



# Explore the Bible.®

LEADER GUIDE

## *1, 2 Peter; Jude*

FALL 2016 > HCSB

*Jeff Iorg, General Editor*

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# LIFE BY DESIGN

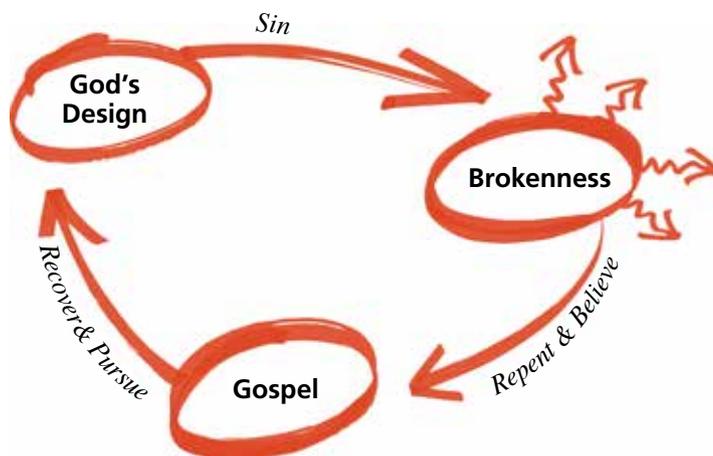
**We live in a broken world. This brokenness is seen in suffering, violence, poverty, pain, and death around us. Brokenness leads us to search for a way to make LIFE work.**

The Bible tells us that God originally planned a world that worked perfectly—where everything and everyone fit together in harmony. God made each of us with a purpose—to worship Him and walk with Him. (See Genesis 1:31 and Psalm. 19:1.)

Life doesn't work when we ignore God and His original design for our lives. We selfishly insist on doing things our own way. The Bible calls this sin. Sin leads to a place of brokenness. The consequence of our sin is separation from God—in this life and for all of eternity. (See Romans 3:23 and Romans 6:23.)

At this point we need a remedy—some good news. Because of His love, God did not leave us in our brokenness. Jesus, God in human flesh, came to us and lived perfectly according to God's Design. Jesus came to rescue us—to do for us what we could not do for ourselves. He took our sin and shame to the cross, paying the penalty of our sin by His death. Jesus was then raised from the dead—to provide the only way for us to be rescued and restored to a relationship with God. (See John 3:16, Colossians 2:14, and 1 Corinthians 15:3-4.)

We don't have the power to escape this brokenness on our own. We need to be rescued. We must ask God to forgive us—turning from sin to trust in Jesus. This is what it means to repent and believe. Believing, we receive new life through Jesus. God turns our lives in a new direction. (See Mark 1:15, Ephesians 2:8-9, and Romans 10:9.)



When God restores our relationship to Him, we begin to discover meaning and purpose in a broken world. Now we can pursue God's Design in all areas of our lives. God's Spirit empowers us to recover His Design and assures us of His presence in this life and for all of eternity. (See Philippians 2:13 and Ephesians 2:10.)

Now that you have heard this Good News, God wants you to respond to Him. You can talk to Him using words like these: My life is broken—I recognize it's because of my sin. I believe Christ came to live, die, and was raised from the dead—to rescue me from my sin. Forgive me. I turn from my selfish ways and put my trust in You. I know that Jesus is Lord of all, and I will follow Him.

*Excerpted from Life on Mission: A Simple Way to Share the Gospel.*

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\*Evangelistic Emphasis

## » MEET THE WRITERS

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## A WORD FROM THE GENERAL EDITOR



We all need an encouraging word from time to time. Life is tough. For some, life's circumstances have been crushing. We need to know God is present and will comfort those who have been afflicted.

The Books of 1 and 2 Peter were written by one of Jesus' closest friends. As one of the original twelve disciples, Peter witnessed the persecution, arrest, crucifixion, and resurrection of his Savior. In these letters, he wrote to believers who were facing severe persecution for their faith, drawing on his experience with Jesus to strengthen them.

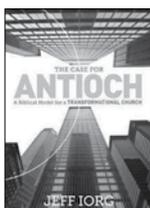
He encouraged them to see their trials as a way to increase their faith. We need the same message. Oppression is not the end. Because of the eternal hope we have in Christ, we can look beyond our current troubles and rest in God's power.

Jude's message is similar. This short letter was written to encourage believers to keep their hope strong. Though we may face heresy and harassment, the gospel is sufficient. The Word of God sustains our hearts and matures our faith through any trial we encounter from people or any spiritual power.

I pray that you'll discover similar encouragement as your group studies these biblical books. God intends for His people to thrive, no matter what life throws our way. This portion of God's Word will show you how.

With hope for your future,

***Jeff Iorg***



*Dr. Jeff Iorg is the president of Gateway Seminary of the Southern Baptist Convention. He has authored numerous books, including The Case for Antioch, Seasons of a Leader's Life, Unscripted, and his latest, Ministry in the New Marriage Culture. Dr. Iorg maintains a leadership resources website at [www.JeffIorg.com](http://www.JeffIorg.com).*



# WORD WISE

Terms listed here are identified in the Bible commentary with a dot (•).

**Asia** [AY zhuh]—Roman province in Asia Minor whose capital was Ephesus. Asia residents were in Jerusalem at Pentecost (Acts 2:9). Those to whom Peter addressed 1 Peter included persons in Asia.

**Bithynia** [bih THIN ih uh]—Roman province in Asia Minor; Paul had desired to take the gospel there but was prevented by the Holy Spirit (Acts 16:7). It is unknown how the gospel arrived in Bithynia. Those to whom Peter addressed 1 Peter included persons in Bithynia.

**Blaspheme**—the literal definition is “to speak harm”; an attitude of disrespect directed against the character of God. The New Testament also labels persecutions against the church as blasphemous acts, thus highlighting the unity of Christ and His church.

**Cappadocia** [KAP uh DOH shih uh]—Roman province in Asia Minor. Residents of Cappadocia were in Jerusalem at Pentecost (Acts 2:9). Those to whom Peter addressed 1 Peter included persons in Cappadocia.

**Day of the Lord**—an expression that points to Christ’s final victory at His second coming and the final judgment of sinners

**Elder**—a term used of those who had leadership positions in the early church; possibly used interchangeably with shepherd and pastor

**Galatia** [guh LAY shuh]—a region in Asia Minor (modern Turkey); the apostle Paul wrote a letter to the churches there. Those to whom Peter addressed 1 Peter included persons in Galatia.

**Holy**—God is holy in that He is completely set apart from all that is sinful, unrighteous, or morally corrupt. God’s people are to be holy because God is holy; the cross made this possible by opening the way for God’s Spirit to indwell His people.

**Morning star**—in the ancient world this was a name for planet Venus, which appears at dawn; used in 1 Peter almost certainly as a reference to the second coming of Jesus Christ (see also Rev. 22:16)

**Pontus** [PAHN tuhs]—Roman province in Asia Minor; residents of Pontus were in Jerusalem at Pentecost (Acts 2:9). Those to whom Peter addressed 1 Peter included persons in Pontus.

**Zion** [ZIGH uhn]—a biblical term that sometimes referred to Jerusalem, to the temple built by Solomon, to the whole nation of Israel, or to the heavenly city of God in the new age

# BIBLE READING PLAN

## SEPTEMBER

- 1. 1 Peter 1:1-2
- 2. 1 Peter 1:3-4
- 3. 1 Peter 1:5
- 4. 1 Peter 1:6-7
- 5. 1 Peter 1:8-9
- 6. 1 Peter 1:10-11
- 7. 1 Peter 1:12
- 8. 1 Peter 1:13-14
- 9. 1 Peter 1:15-16
- 10. 1 Peter 1:17-19
- 11. 1 Peter 1:20-21
- 12. 1 Peter 1:22-23
- 13. 1 Peter 1:24-25
- 14. 1 Peter 2:1-3
- 15. 1 Peter 2:4-5
- 16. 1 Peter 2:6
- 17. 1 Peter 2:7-8
- 18. 1 Peter 2:9-10
- 19. 1 Peter 2:11-12
- 20. 1 Peter 2:13-14
- 21. 1 Peter 2:15
- 22. 1 Peter 2:16-17
- 23. 1 Peter 2:18-20
- 24. 1 Peter 2:21-25
- 25. 1 Peter 3:1-2
- 26. 1 Peter 3:3-4
- 27. 1 Peter 3:5-6
- 28. 1 Peter 3:7
- 29. 1 Peter 3:8-9
- 30. 1 Peter 3:10-12

## OCTOBER

- 1. 1 Peter 3:13-14
- 2. 1 Peter 3:15-17
- 3. 1 Peter 3:18
- 4. 1 Peter 3:19-22
- 5. 1 Peter 4:1-3
- 6. 1 Peter 4:4-6
- 7. 1 Peter 4:7
- 8. 1 Peter 4:8-9
- 9. 1 Peter 4:10-11
- 10. 1 Peter 4:12-13
- 11. 1 Peter 4:14-15
- 12. 1 Peter 4:16-17
- 13. 1 Peter 4:18-19
- 14. 1 Peter 5:1-4
- 15. 1 Peter 5:5
- 16. 1 Peter 5:6-7
- 17. 1 Peter 5:8-9
- 18. 1 Peter 5:10-11
- 19. 1 Peter 5:12-14
- 20. 2 Peter 1:1-2
- 21. 2 Peter 1:3-4
- 22. 2 Peter 1:5-8
- 23. 2 Peter 1:9-11
- 24. 2 Peter 1:12-15
- 25. 2 Peter 1:16-17
- 26. 2 Peter 1:18-19
- 27. 2 Peter 1:20-21
- 28. 2 Peter 2:1
- 29. 2 Peter 2:2-3
- 30. 2 Peter 2:4-10
- 31. 2 Peter 2:11

## NOVEMBER

- 1. 2 Peter 2:12-13
- 2. 2 Peter 2:14-16
- 3. 2 Peter 2:17-18
- 4. 2 Peter 2:19-20
- 5. 2 Peter 2:21-22
- 6. 2 Peter 3:1-2
- 7. 2 Peter 3:3-4
- 8. 2 Peter 3:5-7
- 9. 2 Peter 3:8-9
- 10. 2 Peter 3:10
- 11. Matthew 24:36-39
- 12. Matthew 24:40-44
- 13. 2 Peter 3:11-13
- 14. Isaiah 65:17-19
- 15. Revelation 21:1-4
- 16. Revelation 21:5-7
- 17. 2 Peter 3:14
- 18. 2 Peter 3:15-16
- 19. 2 Peter 3:17-18
- 20. Jude 1-4
- 21. Jude 5-7
- 22. Jude 8-9
- 23. Jude 10-11
- 24. Jude 12-13
- 25. Jude 14-15
- 26. Jude 16
- 27. Jude 17-19
- 28. Jude 20-21
- 29. Jude 22-23
- 30. Jude 24-25



# USING THIS GUIDE TO LEAD

## » PRIOR TO THE GROUP TIME

### 1. Study the core passage.

Read Understand the Context to get a clear picture of how the core passage connects to the whole. Use Explore the Text to gain an understanding of the passage. Consult a study Bible like the *HCSB Study Bible* (also available online at [MyWSB.com](http://MyWSB.com)) and a Bible commentary like *Explore the Bible Adult Commentary* (available at [LifeWay.com/ExploretheBible](http://LifeWay.com/ExploretheBible) in both print and digital formats) to gain additional insight into the passage. Seek to define key words, phrases, places, and actions taken. Record ideas and insights gleaned from your personal study. Write a summary of the truths you discovered using the statement printed under the session title as a starting place.

**TIP:** Start preparing early. Life happens, and it tends to happen closer to times we are scheduled to lead a Bible study group.

### 2. Create a group time plan.

- a. Review First Thoughts for the session to identify a direction for the session and why that session is important to today's adults.
- b. Review the suggestions included in Lead Group Bible Study, identifying the suggestions you believe will work best with your group.
- c. Consider ways of incorporating a Bible Skill into the study, either following the suggestion given (see shaded box in each session) or by developing your own idea.
- d. Consult *QuickSource* (available from [LifeWay.com/ExploretheBible](http://LifeWay.com/ExploretheBible)) and the Explore the Bible blog ([Blog.LifeWay.com/ExploretheBible/Adults/LeaderExtras](http://Blog.LifeWay.com/ExploretheBible/Adults/LeaderExtras)) for additional questions and group time activities.
- e. Visit the Explore the Bible Ministry Grid page ([MinistryGrid.com/Web/ExploretheBible](http://MinistryGrid.com/Web/ExploretheBible)) for additional ideas and insights.
- f. Review the *Explore the Bible Leader Pack* items suggested. Determine how to best use the items in your group's setting.

### 3. Gather your resources.

Use the list in Gather the Following Items list on the first page of each session as a starting place. Make sure you have everything you need to lead the group time using the plan you created. Make sure you have additional copies of *Explore the Bible Personal Study Guide* for anticipated guests.

**TIP:** If you plan to use the Suggested Music Idea and your small group meets with other groups prior to the study time, consider incorporating the music activity into the larger group time.

#### 4. Review and refine.

---

### ➤ DURING THE GROUP TIME

#### 5. Arrive early.

The group time starts when the first person arrives. Make sure you are that person, so that you can set the tone and direction for the group Bible study time. Greet everyone as participants arrive and focus their attention on the Bible study.

#### 6. Lead the group in a time of Bible study.

Use the plan you created to lead the group time. Record notes along the way to help you remember how the group responded. Remember, every group experience takes a few unexpected twists and turns; be flexible.

**TIP:** You can record your plan on a piece of paper and carry that into the group gathering, open the Leader Guide to the Lead Group Bible Study page and guide with those pages open, or use the DOC file provided on the CD-ROM included in the *Explore the Bible Adult Leader Pack* to create your own custom notes. (The DOC file is also included in the digital bundles and digital Adult Leader Pack. See [LifeWay.com/ExploretheBible](http://LifeWay.com/ExploretheBible) for more information.)

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### ➤ AFTER THE GROUP TIME

#### 7. Evaluate and Record.

Review Practice for ideas to encourage the group to put into practice the truths discovered. Record prayer requests and other insights you gained about the group and specific participants. Use these notes to help you be a better guide in the future.

#### 8. Start preparing to lead the next group time.



# INTRODUCTION TO 1,2 PETER; JUDE

Imagine two long-term pastors who have recently retired: “Pastor Peter” and “Pastor Jude.” Pastor Peter has learned that close Christian friends are enduring unfair suffering and persecution. He determines to write them a letter of encouragement and outlines his thoughts to his trusted associate, “Secretary Silas.” He asks Silas to help him organize and shape the content so that the letter is in the best form possible. Silas does so, and Peter sends the letter. It is destined to be recognized as a classic, both in its careful content and its brilliant style.

Meantime, Pastor Jude has learned that some of his Christian friends are dealing with false teachers in their congregation. This news upsets Jude, and he dashes off a brief note to his friends, warning them against the danger they are up against. Jude doesn’t have a Silas to help him, so his letter is a bit rough around the edges as a composition, yet it is still recognized as valuable advice.

Shortly after sending out his first letter, Pastor Peter gets more news: false teachers are also deceiving his friends. In their error, they even deny that Christ will someday return in power and glory. Peter determines to write another letter, but Silas is no longer available to help him, so he writes in his own homegrown style. He confers with his friend, Pastor Jude—or perhaps reads Jude’s letter—and writes his own warning letter, incorporating some of Jude’s thinking. His second letter lacks the excellent style of his first letter. The epistle, however, makes its way into the treasury of letters preserved and read by generations of Christians.

The scenario above is our best educated guess about how the epistles we are studying for the next three months first came to us. We are quite limited in developing this scenario, because we must base our surmises on the information we glean from the letters themselves. There is nothing in the Book of Acts or other New Testament letters to help us be more certain about how these letters originated. They are, nevertheless, not just ancient letters. They are God’s inspired Word to us, and all three letters have been included in the canon of Scripture from the first time that Christians put in writing the list of books considered to be the authoritative, inspired Word of God to followers of Jesus.

## » 1,2 PETER

**Writer**—The author of both letters named himself as “Peter” and as “an apostle of Jesus Christ.” That is all we need to know to identify him as Simon the Galilean fisherman—whom Jesus renamed “Peter” (Greek for “rock”)—introduced in the four Gospels. He was one of the Twelve whom Jesus designated as His official representatives. In the Gospels, Peter famously confessed Jesus as the Messiah, Son of the living God; he is equally infamous for denying Jesus (Matt. 16:16; 26:74). The first part of the Book of Acts reveals Peter as a prominent leader of the fledgling Christian movement. Peter is absent from the latter part of Acts, but later emerged as the author of two letters. According to Christian tradition, Peter was a major source used by Mark in the composition of the Second Gospel. Also according to tradition, he was martyred in Rome during Nero’s reign.

**Dates**—The best clue for the date of 1 Peter is the persecution mentioned in the letter. The decade of the A.D. 60s is likely. On one hand, Christianity had spread to the areas Peter noted in his greeting. On the other hand, the persecution he described (“fiery ordeal,” 1 Pet. 4:12) suggests organized, perhaps even government-sponsored, oppression. When he wrote his second letter, Peter was expecting to die soon (2 Pet. 1:14). He likely died

during the years that Nero was actively persecuting Christians (from A.D. 64, the fire of Rome, till Nero's death in A.D. 68).

**Occasions**—Somehow, Peter had learned about the suffering of believers in five Roman provinces (these make up the northern part of modern Turkey). They needed encouragement not to lose heart. So, “through Silvanus” (1 Pet. 5:12, otherwise called Silas), he crafted an epistle filled with important doctrinal truths as well as teaching about suffering within God's plan. The situation that prompted Peter's second letter was different, although the recipients were probably the same (see his reference to “the second letter,” 2 Pet. 3:1). Having learned of the threat of false teachers, he wrote a warning, without Silas's help, about holding onto the truth of the second coming of Christ.

**Key Themes**—In 1 Peter, the major themes are: hope (confidence in God's future plan), suffering (a privilege), holiness (becoming Christ-like in character), and humility (relating to others according to Jesus' example). In 2 Peter, the major themes are: election (God's sovereignty in salvation), false teachers (who threaten God's people), and Christ's return (in which believers may be confident).

## » JUDE

**Writer**—The man Jude is quite obscure to us. (His name in Greek, “Judas,” is the equivalent of the Hebrew “Judah.”) He called himself a “slave of Jesus Christ” and “brother of James.” Bible students have deduced that he was actually Jesus' younger half-brother, and James—author of the Epistle of James—was his sibling. Both of these men became followers of Jesus only after the resurrection. Nothing is certain about Jude's ministry except that he composed this letter.

**Date**—The letter provides almost no clues for its date of composition. In fact, whether Jude's letter was an inspiration and source for 2 Peter or whether 2 Peter was a source for Jude has been debated. Thus, the book has been dated anywhere from the A.D. 60s to the A.D. 80s. What is clear is that there is a notably close connection between the content of Jude and the second chapter of 2 Peter. There is an obvious overlap in the content of these verses.

**Occasion**—Jude said that he was going to write on one subject, but he changed his mind when he learned about dangerous false teachers who had infiltrated the people to whom he wrote (location unknown). In error, they were teaching that God's grace entitles believers to live however they want morally, without reference to God's commands. Jude wrote to warn against this erroneous teaching, attacking falsehood and encouraging believers to stay true to the faith.

**Key Themes**—Two major themes in the Book of Jude are contending for the faith and identifying and rejecting what is ungodly. These themes are complementary. To do one well, it is necessary to do the other.



# OUTLINE OF 1,2 PETER; JUDE

## 1 Peter

- I. Finding Identity in Jesus (1:1–2:10)
- II. Living as Foreigners (2:11–4:11)
- III. Thriving in Persecution (4:12–5:14)

## 2 Peter

- I. Experiencing Grace (1:1-11)
- II. Trusted Eyewitness (1:12-21)
- III. Exposing False Teachers (2:1-22)
- IV. Expecting Jesus' Return (3:1-18)

## Jude

- I. Contending for the Faith (1-25)

# A LIVING HOPE

Jesus' resurrection gives believers a living hope.

## 1 PETER 1:3-9

**MEMORY VERSE: 1 PETER 1:8**

### PREPARE TO LEAD THE GROUP TIME

- **READ** 1 Peter 1:1-12 and Understand the Context (pp. 14-15). Review the Introduction (pp. 10-11) for additional insight into 1 Peter. Compare Christ's living hope to the concept of hope in today's world.
- **STUDY** 1 Peter 1:3-9, using Explore the Text on pages 15-19. Consult the *Explore the Bible Adult Commentary* (available in print and digital format from [LifeWay.com](http://LifeWay.com)) for additional insight. Focus on Jesus' promise of a living hope to all who place their trust in Him. Underline words or phrases Peter used to describe a living hope through Christ's resurrection.
- **PLAN** the group time using ideas under Lead Group Bible Study (pp. 20-21). Tailor the plans for your group using More Ideas (p. 22) and the ideas included online at [Blog.LifeWay.com/ExploretheBible](http://Blog.LifeWay.com/ExploretheBible).
- **GROW** from expert insights on weekly studies through the Ministry Grid ([MinistryGrid.com/Web/ExploretheBible](http://MinistryGrid.com/Web/ExploretheBible)).
- **GATHER** the following items:  Personal Study Guides;  Copies of **PACK ITEM 5** (*Bookmark: Memory Verses*) to distribute to the group. Prepare to display these Pack Items:  **PACK ITEM 2** (*Outline of 1,2 Peter; Jude*);  **PACK ITEM 3** (*Poster: Fall 2016*);  **PACK ITEM 4** (*Time Line: 1,2 Peter; Jude*); and  **PACK ITEM 6** (*Poster: Christ in 1 and 2 Peter*).



# FIRST THOUGHTS

## KEY DOCTRINE

### *Salvation*

Regeneration, or the new birth, is a work of God's grace whereby believers become new creatures in Christ Jesus.

A cancer patient may hear of some new medicine that promises healing. A struggling family may look to some business scheme with the hope of getting out of a lifetime of debt. A person with shame for bad decisions may turn to religion with the hope of soothing his guilty conscience. All of these examples highlight the promise of hope, especially when times are difficult.

(In PSG, p. 12) **What are some sources of hope you have seen people turn to in their struggles? Why were these sources of hope attractive to those who were struggling?**

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## BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR

For additional context, read "Peter's Epistles: An Overview" in the Fall 2016 issue of *Biblical Illustrator*. Available at [LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator](http://LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator).

When people endure suffering, whether mental, physical, or emotional, they need real hope. They need a hope that is alive and able to offer them something that will give them strength in the trial that they are enduring. False hopes, like false promises, are not worth the energy expended on them. However, when hopes are placed in something that is alive and substantial, those hopes can sustain people in the most difficult times.

Peter had experienced his share of difficulties in his lifetime. He had often become the spokesperson for the twelve disciples. His great confession of Jesus as the Christ at Caesarea Philippi was immediately followed by Jesus' accusation that Peter was sharing the viewpoint of Satan by refusing to accept Christ's suffering (Matt. 16:16-23). Later, Peter came face-to-face with his own shame as God revealed the prejudices of his heart toward the Gentiles. To Peter's credit, he obeyed the vision of God and preached the gospel to Cornelius and the other Gentiles in his household (Acts 10:17-33). This led to even more hurt as Peter refused a meal with Gentiles in Galatia, leading Paul to confront him to his face (Gal. 2:11-13). How did Peter deal with these struggles? We catch a glimpse as he wrote to Christians facing difficulties in the first chapter of 1 Peter.

# UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

## 1 PETER 1:1-12

When Peter composed this letter, he had been one of the great leaders of the first Christians for 30 years or more. In its infancy, the movement thrived in Jerusalem only; the gospel had been preached only to ethnic Jews. Peter's role during this early stage is well documented in Acts 1-12. A bit later on, Paul had taken the lead in pushing Christianity into many provinces of the Roman Empire; further, both Gentiles and Jews responded

to the good news. Peter's responsibilities and travels during this stage are largely unknown. It becomes clear, however, when we pay attention to the opening verses of 1 Peter, that Peter had traveled extensively beyond his home base in Palestine. He certainly had visited the five provinces he mentioned in his greeting (1:1), and he knew the people he was writing well enough to call them "dear friends" (4:12).

In the opening verses of his letter, Peter masterfully included a number of important themes. His mind darted to many central Christian concepts: mercy, new birth, salvation, love, joy, faith, and hope are noteworthy. He commanded a broad understanding of God's work through the eons: from ages past (the prophets of old) to the recent past (Jesus' resurrection) to the present (the current situation of his readers) to the future (Jesus' revelation in glory at His return). He also managed to hold in tension a balance between the painful experiences of his readers ("various trials," 1:6) and glorious confidence in the Lord.

The context passage for this week's session includes the formal salutation (1:1-2), teaching about the living hope believers have because of Jesus' resurrection (1:3-9), and a reminder that the prophets of old had foreseen the salvation that Peter's readers were now experiencing (1:10-12). Our focus is on what Peter taught about our living hope as Christians. Wonderfully, as we will see, this hope is confident trust—something much more robust than how we typically understand hope in contemporary society.

## EXPLORE THE TEXT

### HOPE DISCOVERED (1 PET. 1:3-4)

#### VERSE 3

Peter opened with an expression of **praise** to God, a doxology similar to those found frequently in the psalms and other Old Testament prayers (see Gen. 14:20). Here, however, God is addressed in a way never revealed in the Old Testament: **Father of our Lord Jesus Christ**. In this praise, we see support for the Christian doctrine of the Trinity; further, many Bible students have noted that the full name which Peter used for Jesus is rich in implication. Thus, *Lord* refers to His deity; *Jesus* to His humanity; *Christ* to His messianic ministry; and *our* to the importance of personal application. Praising God is always great medicine for those who are discouraged because of suffering, persecution, or other burdens in life.

Why praise God? Because of our sure salvation, described as **a new birth**. The concept of being born again (regeneration) was initiated by Jesus in His talk with Nicodemus (John 3:3-8) and developed in several epistles (see Titus 3:5; 1 Pet. 1:23). Regeneration is one of many terms used by biblical writers to describe the distinct facets of salvation. Consider how Peter further amplified the new birth.

### BIBLE SKILL

*Use multiple Scripture passages to understand a major doctrine.*

Peter talked about being "born again" in 1 Peter 1:3. Read passages that use similar language, such as "God making us alive" or "being born of God." See Ephesians 2:4-5; Colossians 2:13; and James 1:18. Then, read 1 John 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:1,4,18. What do these verses add to your understanding of the new birth?

### 1 PETER 1:3

<sup>3</sup> Praise the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. According to His great mercy, He has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead

The original source of our new birth is God's **great mercy**, His favor toward those who deserve nothing from Him. His mercy is great because of its great outcome, the eternal inheritance described in verse 4.

The basis of our new birth is Jesus' **resurrection**, without excluding His sacrificial death. Without our Lord's resurrection, there is no way to be assured that His death has saving value. Because of His victory over death, we have a pledge of our own future resurrection (1 Cor. 15:12-19; 1 Thess. 4:14).

The result of our new birth is **a living hope**. Here is the first of five instances of *hope* in the epistle (see also 1:13,21; 3:5,15). In fact, hope is so central to Peter's overall concern in the letter that "hope in the midst of suffering" may be called his essential theme. Biblical hope is firm conviction, not wishful thinking. To put it another way, "faith" is confident trust regarding the present while "hope" is confident trust regarding something yet future. Peter called this hope *living* because it grows and strengthens in those on the path to Christian maturity; furthermore, it will achieve its objective.

## 1 PETER 1:4

<sup>4</sup> and into an inheritance that is imperishable, uncorrupted, and unfading, kept in heaven for you.

### VERSE 4

Peter spelled out the specific content of the believer's hope with the term **inheritance**. The Old Testament used the language of inheritance to refer to the promised land of the Israelites (see Num. 32:19; Josh. 11:23; Ps. 105:11). This earthly inheritance of Israel serves as a pointer to the heavenly inheritance that Peter had in mind. Peter's readers were to look for their hope to be fulfilled by the things God was keeping in heaven for them.

The promised land of the Israelites, however, was always subject to disaster and loss. Indeed, the Israelites were exiled from their land. But such loss can never be so for the heavenly heritage of those who belong to Christ. Peter described the superior nature of the Christian inheritance in three ways.

- **Imperishable.** It cannot be harmed by natural disaster, enemy, or theft; it is permanent.
- **Uncorrupted.** It cannot be touched by evil or sin; it is pure.
- **Unfading.** It never passes its peak (as a flower fades); it is perfect.

**What adjectives might you use to describe your hope for a heavenly inheritance? Stagnant? Confident? Shaky? If someone observed your life for the past month, what evidence would they find that you have a living hope, one that is growing stronger in you?**

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## 1 PETER 1:5

<sup>5</sup> You are being protected by God's power through faith for a salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.

### HOPE ASSURED (1 PET. 1:5)

#### VERSE 5

Salvation is a magnificent and broad concept. It includes what God did long ago (in planning salvation before the world began and sending Jesus as the Savior). It includes our personal past (when we repented and believed

in Christ; “justification,” “regeneration,” and a host of other terms are used). Salvation also includes our future with Christ. It has well been said that we have been saved, we are being saved, and we will be saved. Here, Peter’s thoughts move to salvation in the future, not yet revealed. Our heavenly inheritance is still in view.

So then how can believers be assured that this future salvation is a reality and not just pious pretense? Peter’s answer: it is **God’s power** that guarantees our salvation yet to be. The term **protected** was used in military contexts. It implied something—such as a city or a king—that was kept safe because it was carefully guarded. Although attacks against believers may come in the form of persecution, God will preserve us by His mighty power (His strength, not ours). Thus, the power of God is the ultimate guarantee of Christian assurance.

At the same time, Peter notes that **faith** is the necessary human condition for salvation. He balanced carefully between divine sovereignty and human responsibility. It is God’s power that energizes and sustains an individual’s personal faith.

God’s protection is not for some temporary goal. Rather, it is for **a salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time**. This is Peter’s further explanation of the inheritance he had described in 1:4. Our future salvation is already ready. Yet it will not be displayed to us until the time that God has determined. Although Peter did not specify here which aspect of the last time he was thinking of, surely he had in mind the resurrection of believers at Christ’s return (see 1:7).

Believers can be assured God is protecting their salvation and keeping them secure for eternity. He is therefore greatly to be praised.

**Have you ever wrestled personally with assurance of salvation or the security of your salvation? Based on 1 Peter 1:5, how would you counsel yourself if you have been troubled by this question in your own life?**

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## HOPE CELEBRATED (1 PET. 1:6-9)

### VERSE 6

Everything Peter stated in verses 3-5 is wonderfully positive. Beginning in verse 6, he turned the corner to consider aspects of the Christian life that we may not necessarily think of as positive: **various trials**. In order to demonstrate that such suffering is a privilege, Peter placed trials side by side with rejoicing.

The verb **rejoice** is in the present tense, implying continuous joy. The term is strong, meaning something like “jubilant exultation” or “overjoyed.” Peter was referring to the believers’ ongoing response to all the blessings described in verses 3-5. This rejoicing is sustainable despite the trials readers may face.

### 1 PETER 1:6

<sup>6</sup> You rejoice in this, though now for a short time you have had to struggle in various trials

*Trials* is a term implying undeserved suffering from the outside. In the case of Peter's first audience, it included the intense persecution that was something like going through literal fire (1:7). Such trials are experiences over which a person has no control. Peter deftly described these trials as follows:

- They may be diverse in kind (*various*).
- They will be limited in time (**for a short time**, which may include all of earthly life).
- They are needful in purpose (**you have had to struggle**). Peter was sure that God never needlessly afflicts His people, even though grief may be involved.
- They are positive in outcome (see 1:7).

## 1 PETER 1:7

<sup>7</sup> so that the genuineness of your faith—more valuable than gold, which perishes though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory, and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

## 1 PETER 1:8

<sup>8</sup> You love Him, though you have not seen Him. And though not seeing Him now, you believe in Him and rejoice with inexpressible and glorious joy,

### VERSE 7

Peter developed an illustration that both his original readers and we can readily grasp. **Gold** was the most highly prized metal in the ancient world. Even today, gold is part of the global banking industry, and people still want gold items. The ancients discovered that gold must be **refined by fire**: melted so that only the pure product is retained.

Peter compared the refining of gold with the testing of a believer's faith by going through a fiery trial. Such a trial, he said, demonstrates the **genuineness** or proven worth of such faith. This faith is much more valuable than earthly, purified gold for two reasons:

1. A believer's tested faith cannot perish. It lasts forever. As durable as gold is, it is not eternal.

2. A believer's tested faith can **result in praise, glory, and honor**.

The three results Peter noted (*praise, glory, and honor*) are near synonyms. They refer to approval and privilege. The apostle did not state whether he meant the praise believers will offer to God or whether he had in mind the approval God will grant to believers at the revelation of Jesus Christ (His glorious return). While both are true, it is likely Peter had the latter in view because he was encouraging Christians to be confident of their eternal inheritance (1:4). Further, in this lifetime, faith does not often receive any outward reward, even though God tests it. Thus, it is likely Peter had in mind the reward that God will openly give to people of faith at Christ's return.

### VERSE 8

This verse presents two harmonizing assertions about Peter's first readers. Each assertion has a positive and negative component.

Assertion 1: Positively, **you love Him**. They were experiencing an ongoing, genuine love for the Lord Jesus. (Here is a form of the famous verb for love, *agapao*.) Negatively, **you have not seen Him**. Peter's first readers were not eyewitnesses of the Jesus of history (unlike Peter, who had seen Jesus).

Assertion 2: Positively, **you believe in Him**. They were people of ongoing faith in Jesus (1:5). Negatively, they were **not seeing Him now**. They had no

expectation of seeing Jesus in their natural lifetime. They knew they would see Him only at His return or when they died.

Thus, Peter was highlighting the close relationship between loving Jesus and believing in Him. The two always go hand in hand. Note also that Peter here was debunking “seeing is believing.” Belief in Christ without eyewitness proof is worthwhile. “Those who believe without seeing are blessed,” the risen Jesus proclaimed (John 20:29).

Not only were Peter’s readers full of love and faith, they were already filled with **joy**. The verb **rejoice** is identical to the form used in 1:6, so the apostle was circling back to that concept. The present joy believers experience has two special qualities: it is **inexpressible**; that is, it is beyond human words to articulate fully; and it is **glorious**; that is, it is characterized by the very glory of God and of heaven.

#### VERSE 9

Why do believers experience such wonderful joy now? Because we already possess a preview of our full salvation. The verb **receiving** is in a form that implies present experience. **Goal** means “proper conclusion” or “consummation.” During our earthly life, we are not yet in possession of everything that salvation means. Living hope looks to the future inheritance, kept in heaven. Yet we already are in possession of a foretaste of glory divine. (When Peter referred to **souls**, he was not excluding the body from salvation; *souls* here refers to the total self.) Faith in Jesus, tested as it is, is closely associated with the present experience of love for Jesus, exhilarating joy, and hope for an inheritance that can never fade or be lost.

With these words, Peter concluded his great doxology of praise. He began with “praise the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” and ended with **the salvation of your souls**. No wonder he wanted his readers to be filled with living hope for a heavenly prize that the trials of this life cannot threaten. We should hold on to that same hope in our trials today.

**Based on these verses, how would you explain the relationship between joy and trials to someone going through a difficult season? How would you explain the relationship between believing in the Lord, loving the Lord, and rejoicing in the Lord?**

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#### 1 PETER 1:9

<sup>9</sup> because you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

# LEAD GROUP BIBLE STUDY

## FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

**GUIDE:** As the group arrives, direct attention to the phrase “I hope ...” that you have written on a posterboard. Invite volunteers to share how they would complete the phrase. Encourage them to respond with their first thoughts, before giving deep consideration.

**SAY:** *People often use the word “hope” today to mean wishful thinking. For example, “I hope my favorite restaurant isn’t crowded after church” or “I hope it doesn’t rain over the holiday weekend.”*

**EXPLAIN:** *There’s an older—now archaic—meaning for hope, which was active when the Bible began to be translated into English. The old definition was confident trust that some future event would occur. Jesus offers that kind of hope—a living hope—to all who place their trust in Him. His resurrection gives believers a living hope.*

**INTRODUCE:** Introduce the new unit of study by calling attention to **Pack Item 2** (Outline of 1,2 Peter; Jude), **Pack Item 3** (Poster: Fall 2016), and **Pack Item 4** (Time Line: 1,2 Peter; Jude). Distribute copies of **Pack Item 5** (Bookmark: Memory Verses).

**TRANSITION:** *Peter began his first letter by pointing to real hope—not wishful thinking—as found only through Jesus Christ.*

## EXPLORE THE TEXT

**GUIDE:** Use information from Understand the Context (PSG, pp. 13-14; pp. 14-15) to introduce Peter and the first recipients of his letter known as 1 Peter. Point out that Peter was writing to Christians who were being persecuted for their faith.

**READ:** Read aloud 1 Peter 1:3-4, directing the group to listen for words or phrases Peter used to describe the living hope.

**EMPHASIZE:** Direct the group to review **Pack Item 6** (Poster: Christ in 1 and 2 Peter). Guide them to call out other titles of Jesus we find in Scripture. Emphasize the titles that point to Jesus’ victory over death.

**EXPLAIN:** *Because of His victory over death, Jesus offered hope to those who were enduring persecution. The worst their persecutors could do to them would be to take their lives, but because of the resurrection of Jesus, death was nothing to be feared. This was not some blind hope or false hope, but rather a living hope in Jesus Christ.*

**ASK:** *What does a person’s response to suffering reveal about who or what he or she places hope in?* (PSG, p. 16)

**GUIDE:** Refer to verse 4. Direct the group to locate four ways Peter described the inheritance to stress the eternal nature of salvation. Lead the group to search comments under Verse 4 (PSG, p. 15) to locate a brief explanation for each. Invite volunteers to share their responses.

**TRANSITION:** *Though Peter explained the Christians’ inheritance as eternal in nature, the suffering believers probably wondered at times if they would be able to hold on to their hope in Christ.*

**READ:** Instruct everyone to listen for how Peter assured them of God’s protection while a volunteer reads aloud 1 Peter 1:5.

**SAY:** *Jesus offers a living hope to all who place their trust in Him. The promise of a secure salvation gives believers a reason to rejoice even when facing difficulties.*

**DISCUSS:** *How does the assurance of God’s faithfulness give you the encouragement to endure?* (PSG, p. 17)

**READ:** Call on a volunteer to read 1 Peter 1:6-9, as the group listens for key words or phrases.

**EXPLAIN:** Explain that the word for “joy” in this passage is not the usual Greek word used by secular writers. Rather, it is a deep spiritual joy.

**READ:** Invite a volunteer to read Luke 1:46-47 (Mary’s Magnificat, or Mary’s praise to God when she realized she would give birth to the Messiah) and a second person to read Acts 16:34 (the Philippian jailer’s joyful response when he and his household believed in Jesus).

**DISCUSS:** *How is Christian joy different than a sentimental feeling of happiness? In what ways is it more satisfying?* (PSG, p. 18)

**EMPHASIZE:** Focus on 1 Peter 1:7. Explain this verse using the PSG (p. 18): *Peter contrasted faith with gold, which endured the heat of refinement to burn away impurities. Despite being one of the strongest metals, gold was part of the world order that would perish. Unlike gold, the faith of a believer would endure and result in praise to God, the very thing that Peter had encouraged the Christians facing trials to express (v. 3).*

**DISCUSS:** *Why is it important to celebrate hope when we face difficult trials? How can we celebrate hope?* (PSG, p. 19)

**DO:** Point out that 1 Peter 1:8 is the memory verse for the week. Distribute copies of **Pack Item 5** (*Bookmark: Memory Verses*) for the group to use as a tool for tracking the verses they memorize throughout the study.

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## SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

**REVIEW:** Read the first paragraph under In My Context (PSG, p. 20). Then invite volunteers to respond to this question: *If someone were to compare your living hope as a believer with the way hope is usually portrayed in today’s world, how would you respond?*

**CHALLENGE:** Challenge the group to reflect on their current trials and struggles. Remind them that Jesus offers a living hope to all who place their trust in Him. Encourage the group to consider their responses to the first question set under In My Context (PSG, p. 20): *Share with another person in the group how you came to place your trust in Jesus. Emphasize how doing so gave you hope. How does hearing other people’s stories encourage you?*

**PRAY:** Lead in a time of silent prayer. Encourage the group to pray silently, asking God to help them with a specific trial or tribulation they identified. After a few minutes, voice a closing prayer, thanking God for the living hope that comes through Jesus’ resurrection.



## PRACTICE

- Contact anyone absent from the last group session, making sure they have a PSG. Include a personal invitation to attend Bible study next week.
- Connect with the group via email or social media to remind them of the memory verse for this study (1 Peter 1:8).
- Focus on a few people in your group who need encouragement. Let them know you are praying for them.

## MORE IDEAS

### FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

Organize the group into pairs. Invite them to use their smartphones to search for ways the word “hope” is represented in today’s society. Suggest that they look for news items, images, and titles of books, songs, and movies. Use this information to contrast society’s interpretation of hope with the living hope offered through Jesus’ resurrection.

### EXPLORE THE TEXT

- To supplement the study of 1 Peter 1:3-4, lead the group to envision someone who is suffering or being persecuted for Christ’s sake. Discuss: *Suppose you were to offer words of encouragement to them. What would you say?*
- To enhance your discussion of 1 Peter 1:5, explain that the word for “protected” was a military term that described the action of a strong military protecting a fort or garrison. Invite volunteers to describe what being protected by God’s power means to them.
- To supplement your discussion of 1 Peter 1:7, summarize this information about refining gold: “To form a useful object, raw gold must be cast into a mold. For that to occur, the solid ore must be melted, requiring a temperature of 1,900 degrees Fahrenheit. When the gold is melted, the impurities rise to the surface, where they are skimmed off or burned off. A goldsmith knows the gold is ready to cast when the liquid gold becomes mirror-like and he can see his face reflected in the surface.” Likewise, through the refining heat of trials, followers of Jesus Christ grow spiritually and reflect more of His character in their lives.<sup>1</sup>

### SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

Direct attention to the second question set under In My Context (PSG, p. 20): *List trials and difficulties you face today. Evaluate your response to the things you listed. Then list by each item ways you can rejoice in that trial or difficulty.* Invite volunteers to share their responses with the group, focusing on how trusting Christ has given them hope. Be prepared to share your own responses as well.

### SUGGESTED MUSIC IDEA

Use the lyrics or recording of “My Hope Is in You,” by Aaron Schust, to close the session. As an alternative, sing or read the words to “When the Morning Comes,” by Charles A. Tindley.

1. “1 Peter 1:7,” David Walls and Max Anders, *Holman New Testament Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 1999), 9.

# BE HOLY

Jesus' resurrection empowers believers for holy living.

## 1 PETER 1:13-25

**MEMORY VERSE: 1 PETER 1:22**

### PREPARE TO LEAD THE GROUP TIME

- **READ** 1 Peter 1:13-25 and *Understand the Context* (pp. 24-25). Underline the commands given in this passage; place an asterisk beside the reasons for following the commands. Read the passage a second time, looking for connections between the commands and the reasons for following them.
- **STUDY** 1 Peter 1:13-25, using *Explore the Text* (pp. 25-29). Focus on the motivation for obedience to the commands by which you placed an asterisk when you read the Scripture passage.
- **PLAN** the group time using ideas under *Lead Group Bible Study* (pp. 30-31). Consider ways to use the Bible Skill activity (PSG, p. 26) during the session. Customize your group plans using *More Ideas* (p. 32) and the ideas included in *QuickSource* and online at [Blog.LifeWay.com/ExploretheBible](http://Blog.LifeWay.com/ExploretheBible) or [MinistryGrid.com/ExploretheBible](http://MinistryGrid.com/ExploretheBible).
- **GROW** with other group leaders at the *Groups Ministry* blog ([LifeWay.com/GroupMinistry](http://LifeWay.com/GroupMinistry)).
- **GATHER** the following items:  Personal Study Guides;  A ruler (for *More Ideas*). Make copies of  **PACK ITEM 5** (*Bookmark: Memory Verses*) for those who don't have one. Prepare to display the following Pack Items:  **PACK ITEM 1** (*Map: Pentecost and the Jewish Diaspora*);  **PACK ITEM 4** (*Time Line: 1, 2 Peter; Jude*); and  **PACK ITEM 12** (*Poster: 1 Peter 1:22*).



# FIRST THOUGHTS

## KEY DOCTRINE

### *Sanctification*

Sanctification is the experience, beginning in regeneration, by which the believer is set apart to God's purposes, and is enabled to progress toward moral and spiritual maturity through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit dwelling in him.

Many of us remember where we were on September 11, 2001. So many things have changed since that day; some are directly related to the events of those days while others are not. Security practices, economic realities, definitions of marriage, and the rise of terrorists groups are just a few of the changes we have seen. You have no doubt changed a great deal as well. Relationships may have started while others ended. Maybe you've had children (or grandchildren). Perhaps you changed jobs or had a major illness.

Narrow the question of personal change to the matter of your relationship with the Lord. Think about how you're different now, for better or worse, than you were then. Perhaps you began participating in a congregation for the first time or you changed churches. Maybe you began studying Scripture more seriously, or participated in a mission trip, or began leading an adult Bible study group.

(In PSG, p. 23) **What has changed in the past 15 years? How do those changes impact people spiritually? How has your walk with God changed in the past 15 years?**

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## BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR

For additional context, read "Christianity in the Age of Emperor Worship," an archive *Biblical Illustrator* article provided on the CD-ROM in the Fall 2016 *Explore the Bible: Leader Pack*.

Peter wrote his first letter to Christians suffering in Asia Minor. They faced localized persecution and needed encouragement to continue in their faith. The presence of persecution did not give them a license to compromise their standards. Even more importantly, those who experienced persecution needed to maintain their standards of holiness even if it put them at odds with those who threatened them. They were accountable to God for how they conducted their lives. The way they lived reflected their belief in the gospel. Just as he had connected future hope with Jesus' resurrection, so here Peter made the point that the resurrection of our Lord empowers believers for present-day holy living.

# UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

## 1 PETER 1:13-25

In order to interpret these verses well, knowledge of certain first-century events and of certain first-century cultural practices will be valuable. As noted in the introduction to these studies, many Bible students believe that 1 Peter was composed in the A.D. 60s. The reigning Roman emperor was Nero Caesar (ruled A.D. 54–68). From the time of the great fire that destroyed half the city of Rome in A.D. 64 until his death, Nero persecuted Christians in Rome, and the official government position

was to continue opposing Christians until Constantine stopped it centuries later. Thus, the believers to whom Peter wrote were enduring political and social change (or were about to experience such change). Peter’s case for holiness in this week’s lesson reminds us that just because things change or become difficult is no reason to abandon the quest for Christlikeness.

Two cultural practices that we have little experience with today are assumed by Peter in his illustrations. The first is found in the phrase, literally, “gird up the loins of your mind” (1:13). This referred to the ancient practice of a man gathering up the long skirt of his outer robe by pulling it up between his legs and tying it around his waist with his belt. This prepared him for running or other strenuous activity (see 1 Kings 18:46; 2 Kings 4:29; 9:1 for the literal usage). Peter’s illustration vividly portrays intentional preparation for exertion. Second is the word “redeemed” (1:18). The reference is to the first-century practice of purchasing freedom for a human slave or a hostage by the payment of a monetary price. Although we grasp the concept today, we have not likely experienced redemption in this sense. We are more likely to use “redeemed” generally as an equivalent to “saved.” The term Peter used, however, was more precise than our usage suggests.

## EXPLORE THE TEXT

### OBEDIENT (1 PET. 1:13-16)

#### VERSE 13

With the transition word **therefore**, Peter recognized that the future inheritance God has promised (last week’s lesson) is an incentive to holiness. Peter re-emphasized this future reward by asking his readers to **set your hope completely** on what is yet to come at the Lord’s return. The phrase *set your hope* is a verb form closely related to the noun “hope” in 1:3. Here, hope is given as a command. Thus, on one hand, believers already have hope because we are born again; on the other hand, we are to practice the hope (confident trust for the future) we have already received.

We cannot fulfill this command to hope haphazardly. It demands that we intentionally prepare for exertion. Further, it requires that believers be **serious**. Mental laziness, drunkenness, and addictive habits or behaviors—all of which are implied by the term Peter used—lull believers into sin through carelessness. Later in the letter, Peter will use the same term to remind believers that prayer and resisting the Devil require sober-mindedness as well (4:7; 5:8).

Peter wanted his readers never to forget the wonderful future that lies ahead at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Yet those who will experience this future are to make present-day preparation and action. In the next verses, the apostle became specific.

### BIBLE SKILL

*Observe when and for what purpose a New Testament passage includes an Old Testament quotation.*

Identify the sources of the biblical quotation in 1 Peter 1:16. Read Leviticus 11:44,45; 19:2; 20:7,26. Why did Peter use this quotation? What factors are different in the old and new contexts? What factors are the same or similar? How does the quoted passage help you better understand God, His holiness, and the call to holy living?

### 1 PETER 1:13

<sup>13</sup> Therefore, with your minds ready for action, be serious and set your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

## 1 PETER 1:14-15

<sup>14</sup> As obedient children, do not be conformed to the desires of your former ignorance. <sup>15</sup> But as the One who called you is holy, you also are to be holy in all your conduct;

## 1 PETER 1:16

<sup>16</sup> for it is written, Be holy, because I am holy.

## 1 PETER 1:17

<sup>17</sup> And if you address as Father the One who judges impartially based on each one's work, you are to conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your temporary residence.

### VERSES 14-15

Peter began with a negative command: **do not be conformed**, a verb found in the New Testament only here and in Romans 12:2. It means “to pattern one’s actions.” Peter was reminding us that we are to live fundamentally differently than we did when we followed the desires of the surrounding culture and our own sinful desires. We are enabled to carry out this command because we belong to a new family. We are now **obedient children** because we have been born again (1:3).

The apostle balanced the negative with a positive: **you also are to be holy** (see p. 6). Holy means “set apart,” that is, set apart from sin and set apart to God and seeking God’s honor. Further, believers’ holiness is never a Sunday-only thing, but involves **all your conduct**. Peter reminded these Christians again of God’s initiative in salvation. The Father had **called** them to Himself, and they had responded in faith. In calling them and in making them part of His family, God was declaring His intention to make His children like Him in moral character. Peter was making it plain that we are to be intentional in the pursuit of personal holiness. It’s not that we grudgingly avoid outward sins; rather, we seek God’s power and presence so that we delight in Him, and we long for holiness from the inside out.

### VERSE 16

Peter based his understanding of God’s holiness—as well as the command to **be holy**—in Scripture. He quoted a text occurring several times in Leviticus (11:44-45; 19:2; 20:7,26). God’s moral standard for His people in both Testaments is the same, and it is based on His own character. Why are some things morally right and others morally wrong? It is not because of cultural norms nor because of personal conscience; rather, God’s character is the foundation for ethics. Because God delights in attitudes and actions that reflect His character and hates what is contrary to His character, we are to imitate Him and thus honor Him. Just as natural children want to be like their parents, so we should imitate our heavenly Father.

(In PSG, p. 25) **How would you describe the connection between God’s character and a believer’s conduct?**

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### REVERENT (1 PET. 1:17-21)

#### VERSE 17

Jesus invited us to address God in prayer as “our Father” (Matt. 6:9). Yet we also know He is the One who will judge every human being. Peter thus offered this as an added motive for holy living. Some Bible students believe that Peter had only the final judgment in mind; others think he also included the present discipline that we receive from God in this life, just as human parents continually discipline children for their good

(see 1 Pet. 4:17). Whichever the case, God is the perfect, impartial Judge. He doesn't play favorites (as some human parents do).

With this awareness, we live out our earthly lives—which Peter called **the time of your temporary residence**, a reminder that this lifetime is preparation for eternity—in **fear**. By *fear* Peter meant not terror or dread but reverence and respect. The fear of the Lord is taught in both the Old and New Testaments (Prov. 1:7; Col. 3:22). Thus, fearing God is totally compatible with loving Him and trusting Him. It is a good and right thing for believers to beware of offending God and incurring His fatherly displeasure.

#### VERSES 18-19

Peter intensified the importance of reverent fear by noting the immense cost of our redemption. If we disallow the command to holy living or dismiss the fear of God, then we are, in essence, insulting God's provision of salvation. Paying money to buy the freedom of another was an admirable thing to do in the ancient world. (See "Understand the Context," p. 25.) God, however, took redemption to a spectacular level. His goal was not that we gain personal liberty; rather, He planned to remove sinners from their **empty way of life inherited from the fathers**. In context, Peter likely meant the pagan lives that his (primarily Gentile) readers abandoned when they turned to Christ (Rom. 1:21; Eph. 4:17). In any case, no Christians are shackled to the sins of previous generations.

Not only was God's goal for redemption magnificent, so was His means of achieving it. The price was **the precious blood of Christ**, obviously referring to the sacrificial death of our Lord (and the first such reference in the epistle). As Jesus' followers, we are accustomed to thinking of His death as the means to remove our guilt and gain God's forgiveness. Here, however, Peter focused on Christ's death as the means of rescuing us from our former, futile way of life. Peter was using the language of Old Testament animal sacrifices when he referred to Christ as **a lamb without defect or blemish** (Num. 6:14; 28:3). However spotless the lambs were that Jewish priests sacrificed on the altar, they were only shadows of the coming death of Christ. His perfection as God's lamb is found in His sinless life rather than merely in His bodily perfection (John 1:29; Heb. 9:14; 1 Cor. 5:7).

#### VERSE 20

Having referred to the death of Jesus, Peter couldn't help but offer a related doctrinal point for reflection. The crucifixion was no historical coincidence. Rather, God planned this means of saving sinners **before the foundation of the world**. The term **chosen** can also be translated "foreknown," but Peter did not mean simply that God knew ahead of time that Jesus would die in this way. Before creation, the death of Jesus was God's intended way of salvation. Yet God's eternal plan was put into effect as a real-time occurrence in human history. Peter referred to Jesus' death as occurring **at the end of the times**, pointing to the first coming of Christ (Gal. 4:4).

Jesus' coming was not simply great in general; it had great personal application to Peter's first readers (**for you**). It also applies to all who respond with repentance and trust in Jesus and so receive redemption.

#### 1 PETER 1:18-19

<sup>18</sup> For you know that you were redeemed from your empty way of life inherited from the fathers, not with perishable things like silver or gold, <sup>19</sup> but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish.

#### 1 PETER 1:20

<sup>20</sup> He was chosen before the foundation of the world but was revealed at the end of the times for you

## 1 PETER 1:21

<sup>21</sup> who through Him are believers in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

### VERSE 21

Peter developed further how Christ's coming applied to his readers. Having noted Jesus' death ("the precious blood," 1:19), he now added Christ's resurrection (God **raised Him from the dead**) as well as His ascension and His being seated at the Father's right hand (God ... **gave Him glory**). Peter was making it clear that it is false to claim that we are to fear the Father but trust in Christ. No, it is as we Christians believe in Christ that we trust in the Father as well.

The apostle concluded his line of thought in this paragraph (1:17-21)—God's call to holiness, the challenge to fear God, and the reminder of God's costly redemption—by reminding his readers again of how it is they stay connected to God. The means of their connection to God is **faith** (trusting Him alone for salvation) and **hope** (confident trust that God will provide the promised heavenly inheritance beyond earthly life).

**How often do you think about the importance of fearing God? On the basis of these verses, why should you develop a holy, reverent fear of God? In what ways could you more intentionally cultivate a life of reverence for God?**

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## 1 PETER 1:22

<sup>22</sup> By obedience to the truth, having purified yourselves for sincere love of the brothers, love one another earnestly from a pure heart,

### COMPASSIONATE (1 PET. 1:22-25)

#### VERSE 22

What are believers to emphasize in relationship to other Christians? Peter's answer: **love one another**. Conversion to Christ already had changed the readers and made such love possible. Here, Peter described conversion as **obedience to the truth**, another way of saying that they had put their faith and hope in God (v. 21). One result of conversion is that we have been cleansed from sin (**purified**). Further, there is an ongoing work of becoming more pure, that is, holy or Christlike, in our actions and attitudes. (This is often summarized as "sanctification.")

Changed character works from the inside out. An important outworking of inner purity is that we demonstrate **sincere love of the brothers**. The literal meaning of the terms Peter used is instructive. The noun *love* in this verse refers to affection between family members. The adjective translated *sincere* is literally "non-hypocritical" or "without faking it."

Peter drove this truth home with a command: **love one another earnestly**. This time, the word for love is a verb form of a well-known New Testament noun understood as "sacrificial love." It's akin to the famous noun for love, *agape*. *Earnestly* translates a term that means deeply or fervently. The progression of Peter's thinking in verse 22 is this: In conversion, you were made pure, and you are growing in purity, so that you have a genuine affection for others in the Father's family. Now you should grow in sacrificial love for each other in a way that is deep and strong.

**What is the connection between being born again and genuinely loving other believers? Who do you need to love more sincerely as a result of studying these verses? How will you meet this challenge?**

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### VERSE 23

**Born again** is a form of the same verb used in 1:3. In that verse, Peter emphasized the role of the resurrection in regeneration. Here he focused on the role of the **word of God**. In context, he meant the word as preached when the gospel is proclaimed (1:25). Through the proclamation of the good news, sinners hear, hearts are opened, and the Spirit brings new life. Peter described this word as **living and enduring** (as opposed to dead and temporary). Peter compared the role of God's word in regeneration to the role of perishable earthly seeds. When it is planted in receptive soil, new life emerges. So it is when the word finds a place in a sinner, who then repents and believes what was preached.

### VERSES 24-25

Peter had turned to the Scriptures as testimony to the truth of God's holiness (1:16). Now he turned to Scripture for testimony that God's word lasts forever. He recalled two couplets of Hebrew poetry from Isaiah 40:6-8. In the first couplet, the second line repeats the meaning of the first line, but in different words (called "synonymous parallelism"). **Flesh** refers to natural human existence, and **all its glory** refers to human splendor and fame. How permanent are these? They are as fleeting as **grass**, which scorches in the heat; they are as fading as a **flower of the grass**, which wilts and quickly disappears. Each human is here only for a short season, no matter how famous.

Is there anything permanent to which we can attach ourselves? Isaiah and Peter answered with a ringing "yes." In the second couplet, the second line gives the opposite of the first line (called "antithetic parallelism"). On the one hand, grass and flowers and all things merely human are destined to wither and fade. On the other hand, people can latch onto something that **endures forever**. It is none other than **the word of the Lord**. Peter hastened to show the application. This everlasting word is that which was **preached as the gospel** to Peter's first readers (and to us as well). That word includes Old Testament Scriptures, the New Testament proclamation of the apostles, and the message of the gospel wherever it is proclaimed. This word is a necessary instrument in bringing about the new birth. Whatever glory humans have achieved will fade away. Only those who are born again will live with God forever.

### 1 PETER 1:23

<sup>23</sup> since you have been born again—not of perishable seed but of imperishable—through the living and enduring word of God.

### 1 PETER 1:24-25

<sup>24</sup> For All flesh is like grass, and all its glory like a flower of the grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls,  
<sup>25</sup> but the word of the Lord endures forever. And this is the word that was preached as the gospel to you.

# LEAD GROUP BIBLE STUDY

## FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

**GUIDE:** As the group arrives, begin a discussion of major lifestyle changes people decide to make. These may include health and fitness, relationship, and financial decisions.

**ASK:** *When making these major lifestyle changes, where do people get encouragement and motivation to keep on when facing challenges? What or whose examples do they follow? How do they select these examples?*

**TRANSITION:** *Peter wrote his letter to Christians who were making a major lifestyle change. They needed encouragement to continue to live a holy life amid persecution for their beliefs.*

## EXPLORE THE TEXT

**INTRODUCE:** Read the paragraph beginning “Peter wrote his first letter to Christians suffering in Asia Minor” (PSG, p. 23). Then use **Pack Item 1** (*Map: Pentecost and the Jewish Diaspora*) to help the group visualize the persecution Peter’s readers faced with the expansion of the Roman Empire. Remind the group that scholars believe Peter was martyred in Rome during Nero’s persecution of Christians. Review **Pack Item 4** (*Time Line: 1,2 Peter; Jude*) for other events happening around Peter’s death.

**READ:** Read aloud 1 Peter 1:13-16, encouraging the group to listen for commands introduced by the words “be” and “not be.” Emphasize the words “be” and “not be” as you read.

**EXPLAIN:** *Our standard of holiness must come from God, not from the culture in which we live. Society begins attempting to set standards when children are born. Babies are weighed and measured, then compared with what is “normal.” In contrast to cultural norms, God provided the pattern for holiness for His children, who are born again (1 Pet. 1:3) to a living hope.*

**DISCUSS:** *Why is it important to remember the teachings about the new birth before we begin understanding the call to holy living? Why is the order of the new birth and holy living important? (PSG, p. 25)*

**GUIDE:** Ask the group to read verse 16 to identify and underline God’s standard for holiness.

**EMPHASIZE:** *Humans are not capable of perfection, but we are to strive to live a holy life according to God’s standard.*

**GUIDE:** *Peter grounded his instruction in Scripture, not his opinion.* Ask two volunteers to read aloud 1 Peter 1:16 and Leviticus 11:44-45. Note that Peter also used the same words as Jesus: “It is written.” Instruct the group to listen for this phrase as you read aloud Matthew 4:4,7,10. Stress that in a world of shifting ethical standards, it is important to know the Scriptures and apply them.

**TRANSITION:** *Holy living results in living with reverence for the Father in the here and now—our temporary residence.*

**READ:** Read 1 Peter 1:17-21, as everyone listens for the roles of God and Jesus Christ expressed in these verses.

**GUIDE:** Create two teams. Direct one team to search 1 Peter 1:17-21 and pages 26-27 of the PSG for references to the old life before Christ. Instruct the second team to search 1 Peter 1:17-21 and page 27 of the PSG for references to the new life bought by Christ's salvation. Allow time for each group to report what they discovered.

**EXPLAIN:** *Peter instructed his readers to live out of reverence to God's position as Judge and in response to the cost of salvation. All people are held accountable to God: the unbeliever for his or her rejection of Jesus and the believer for how he or she lived for Him.*

**MINI-LECTURE:** Present a brief mini-lecture on Christ as the Lamb of God. Read or invite volunteers to read Leviticus 22:19-25; John 1:29; and Revelation 5:9-10. Clarify key phrases in 1 Peter 1:19-20, such as precious blood of Christ, lamb without defect or blemish, and chosen before the foundation of the world.

**DISCUSS:** *How does the knowledge that God planned Jesus' death and resurrection long before you ever sinned heighten your reverence for the Father? How does rejecting the death of Christ disrespect God the Father?* (PSG, p. 28)

**TRANSITION:** *True belief leads to obedience and reverence, but it also leads to a compassionate life.*

**READ:** Call on a volunteer to read aloud 1 Peter 1:22-25. Use **Pack Item 12** (Poster: 1 Peter 1:22) to point out that 1 Peter 1:22 is this session's memory verse. Discuss how group members' lives demonstrate the words "earnestly from a pure heart."

**GUIDE:** *To illustrate the importance of showing compassion toward others as a fulfillment of the Scriptures, Peter quoted Isaiah 40:6-8. These verses provided comfort to the exiles in Babylon. Lead everyone to compare Isaiah 40:6-8 with 1 Peter 1:24-25.*

**ILLUSTRATE:** On a posterboard, write from the PSG (p. 28): "The practical outgrowth of holiness is not that others will view us as better people but that we will have a more sincere love for others." Call for reactions to this statement.

**DISCUSS:** *What is the connection between holiness and compassion? What is the connection between humility and a person's love for others?* (PSG, p. 28) *How is our love for others rooted in the gospel?* (PSG, p. 29)

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## SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

**DISCUSS:** Review the statements under In My Context (PSG, p. 30) to present a summary of the study. Ask: *How does 1 Peter 1:13-25 encourage and motivate you to live a holy life?* Invite the group to share specific Scripture verses to support their responses.

**CHALLENGE:** Call attention to the third question set under In My Context (PSG, p. 30): *Identify some groups of people around you that your Bible study group can adopt to show Christ-like compassion toward them. Make a plan as a group for how you will demonstrate compassion to the identified groups.* List the people groups on the board or sheet of paper. Lead the group in brainstorming how, as a group, you can demonstrate compassion to at least one of the identified groups. Determine specific actions and a deadline for completion.

**PRAY:** Lead the group in prayer, asking God to strengthen each of you as you seek to live holy lives in an unholy world. Pray for a focus on being obedient, reverent, and compassionate.



## PRACTICE

- Spend time this week evaluating holiness in your life. Be aware of the areas in which you struggle most. Identify ways this study can strengthen you.
- Contact those not present, asking them for prayer requests. Use the opportunity to encourage them in their spiritual lives.
- Work on the memory verse (1 Peter 1:22) for this session. Brainstorm ways to challenge your group to internalize God's Word. For ideas, read the article "Meet David: He's Memorized 15 Books of the Bible" on pages 146-148.

## MORE IDEAS

### FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

To replace the focus idea, use First Thoughts (PSG, pp. 22-23) to lead a discussion about the 15th anniversary of September 11, 2001. Invite the group to share brief memories of the event. Discuss the questions on page 23 of the PSG: *What has changed in the past 15 years? How do those changes impact people spiritually? How has your walk with God changed in the past 15 years?*

### EXPLORE THE TEXT

- To supplement your discussion of 1 Peter 1:13-16, lead individuals to draw what they think is a two-inch line in the margin of their PSG. Compare line lengths. Discuss: *Whose line is correct? How do we know it is correct?* Display a ruler as the standard to measure lines. Emphasize that God is the standard for holiness. *We are to measure our lives by the One who is holy, not by others, because we can always find someone we consider less holy than ourselves.*
- To further your discussion of 1 Peter 1:17-21, invite individuals to identify their most treasured heirloom or possession that they most want to pass on to their descendants. Allow volunteers to explain why they treasure the item identified. Compare this treasured inheritance with our inheritance from God as described in 1 Peter.
- To add to the discussion of 1 Peter 1:22-25, read Isaiah 40:6-8, which is quoted in 1 Peter 1:24-25. Explain that the passages contrast God's permanence with grass and flowers. Lead the group to restate the passages using a different comparison for the nature references in 1 Peter 1:24.

### SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

Lead in a review of 1 Peter 1:13-25 and observe when and for what purposes Peter quoted from the Old Testament. Then guide the group to complete the Bible Skill activity (PSG, p. 26).

### SUGGESTED MUSIC IDEA

To close the session, play a recording of "Take My Life (Holiness)," by MercyMe, or lead the group in singing or reading the words to "Take Time to Be Holy," by William D. Longstaff.

# BUILDING OUR FAITH

Believers mature both personally and as a community through God's grace.

## 1 PETER 2:1-10

**MEMORY VERSE: 1 PETER 2:10**

### PREPARE TO LEAD THE GROUP TIME

- **READ** 1 Peter 2:1-10 and Understanding the Context (pp. 34-35). Circle words or phrases that might require more explanation during the group time (such as spiritual milk, living stone, cornerstone, chosen race, and royal priesthood). Consult the *Explore the Bible Adult Commentary* (available in print and digital format from *LifeWay.com*) and **PACK ITEM 6** (*Poster: Christ in 1 and 2 Peter*) for more information.
- **STUDY** 1 Peter 2:1-10, using Explore the Text (pp. 35-39). As you study, list and define the ways Peter describes believers and Jesus. What progression do you observe in Peter's description of believers from verse 2 through verse 10?
- **PLAN** the group time using the ideas under Lead Group Bible Study (pp. 40-41), More Ideas (p. 42), *QuickSource*, and *Blog.LifeWay.com/ExploretheBible*.
- **GROW** from expert insights on weekly studies through the Ministry Grid (*MinistryGrid.com/Web/ExploretheBible*).
- **GATHER** the following items:  Personal Study Guides;  Different Bible translations; and  **PACK ITEM 2** (*Outline of 1,2 Peter; Jude*). For More Ideas: Search the Internet to locate a brief construction video or arrange a small display of building materials (hammer, nails, etc.). Prepare to display the following Pack Item:  **PACK ITEM 6** (*Poster: Christ in 1 and 2 Peter*).



# FIRST THOUGHTS

## KEY DOCTRINE

### *Sanctification*

Growth in grace should continue throughout the regenerate person's life.

Building a house can be a trying time for families. A foundation requires much work before a house can be built on top of it. The owners wonder if the house will ever get built as day after day they drive by and see no structure arising. When the foundation is finally poured, the owners almost always look at it and panic. It's too small! Did we make it big enough? The foundation always looks small until the walls begin to ascend. When the house does ascend, the owners face a series of choices. What color should the walls be? What color should the carpet be? Decision after decision confronts the owners of the house, but these are important decisions because in the end they determine what the house will become. The foundation determines the capability of the house, but the ensuing decisions determine its beauty.

(In PSG, p. 32) **What decisions might an owner face when building a house? Which decisions do you think carry the biggest weight?**

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## BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR

For additional context, read "Living Stones: What Did Peter Mean?" in the Fall 2016 issue of *Biblical Illustrator*. Available at [LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator](http://LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator).

Building a house parallels some of the struggles of spiritual growth. The foundation of both a house and a spiritual life are crucial. Problems in the foundation will result in a poor structure above it. Spiritual growth may seem so much slower than the new Christian would like it to be. It is easy to get frustrated with one's own growth. We expect too much too soon in our lives and forget our lives are a product of our day-to-day decisions. Sometimes we forget that, like a house, it takes a group effort to raise up the finished product. One person does not do all the electrical, plumbing, painting, and other crafts it takes to finish the building. As Christians, we too grow in the context of a Christian community.

# UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

## 1 PETER 2:1-10

Peter's first readers had come to Jesus as Gentiles. The gospel had rescued them from paganism. As they had read the Scriptures about God's work among the Israelites during the era of the Old Covenant, surely they asked themselves questions such as, *How do we Gentiles fit into God's family? Can we really call ourselves God's chosen people?* They also may have been asking whether they were truly an integral part of what God had done with the coming of the Jewish Messiah.

Peter's plan in this week's passage was to develop the illustration of a building and then show that believers and Christ are all part of the same building. To further his case, he drew from important Old Testament passages. Pay attention to the following Old Testament quotations:

- Isaiah 28:16, quoted in 1 Peter 2:6. The apostle took a prophecy about a coming One who was a “stone” figure, upon whom everyone could believe and never be disappointed. What mattered was trust in the stone rather than the ethnicity of those coming to the stone.
- Psalm 118:22, quoted in 1 Peter 2:7. Moving the stone concept further, Peter showed that the stone rejected by human builders would become the honored cornerstone. The reference to Christ’s rejection by humans in crucifixion and His exaltation by God in resurrection is clear.
- Isaiah 8:14, quoted in 1 Peter 2:8. Again developing the stone concept, Peter noted that God’s stone results in many people stumbling and falling. Many—Jew or Gentile—will respond wrongly.
- Phrases from Exodus and Isaiah are taken from their original reference to the Israelites and applied directly to Peter’s Christian readers. These are quoted in 1 Peter 2:9.

## EXPLORE THE TEXT

### SPIRITUAL MILK (1 PET. 2:1-3)

#### VERSE 1

Peter had exhorted his readers to “love one another earnestly” (1:22). The present verse gives more details about how to express such love. There are some things Christians are to **rid** themselves of, or put away decisively, like taking off a dirty shirt. Why? Because these things are harmful to other believers.

On the one hand, the five vices that Peter listed are representative; on the other hand, they are inclusive, as the term **all** (in front of the first, second, and fifth items) indicates. **Malice** is a broad term that included such ideas as evil intent, nastiness, or a mean disposition. **Deceit** implies falsehood or trickery, which certainly can harm another. **Hypocrisy** or insincerity means masking inward hostility with an outward appearance of love. **Envy** means not being thankful for the good things that others have or even jealous desire to have what someone else has. **Slander** is cutting down others in speech, that is, words meant to harm another’s reputation. Those who commit these five sins intend to harm someone else; love seeks to do good to one another.

#### VERSE 2

The apostle already had described becoming a Christian as regeneration or being born again (1:3,23). He continued to use such language to talk about growing as God’s children. The image of **newborn infants** hungrily drinking milk was something everyone can understand. Peter did not mean that his readers were new Christians; rather, he was referring to the intense desire of a baby for the mother’s breast. Further, **pure spiritual milk** does not here imply elementary teachings, for he had just been referring to the powerful effectiveness of “the living and enduring word of God” (1:23). This divine word had already resulted in their being born again. Now, it was

### BIBLE SKILL

*Memorize a verse and apply it to a real-life situation.*

Memorize 1 Peter 2:10 in your preferred Bible translation. Then write the verse in your own words. Finally, write a couple of sentences, stating how this verse can help you understand your identity in Christ, both for this life and for eternity.

### 1 PETER 2:1

<sup>1</sup> Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings,

### 1 PETER 2:2

<sup>2</sup> As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby:

to play its role in helping them mature in their salvation. Milk is used here in a positive sense as something that we partake of all our lives (in contrast to “milk” in Heb. 5:13 as something elementary we are to move beyond). The term translated *pure* means uncontaminated by foreign matter, a wonderful reference to the perfect truthfulness of all those words that come to us from God. *Spiritual* is a term to remind the readers that Peter was not thinking of literal milk but of figurative milk. We could substitute the words “the holy Scriptures” for “pure spiritual milk” and get at Peter’s message. The phrase **so that you may grow by it for your salvation** refers to our attaining glorification, the future heavenly completion of our salvation.

## 1 PETER 2:3

<sup>3</sup> If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious.

### VERSE 3

“Taste and see that the LORD is good” (Ps. 34:8). Peter had likely recited this psalm many times, and perhaps he was recalling it in connection with his exhortation for readers to continue drinking the milk of God’s words. To be a bit more precise, Peter’s thinking was like this: When we were first converted (or born again), we experienced that the Lord Jesus is sweet to our spiritual taste. Because our first experience of Him was good, we ought to keep on wanting more and more of the Lord’s spiritual deliciousness. We experience that through His words, and so we grow.

(In PSG, p. 36) **How would you explain the importance of proper spiritual nourishment? What would you include as a balanced spiritual diet for the believer?**

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## 1 PETER 2:4

<sup>4</sup> To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious,

### VERSE 4

Growth in the Christian life does not happen in isolation from other believers. Thus, the apostle changed his image from an individual baby drinking milk to stones becoming part of a temple. We become part of the temple by being joined to the chief stone (Christ), and thus we are joined as well to all the other stones.

By the phrase **coming to Him**, Peter was thinking primarily of one person after another coming to Christ in Christian conversion. (This is one of only a few verses in the New Testament that speak of “coming to Christ”; see also Matt. 11:28.) Yet, in another sense, believers keep on coming to Christ daily in worship and fellowship.

The apostle introduced his new illustration with the words **a living stone**. We can also think about other similar biblical images of Christ as “living”: “living bread” and “living water” come to mind (John 4:10-14; 6:51; 7:38).

Having compared Christ to a stone, Peter introduced the theme of this stone’s rejection, which he would develop a bit later (2:8). This stone was **rejected** by people—in His ministry, in His death, and in the time Peter

was writing. Human opinion, however, is nothing compared to God's opinion. The stone was **chosen** by God. (See commentary about 1:20 on p. 27.) He was also **valuable** (meaning precious or held in honor), a term that could apply to an architectural stone as well as to Christ as the living stone.

#### VERSE 5

If Jesus is the big living stone, then those who come to Him in faith are little **living stones**. We are in the process of **being built into a spiritual house**, that is, the new temple in which God's Spirit dwells, in contrast to the old temple of Solomon (or the temple that was still standing when Peter wrote). By using the term *spiritual* in reference to the temple and *living* in regard to the stones making it up, Peter was making sure his readers understood that he did not have in mind any physical building.

This new temple now under construction is vastly superior to any and every literal temple that was ever built by humans. Nevertheless, Peter elaborated on two more points in the temple illustration. Both Jews and pagans knew that temple buildings existed for the sake of making animal sacrifices, offered by duly consecrated priests. Not just anyone could serve as a priest, and not just anything was acceptable as a sacrifice. (As a reminder of how restricted both the priesthood and the acceptable sacrifices were, review Leviticus 1–10.)

In the new, superior *spiritual house*, all has changed. Every living stone now makes up **a holy priesthood**. We are a company of priests, set apart (holy) to do God's work. (See commentary about 1:15-16 on p. 26.) As priests to God in His new temple, we now offer **spiritual sacrifices** with the help of the Spirit of God.

What sacrifices do we as believers offer as priests and stones in God's new temple? Other New Testament passages are suggestive. We offer ourselves (Rom. 12:1). We offer financial support to God's work (Phil. 4:18). We offer our praises (Heb. 13:15). We can make such sacrifices with the Spirit's help, who then makes them **acceptable to God through Jesus Christ**.

#### VERSE 6

What was Peter's basis for affirming that believers must be holy (1:16)? He quoted Scripture. What was his foundation for affirming that God's words are alive and enduring (1:24-25)? He quoted Scripture. What was his basis for seeing Christ as God's living stone? No surprise. Again he quoted Scripture. He cited three texts, each of which looks at the stone from a different angle. (See "Understand the Context," pp. 34-35.) Further, each text is messianic prophecy, for the only way these verses make sense is that Peter knew they were prophetic of Christ. Further, there is a common thread among the three: one's attitude to this stone determines his or her destiny.

Peter's first quotation was Isaiah 28:16. In this passage the stone is identified as **chosen and honored**, the same terms which the apostle had already applied to Jesus (2:4). In the Isaiah quotation, this stone is furthermore called the **cornerstone**, the most important stone, architecturally, in an ancient building. This was the large foundation stone

#### 1 PETER 2:5

<sup>5</sup> Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.

#### 1 PETER 2:6

<sup>6</sup> Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded.

set by masons in the corner, to which all the other stones were laid in alignment. Isaiah went on to emphasize the importance of relating rightly to this cornerstone. The right response is evidenced in **the one who believes in Him**. Such a person **will never be put to shame** or disappointed.

## 1 PETER 2:7-8

<sup>7</sup> Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, <sup>8</sup> And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed.

### VERSES 7-8

Peter commented on what happens to those who trust the cornerstone. He assured Christians they would receive **honor**. No doubt he was thinking of the end-time honor that will come to believers when their hope is fulfilled and they receive their heavenly inheritance (see 1:4-5). There is, however, a contrasting group. These are **the unbelieving**. Peter turned to Psalm 118:22 and to Isaiah 8:14 for texts which noted that some reject the stone and therefore **stumble**.

The quotation from the Psalms alludes to the practice of ancient builders examining each of the stones quarried to go into their project. Some stones would be judged as worthy; others would be turned down. The psalmist presented a shocking situation: the builders **rejected** one particular stone, only to find that it had **become the cornerstone**, the most important stone in the building. The original decision was overturned. As prophecy, the Psalm text referred to Jesus' historical rejection at His first coming. It also referred to Him as the One God chose to be the essential, honored cornerstone for the spiritual house now under construction.

In verse 8, Peter quoted Isaiah 8:14. The imagery of the stone changed, however, from a stone in a great temple to a large rock lying in a roadway. Whether Isaiah meant a paving stone that became dislodged or a boulder under the surface that worked its way up to the top doesn't affect the imagery. When people on the road do not take such a stone into account, they will **trip** and fall. Peter and Isaiah's point was that disbelief in (and disobedience to) the stone God put in place has a disastrous result.

To stumble or trip over a literal stone might mean bruises, skinned knees, or embarrassment. The spiritual reality is much more serious. Such stumbling has bitter consequences for one's eternal destiny. Bible students have interpreted in a variety of ways the phrase **they were destined for this**. Some understand Peter to be teaching that certain individuals are destined to fall and so be lost eternally. These are the individuals who refuse Christ. Others understand Peter to mean that unbelief has been destined by God to result in eternal destruction. In either case, the wording in Isaiah suggests that people's stumbling is of their own making. We are each responsible before God for how we respond to His revelation. People are guilty and stumble because **they disobey**, that is, because they ignore the stone.

**Have you ever thought of yourself as a living stone making up part of a spiritual house? What aspects of this analogy are most appealing to you?**

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## SPIRITUAL PEOPLE (1 PET. 2:9-10)

### VERSE 9

In rapid order, Peter gave four descriptions of Christians. These descriptors are identical to what God had previously said about the people of Israel in Exodus 19:5-6 and Isaiah 43:20-21, as well as other verses. Peter's teaching was that there is now one people of God. We are not limited by race or geography or nationality. All believers are united in God's plan and purpose. The **you** in verse 9 emphatically contrasts with the disbelieving, disobedient persons of verses 6-8.

- **A chosen race** (Isa. 43:20) recalls that Christ was chosen (1 Pet. 2:4,6). We have now come to Him and are also a chosen people. The Israelite understanding that Jews alone were God's chosen people has now been broadly expanded.
- **A royal priesthood** (Ex. 19:6) continues the thought of the holy priesthood of 2:5. The emphasis now is that we are royal or kingly priests, serving a great King at His pleasure.
- **A holy nation** (Ex. 19:6) implies a nation set apart and dedicated to the service of the living God. After the coming of Christ, geographical or political "nation" no longer has spiritual significance.
- **A people for His possession** (Ex. 19:5; Isa. 43:21) suggests that believers are God's distinctly prized possession.

What was God's primary purpose in doing these things for us? Peter declared that all of this has been accomplished so that we may live in praise of this great and good God. He noted once again the contrast between two groups: there is the group in spiritual **darkness**; there is the group called **into His marvelous light**. We were born again, made into living stones, made into royal, holy priests (and so on) not mainly for our well-being. Rather, our ultimate meaning as humans is found in proclaiming **the praises** of this great God.

### VERSE 10

Peter concluded this section with a final reflection on the difference between formerly living in darkness and now living in spiritual light. He drew on the language of Hosea 1:6-9; 2:23. Note that in Hosea, it was Israel who was not God's people; in Romans 9:25-26, Paul applied this as referring to Gentiles. For Peter, the reference to "not God's people" applied both to Jews and to Gentiles who had not believed in Christ.

- Characteristics of living in darkness: (1) **not a people** and (2) **you had not received mercy**.
- Characteristics of being called into spiritual light: (1) **you are God's people** and (2) **you have received mercy**.

Thus, the apostle pointed out, once again, the great difference that conversion to Christ makes.

### 1 PETER 2:9

<sup>9</sup> But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light:

### 1 PETER 2:10

<sup>10</sup> Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.

# LEAD GROUP BIBLE STUDY

## FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

**GUIDE:** As the group arrives, invite individuals to name stages of building a house from the planning to its completion. Write responses on the board. Lead the group to brainstorm all the trades involved in the process, such as excavators, carpenters, electricians, and plumbers.

**ASK:** *Why is each of these necessary to building a house? What would happen if one step were omitted or done out of order?*

**EXPLAIN:** *Most of us do not do all the electrical, plumbing, painting, and other crafts it takes to finish a house. Building a house can parallel the process of spiritual growth. Both require a strong foundation and a community of dedicated workers.*

**INTRODUCE:** Call attention to **Pack Item 2** (*Outline of 1,2 Peter; Jude* or PSG, p. 10). Review the outline and Understand the Context (PSG, pp. 33-34) to set the context of 1 Peter 2:1-10.

## EXPLORE THE TEXT

**READ:** Read aloud 1 Peter 2:1, directing the group to listen for five attitudes and actions that were unbecoming of Christians. Use the PSG (p. 34) and commentary (p. 35) to provide insight into malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander.

**ASK:** *How do the attitudes and actions listed by Peter get in the way of spiritual growth? (PSG, p. 35)*

**DO:** Invite volunteers to read 1 Peter 2:2-3 from various Bible translations. Compare the translations, looking for ways the verses are similar and different.

**CLARIFY:** Stress that Peter's reference to "pure spiritual milk" applies to more than immature Christians: *All Christians need the pure spiritual milk that allows them to grow. Whether mature or immature, Christians need the same food source.*

**EXPLAIN:** *Different translation of 1 Peter 2:2 use "desire," "long," or "crave" to express the intensity we have toward our need for pure spiritual milk. Call on one volunteer to read Psalm 42:1 and another to read Psalm 84:2.*

**ASK:** *How would you explain the importance of proper spiritual nourishment? What would you include as a balanced spiritual diet for the believer? (PSG, p. 36)*

**TRANSITION:** *Peter shifted metaphors for spiritual growth, turning from newborn babes craving pure spiritual milk to living stones being built into a spiritual building.*

**READ:** Invite a volunteer to read aloud 1 Peter 2:4-8, as the group listens for the reference to Jesus Christ.

**HIGHLIGHT:** Call attention to **Pack Item 6** (*Poster: Christ in 1 and 2 Peter*). Use the poster to highlight the titles of Jesus, such as Cornerstone (1 Pet. 2:6), throughout the session.

**EXPLAIN:** *Jesus is a living stone, the cornerstone for the building. Those who come to Him for salvation become part of His building program. The Christian life must be lived in community. We are not a stone unto ourselves but a part of what God is building around us.*

**ASK:** *What role does a church and its members play in the development of a follower of Christ?* (PSG, p. 37)

**COMPARE:** Invite the group to read and compare 1 Peter 2:6 to Isaiah 28:16.

**EXPLAIN:** *Peter quoted the passage from Isaiah to demonstrate how this was God's plan from the beginning. At great cost the Cornerstone was laid in place in Zion, and it was the foundation upon which everything else rested.*

**CLARIFY:** Use the information under Verses 7-8 (PSG, pp. 37-38) to explain the references to rejection.

**DISCUSS:** *How does knowing that Jesus was rejected by some give believers courage to face persecution and rejection? Should believers expect to be treated differently by those who reject Jesus? Explain.* (PSG, p. 38)

**READ:** Read aloud 1 Peter 2:9-10. Then direct the group to locate four images Peter used to describe Christians in these verses.

**CLARIFY:** *These exalted titles were not to bring glory to the people of God. Rather, they were to bring praise to God.*

**DISCUSS:** *What is the relationship between worship and evangelism?* (PSG, p. 39)

**GUIDE:** Reference television shows that depict homes before and after restoration. Read verse 9, noting that the words “darkness” and “light” describe life before and after Christ. Write *Darkness* and *Light* on a board. Invite volunteers to name words that described their life before Christ; list responses under the word *Darkness*. Call for words that describe life with Christ; list responses under the word *Light*. Draw an outline of a house around words in the *Light* column. Say: *These words describe God's people, a community built through God's grace.*

**DISCUSS:** *How does the gospel break down walls between people?* (PSG, p. 39)

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## SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

**ASK:** *What guidance does 1 Peter 2:1-10 provide about building our faith?* Invite the group to share additional insights gained. Read the first paragraph under In My Context (PSG, p. 40) to summarize the study.

**ENCOURAGE:** Point out that the session focuses on the personal and community aspects of Christian maturity. Invite volunteers to identify one fellow believer they will encourage in the coming week. Ask volunteers to share their way of encouragement without revealing whom they plan to encourage.

**CHALLENGE:** Call attention to the second question set under In My Context (PSG, p. 40): *Evaluate the progress of your spiritual life. How are you growing in your relationship with the Lord? What areas need more attention? List actions you will take to foster your spiritual growth.* Lead the group to list in the margin of the PSG one step they will take to grow in the coming week.

**PRAY:** Close in prayer, asking God to help the group follow through with the actions identified during the discussion of the In My Context questions.



## PRACTICE

- Early in the week, text or email the group. Include a photo of a building under construction. Affirm that you are praying for your group as they each build their faith personally and as a community through God's grace.
- Later in the week, text or email the group and thank them for their participation during the group Bible study time.
- Lead the group in the memorization of 1 Peter 2:10, the memory verse for the week. Text or email the group, encouraging them to write the verse in whatever translation they want to memorize it. Initiate a discussion via group text or social media by inviting the group to share tips that may help others memorize the verse.

## MORE IDEAS

### FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

Locate a brief video showing building construction on the Internet (suggested search: "home time lapse"). As individuals arrive, show the video clip and solicit responses about experiences with building a home or other construction. (As an option, arrange a display of building materials.)

### EXPLORE THE TEXT

- To supplement the discussion about spiritual growth, display a growth chart that parents use to record children's height. Use an actual chart or draw lines on a board to represent a chart. Call attention to the growth chart. Lead everyone to compare physical growth with spiritual maturity.
- To replace or supplement the discussion about the cornerstone, give a mini-lecture about the concept of a cornerstone. If your church has a cornerstone, display a photo of it and share a bit of its background.
- To replace or supplement the discussion of darkness and light, pre-enlist someone to give a brief testimony about what it means to be called out of the world's darkness into God's light. Physically turn off and on the lights in the room to illustrate the impact of light.

### SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

To supplement the challenge, lead the group to establish a system for encouraging each other in spiritual growth. Suggest using texts, emails, and other forms of communication at least weekly.

### SUGGESTED MUSIC IDEA

To close the session, lead the group in singing "The Solid Rock," by Edward Mote, or play a recording of the song. As an option, play a video of "In Christ Alone (Cornerstone)," by Stuart Townsend and Keith Getty.

# LIVING AS STRANGERS

Believers honor God through their good works.

## 1 PETER 2:11-20

**MEMORY VERSE: 1 PETER 2:12**

### PREPARE TO LEAD THE GROUP TIME

- **READ** 1 Peter 2:11-25, First Thoughts (p. 44), and Understand the Context (pp. 44-45). Make note of Peter's comments about honoring God through interactions with various groups and individuals. Visualize the groups and individuals Peter might comment on if he were writing to your community.
- **STUDY** 1 Peter 2:11-20, using Explore the Text (pp. 45-49). Reflect on how living as a stranger in Peter's day compares with living a countercultural lifestyle in today's world.
- **PLAN** the group time using the ideas under Lead Group Bible Study on pages 50-51, More Ideas on page 52, *QuickSource*, and ideas online at *MinistryGrid.com/ExploreTheBible*. Add variety to the plans for your group in this session by using at least one suggestion from More Ideas on page 52.
- **GROW** with other group leaders at the Groups Ministry blog (*LifeWay.com/GroupMinistry*).
- **GATHER** the following items:  Personal Study Guides;  Names of far-away countries written on strips of paper, one location per strip;  A container for the strips; and  **PACK ITEM 5** (*Bookmark: Memory Verses*) as needed. For More Ideas, gather:  Travel posters or photos of road signs in various languages (locate on Internet);  A voter registration card. Prepare to display the following Pack Item:  **PACK ITEM 7** (*Poster: Relationship Builders*).



## FIRST THOUGHTS

### KEY DOCTRINE

#### *The Christian and Social Order*

Christians should be ready to work with all men of good will in any good cause, always being careful to act in the spirit of love without compromising their loyalty to Christ and His truth.

On a recent mission trip, a person who was traveling for the first time out of the United States experienced culture shock. He had gotten worked up about not knowing the language, not knowing the money, and not knowing the culture. The first night of the mission trip the group was in a hurry and decided to eat at an American hamburger place, even though they were in a country known for its own cuisine. The first-time missionary panicked when he approached the counter. Speaking very loudly and slowly, he said, "I would like a hamburger, and some fries, and a coke." In perfect English with a European accent, the counter worker said, "Would you like ketchup and mayo?" Culture shock took its toll. The missionary backed up slightly, raised his hands, and said slowly and loudly, "Whoa! We are not from here." A friend leaned over toward him and said, "Dude, he's speaking English." Sometimes new surroundings get the best of us.

(In PSG, p. 42) **What are some of the ways you have experienced culture shock when traveling to a new location? How did it make you feel?**

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### BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR

For additional context, read "Rewards Among the Romans" in the Fall 2016 issue of *Biblical Illustrator*. Available at [LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator](http://LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator).

Christians live as strangers in a foreign land. They are like diplomats living in an embassy in a foreign country. They represent their culture to a foreign culture that surrounds them. Living in a foreign culture, ambassadors abide by the laws of the country that they inhabit, as long as it does not cause them to break the laws of their own land. They are bound by the laws of their own country even though they are residing in another place.

Peter wrote to Christians who certainly must have considered themselves temporary residents in this world. Their government was growing more hostile to their faith. Persecution was not just a theoretical possibility; it was actually happening. Peter's counsel in this week's Scripture passage was for them not to withdraw but rather to be such exemplary members of their communities that they would have a positive influence.

## UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

### 1 PETER 2:11-25

The larger passage serving as the context for this lesson is 1 Peter 2:11-25. The apostle's flow of thinking is relatively straightforward:

- In general, live with integrity and good works in your larger society, remembering that you are temporary residents (2:11-12).
- In particular, submit to governmental authorities, because this is one of the ways you silence those who oppose you (2:13-17).

- Furthermore, submit to those in authority over you in your work, even if they are unfair, because this pleases God (2:18-20).
- Remember that Christ suffered unjustly in His crucifixion, not only to heal you spiritually, but also to be your example in suffering (2:21-25).

For Peter’s first readers, both the political arrangement and the employee–employer structure were vastly different than what we have experienced. The government was the Roman imperial system, with an emperor (Nero) and no right for citizens to vote. As far as we know, no Christians were in government positions anywhere at this time.

When we seek to apply Peter’s teaching, we are to be aware, on one hand, that obeying God’s Word always takes precedent over human laws when the two collide, even though our general stance is to submit (2:13). On the other hand, we must also be aware that today we have many Christian brothers and sisters who live under governments that repress Christianity. They are facing pressures of which we can be only dimly aware.

Further, in the first century, slavery was legal. It was not parallel to the race-based slavery of recent history, but it was grossly unfair nevertheless. There was little or no opportunity to express grievances or gain a fair hearing. Yet the principles Peter outlined are applicable: respect for those over us in the workplace is always right, while at the same time we should not have to allow others to abuse us. As you study, look for Peter’s main concern: we can demonstrate godly character toward government authorities and toward those over us at work.

## EXPLORE THE TEXT

### IN CULTURE (1 PET. 2:11-12)

#### VERSE 11

As Christ’s apostle, Peter was about to offer strong advice (*I urge you*). Yet as their spiritual brother in God’s family, he cared for his readers and loved them, calling them *dear friends*, traditionally translated “beloved.”

The apostle deftly described the relationship between these believers and their culture. On one hand, they were *strangers and temporary residents* (see 1:1,17). Abraham the patriarch used this same language to refer to himself as an alien in his travels (Gen. 23:4; see Ps. 39:12). Christians are always to remember that this world is not our true homeland; we are waiting for our heavenly home. This fact especially encourages Christians who have been displaced by war and missionaries who have served Christ far away from their geographical roots.

Peter’s readers, on the other hand, were not to withdraw. Rather, they were still living in their surrounding culture (as Peter’s later remarks about submitting in the workplace and to the government implies). Further, they were to remember that they were constantly at *war*—spiritual war. There were *fleshly desires* that could harm them. These sinful passions were characteristic of their previous lives (see commentary about 1:14 on p. 26).

### BIBLE SKILL

*Analyze a biblical command for Christian living.*

Identify at least three biblical commands for Christian living found in 1 Peter 2:11-20. Express each command as briefly as possible. (Example: “Submit to the government,” 2:13.) Develop a “path of obedience” for each imperative. That is, think of reasons God gave us these commands. Consider damage that might be caused by ignoring them and benefits generated by obeying them.

### 1 PETER 2:11

<sup>11</sup> Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul.

When believers indulge the temptations of our sinful natures, we may think these are harmless diversions. Yet these are actually our spiritual enemies that weaken and defeat us. See 4:3 for a specific list of such desires.

## 1 PETER 2:12

<sup>12</sup> Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

### VERSE 12

The previous verse was negative: “don’t do this.” Now Peter turned to the positive: “do this.” The words **conduct yourselves** have to do with lifestyle, a pattern of behavior observable to others. In a word, we are to live **honorably** (often translated simply “good”). Integrity matters to Christians not only for our own sake but because the Gentiles are watching. (Note that all non-Christians are now categorized generally as Gentile or pagan.)

The best-case scenario we can envision for unbelievers who speak against or slander us is that they will repent and turn to Christ for salvation. Peter thought this was possible, even for **those who do what is evil** against believers. One way God removes such hostility is this: slanderers will observe the Christian’s **good works**. Then, once they have been converted, previous despisers too will **glorify God**, praising Him for His work in their lives. The apostle was echoing what he had heard, decades earlier, from the Lord Jesus: “Let your light shine before men, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven” (Matt. 5:16).

Bible students have understood **the day of visitation** in two ways. The reference might be to the time God visits people with salvation, sending His Spirit to indwell them, and they praise God. Or perhaps Peter was thinking of the day of judgment, when God visits the world with justice, and believers stand before Him in praise and wonder for their salvation.

(In PSG, p. 45) **Why is it important for Christians to be good citizens as much as possible without violating the ways of God? How have you seen a Christian impact a community simply by the way he or she lived?**

## 1 PETER 2:13-14

<sup>13</sup> Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human authority: whether to the emperor, as the supreme authority, <sup>14</sup> or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right.

### TOWARD OFFICIALS AND LEADERS (1 PET. 2:13-17)

#### VERSES 13-14

The verb **submit** or “be subject” summarizes the Christian’s main responsibility to the government. It refers to a willing submission rather than coercion. This verb is quite broad, and in other New Testament passages it is used to exhort believers to be subject to God, Christ, church leaders, one another, husbands, and masters (Jas. 4:7; Eph. 5:21,24; Heb. 13:17; 1 Pet. 3:1; 5:5).

The reason Christians can willingly submit is **because of the Lord**, that is, because of His sovereign goodness in providing mankind with a structure of human authority. When Christians disobey the laws of the land, we give opponents occasion for accusations of lawlessness. We should not absolutize this command, however. Peter also boldly declared (in a

situation in which the human laws contradicted God's words), "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29).

The apostle noted two levels of civil authorities: **the Emperor** and **governors**. The various Roman provinces were ruled by governors. Clearly the apostle believed God's will is for believers to be subject even to authorities who are unbelievers or morally bankrupt. Although at present our highest governmental authority is not a king, we can readily apply this: submit to higher and lower civil authorities, of whatever rank.

There is an important theological underpinning for Peter's teaching: God's overall plan for human government is for the good of the people governed. We can easily see the value in having those in place over us who **punish those who do what is evil**. That's why there are police and courts. The complement is that government will, on occasion, **praise those who do what is good**. In general, governments understand that they are responsible for the well-being of their people, even if they carry out this task imperfectly. Romans 13:1-7 is the longest passage in the New Testament that develops this theme.

#### VERSE 15

Four times in this letter Peter commended a particular action as **God's will**: to silence accusers by submitting to government (2:15), for some to suffer for doing good (3:17; 4:19), and to reject evil human desires (4:2). These seem mundane, but they go to the heart of believers' willingness to entrust themselves to God in the challenges of everyday life.

Here the point is that when Christians are engaged in doing the right things (especially in submitting to civil authorities), any false charges made against them will be counteracted. Even if unbelievers are not converted, at least they will be silenced. **Ignorance** implies people who have closed their minds. **Foolish people** means those who are willfully opposed to God.

#### VERSE 16

Do you like oxymorons? How about "jumbo shrimp" or "honest thief" or "deafening silence"? Peter developed a terrific oxymoron in this verse: "free slaves." The term for **slaves** referred to a bond servant, one owned by another. This is the way we think of ourselves when we submit to Him as Lord. For us, however, this results in true **freedom**. Whatever our social or economic status, we are free in the Lord to love Him and to grow in godliness. Therefore, we are to live as free people. Yet our freedom in Christ has its limits. We are not free to sin. We are not free to rebel against government authority (as long as that authority does not contradict God's words). We are certainly not free **to conceal evil**, to pretend to be doing right while we are actually doing wrong. This verse may be rephrased in two paradoxical statements:

- Believers are slave people, living only to please our heavenly Master.
- Believers are free people, submitting willingly to governmental authorities.

#### 1 PETER 2:15

<sup>15</sup> For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people.

#### 1 PETER 2:16

<sup>16</sup> Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as God's slaves.

## 1 PETER 2:17

<sup>17</sup> Show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, honor the emperor.

### VERSE 17

Peter now summarized his counsel on how believers are to live as temporary residents in the world. There are four brief commands.

1. **Honor everyone.** The apostle began with the most inclusive of the four commands. Part of doing good works among non-believers (2:12) is to be courteous and respectful of others. Even when others despise us or mistreat us because we are believers, we are to be considerate.

2. **Love the brotherhood.** As brothers and sisters in God's family, we are to go beyond respect. We are to show sacrificial love.

3. **Fear God.** The highest obligation of believers is reverential awe and respect for God (see commentary about 1:17 on pp. 26-27). Of course, He is also to be praised and loved and offered our spiritual sacrifices, as Peter already noted (1:3,8; 2:5,8).

4. **Honor the Emperor.** Those in civil authority are among those to whom believers should show respect, whether they are kind or cruel, whether they are believers or unbelievers. Honor for government leaders cannot ever cause us to violate fear of God and love for fellow believers.

**What word first comes to mind : "My relationship with the government is \_\_\_\_\_." If your answer is anything other than "submission" (or an equivalent), what is your rationale? On the basis of studying verses 13-17, is there some attitude adjustment you should consider as you think about your relationship to authorities over you—whether local, state, or national?**

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## 1 PETER 2:18

<sup>18</sup> Slaves, in reverent fear of God submit yourselves to your masters, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh.

### VERSE 18

When Peter turned from the Christian's responsibility toward government to the duty toward workplace authorities, he targeted a specific relationship: the **household slaves** and their **masters**. Some of the original recipients of the letter must have been dealing with this thorny issue. The term translated *household slaves* overlaps in meaning with the term "slaves" in 2:16. Both nouns referred to individuals owned by (and considered personal property of) a master. Some first-century slaves rose to management positions, but many were assigned menial, harsh tasks. Masters ran the gamut, from **good and gentle to cruel**.

Peter did not address whether slavery was immoral; rather, he offered wisdom for the immediate need. Slaves were to **submit** (the same verb as used with reference to government authorities). He added, moreover, that such submission was to be done **with all fear**. He probably meant that such obedience was to be based on respect for God, not that workers should have a cringing dread of those in authority over them. Yet surely workers are to have a healthy apprehension of incurring their supervisor's displeasure

because of inferior work. In any case, Peter was arguing that obedience does not depend on the character of the master.

(In PSG, p. 49) **How does the way one treats his or her boss dishonor or honor God?**

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#### VERSE 19

Peter turned his attention to those slaves with harsh masters. As much as they might want to rebel, they should consider their difficult circumstances as an opportunity to display the power of the gospel. Peter wanted such workers to go beyond stoically putting up with their circumstances. They were to see grief from suffering unjustly as an opportunity to please God. Such a situation brings *favor*; that is, it is an experience in which God's grace or favor is on display.

The phrase *mindful of God's will* literally is "conscious of God." It has the sense of the consciousness of a relationship with God. Constantly aware of that relationship, Christian slaves could persevere in voluntary obedience even under harsh treatment. Although it may be difficult for us to accept Peter's reasoning here, he certainly believed that patient endurance of injustice pleases God. Believers can take this attitude because of our confidence that in the end God will right all wrongs.

#### VERSE 20

As Peter wrapped up these instructions, he asked a rhetorical question. Of course there can be no credit to believers who sin in the workplace and *are punished*. Submitting to deserved punishment brings no commendation from God; further, it does nothing to advance the cause of the gospel.

In the second part of verse 20 Peter noted a contrast, now making a statement rather than asking a question. This life is often unfair. Government can be unfair. The workplace can result in unjust treatment. Believers, however, are called on always to *do what is good*, even if undeserved suffering happens as a result. The proper response is patient endurance. This happens when we trust in God and so experience His grace in our lives. Such suffering was no doubt included in the "various trials" Peter's readers were experiencing, which he had said revealed the genuineness of their faith (1:6-7). Peter may have been thinking of Jesus' own teaching: "You are blessed when they insult and persecute you and falsely say every kind of evil against you because of Me. Be glad and rejoice, because your reward is great in heaven" (Matt. 5:11-12).

#### 1 PETER 2:19

<sup>19</sup> For it is commendable if someone bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because they are conscious of God.

#### 1 PETER 2:20

<sup>20</sup> But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God.

# LEAD GROUP BIBLE STUDY

## FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

**GUIDE:** Invite each person to select a strip of paper with the name of a far-away location written on it. Direct volunteers to name the location they received and tell how they might feel if they were required to live there.

**ASK:** *What are some of the ways you have experienced culture shock when traveling to a new location? How did it make you feel?* (PSG, p. 42)

**EXPLAIN:** Call attention to the session title (Living as Strangers). Use information under First Thoughts (PSG, pp. 42-43) to explain how Christians live as believers in a foreign land.

**INTRODUCE:** Call attention to the outline (p. 12; PSG, p. 10). Use the information from First Thoughts (p. 44; PSG, pp. 42-43) to explain the shift from the relationship between believers (1 Pet. 1:13-2:10) to their relationship with the unbelieving world.

## EXPLORE THE TEXT

**HIGHLIGHT:** Call attention to **Pack Item 7** (*Poster: Relationship Builders*). Characterize society as the first of three relationships to be studied in this session for which Peter provided guidance for his readers' lifestyles. Lead the group to fill in the chart as you work through 1 Peter 2:11-20; 3:1-12 during the next two sessions.

**READ:** Read aloud 1 Peter 2:11, calling for the group to listen for the words Peter used to describe his readers ("strangers and temporary residents").

**SAY:** *Christians are in the world but not of the world, and their values come from the Lord rather than the society in which they live.*

**READ:** Read aloud 1 Peter 2:12, guiding everyone to listen for how Peter told his readers to conduct themselves and what should be the result.

**EXPLAIN:** *People viewed Christians in Peter's day with disdain and suspicion. The church was under close scrutiny and criticism. Peter reminded his readers that they were to live above reproach, carrying positive reputations because they were being watched.*

**DISCUSS:** *Why is it important for Christians to be good citizens as much as possible without violating the ways of God? How have you seen a Christian impact a community simply by the way he or she lived?* (PSG, p. 45)

**DO:** Note that 1 Peter 2:12 is this session's memory verse. Distribute **Pack Item 5** (*Bookmark: Memory Verses*) as needed. Encourage the group to write the verse in their own words in their PSG.

**TRANSITION:** *Peter turned from instructions about overall culture to influential subgroups. He instructed his readers to submit to governmental authority, being model citizens so they would be praised and not punished.*

**READ:** Call for a person to read 1 Peter 2:13-17, directing the group to listen for various officials and leaders Peter mentioned in the passage.

**CLARIFY:** *This is not the only place in the New Testament where Christians are urged to submit themselves to the authority of the government. However, the apostles faced difficult decisions when the law of God and the law of man conflicted. They decided that they needed to obey God rather than man.*

**DO:** Form two teams. Invite one team to read and summarize passages about submitting to the authority of the government: Romans 13:1,5 and Titus 3:1. Direct the second team to read and summarize Acts 5:29, which relates to decisions the apostles faced when the law of God and the law of man conflicted.

**DISCUSS:** *How do these passages help you understand how to live as a Christian in relationship to the authority of the government? From the PSG (p. 47): Why doesn't submission to government silence all persecution?*

**CLARIFY:** Use the comments under Verse 16 (p. 47; PSG, p. 47) to explain that submission to authority does not automatically take away freedom and Christians' freedom in Christ.

**ASK:** *How have people used their freedom for evil? Why is it important for Christians to avoid this temptation? (PSG, p. 47)*

**GUIDE:** Direct the group to identify Peter's four commands in verse 17. Invite volunteers with smartphones to read the verse from a variety of translations. Use the comments under Verse 17 in the PSG (p. 48) to provide insight into each command.

**READ:** Call on a volunteer to read aloud 1 Peter 2:18-20.

**MINI-LECTURE:** Use the commentary and the information under 1 Peter 2:18-20 to prepare a mini-lecture on slavery. Include the ways people could be enslaved and the positions in society slaves held. Explain Peter's use of "fear." Use information under Verses 19-20 (p. 49; PSG, p. 49) to explain that Peter spoke of those who were suffering unjustly.

**CLARIFY:** *Today's work situations are not precisely parallel to first-century slaves, nor was first-century slavery parallel to modern slavery. Showing respect for others today does not mean we must accept their abuse.*

**DISCUSS:** *How would you define the line between showing grace and standing up against abuse? Can a person do both at the same time? Explain. (PSG, p. 49)*

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## SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

**SHARE:** Highlight the first summary statement under In My Context (PSG, p. 50): *Believers are to be exemplary members of their community, having a positive influence. Believers demonstrate trust in God by respecting their local government leaders.* Invite volunteers to share an example of a believer who exemplifies this truth.

**REFLECT:** Call attention again to **Pack Item 7** (Poster: *Relationship Builders*). Lead the group to reflect on ways they can use Peter's guidance to enhance their relationships.

**PRAY:** Use the second question set under In My Context (PSG, p. 50) to guide the closing prayer: *List the names of local government leaders. Take time to pray for them, that God will use them for His purposes and to bring about good in your community. Consider ways of letting these leaders know you pray for them.*



## PRACTICE

- Contact those who were not present. Invite them to share any prayer requests and ministry concerns. Share a summary of the lesson and encourage them to use their copy of the PSG to study the passage on their own.
- Follow up with questions the group may have had during the study.
- Email the group after the session, encouraging each person to thank someone who has a positive influence in your community. Suggest that they send a handwritten note as an alternate to electronic communications.

## MORE IDEAS

### FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

To replace the focus idea, create a display of travel posters for far-away destinations or download photos of road signs in various languages from the Internet. Use the display to introduce a discussion of the challenges, concerns, and choices of living in a foreign land.

### EXPLORE THE TEXT

- To enhance the discussion about Christians in culture, point out that the words “strangers” and “temporary residents” often occur together in the Bible. They emphasize the Christian’s status as a temporary resident of the world in which he or she lives. Invite volunteers to read Psalm 39:12 and Genesis 23:4. Discuss: *Why is recognizing the concept of living as a stranger or temporary resident on earth significant for believers?*
- To supplement the discussion about governmental authority, show a voter registration card. Lead the group to discuss the responsibilities they have as citizens of both heaven and their country. Ask: *How do you balance the two?*
- To enhance the group’s understanding of 1 Peter 2:18-20, discuss ways to show respect in the workplace when leaders are unjust or cruel (v. 18). Discuss: *How does the way one treats his or her boss dishonor or honor God?* (PSG, p. 49)

### SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

Use the Bible Skill activity (PSG, p. 46) to supplement the challenge. Lead the group to identify three biblical commands for Christian living found in 1 Peter 2:11-20. Consider the damage that might be caused by ignoring them and the benefits generated by obeying these commands.

### SUGGESTED MUSIC IDEA

To close the session, read aloud the words of “Let Others See Jesus in You,” by B. B. McKinney. Instruct the group to listen for phrases that describe the influence believers can have.

# LIVING IN RELATIONSHIP

Believers honor God through healthy relationships.

## 1 PETER 3:1-12

**MEMORY VERSE: 1 PETER 3:8**

### PREPARE TO LEAD THE GROUP TIME

- **READ** 1 Peter 3:1-12, First Thoughts (p. 54), and Understand the Context (pp. 54-55). Compare Peter's comments about healthy relationships with today's attitudes. Reflect on areas in which you see distinct contrasts.
- **STUDY** 1 Peter 3:1-12, using the commentary provided (pp. 55-59). As you study, create an outline of the counsel Peter provides for husbands and wives (vv. 1-7) and actions for all believers (vv. 8-12). Based on your outline, consider how attitudes toward marriage relate to attitudes in other relationships.
- **PLAN** the group time using ideas under Lead Group Bible Study (pp. 60-61), More Ideas (p. 62), ideas in *QuickSource*, and ideas online at [Blog.LifeWay.com/ExploretheBible](http://Blog.LifeWay.com/ExploretheBible). Brainstorm creative ways to use the Suggested Music Idea (p. 62) that are appropriate for your group.
- **GROW** from expert insights on weekly studies through the Ministry Grid ([MinistryGrid.com/Web/ExploretheBible](http://MinistryGrid.com/Web/ExploretheBible)).
- **GATHER** the following items:  Personal Study Guides;  Index cards and pens;  Copies of **PACK ITEM 5** (*Bookmark: Memory Verses*) as needed. For More Ideas:  Names of songs about relationships that represent popular culture, yet are appropriate for a Bible study session;  Photos of female movie stars, past and present. Display:  **PACK ITEM 7** (*Poster: Relationship Builders*).



## FIRST THOUGHTS

### KEY DOCTRINE

#### *The Family*

A husband has the God-given responsibility to provide for, to protect, and to lead his family. A wife, being in the image of God as is her husband and thus equal to him, has the God-given responsibility to respect her husband and to serve as his helper in managing the household and nurturing the next generation.

Healthy relationships aren't automatic. They take a lot of attention, often unseen by others. In the last several decades, we've all become aware that society has grappled with shifting ideas about the marriage relationship. Each new idea brings a challenge to what is often called traditional marriage: one man plus one woman committed to each other for life in a legally recognized manner. Further, those who embrace traditional marriage have faced other issues: is there a biblically correct way for a husband and wife to envision their relationship? Are they equal partners? Are wives really to blindly obey their husbands? How do they handle disagreements about the nature of their marriage?

(In PSG, p. 53) **In your opinion, what is the biggest challenge Christians face in honoring God through marriage and healthy relationships?**

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### BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR

For additional context, read "Jewelry: What the Bible Says" in the Fall 2016 issue of *Biblical Illustrator*. Available at [LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator](http://LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator).

When it comes to relationships, people have behaviors they must not do to one another, but they also have actions they must do to one another. For example, they are not to dishonor others but honor them. They should not abuse but respect one another. Peter had previously discussed the relationship of a slave with his or her master (1 Pet. 2:18-25). He encouraged slaves to show submission to their masters because this was honoring to God. In doing so, they were demonstrating the kind of life that Jesus lived in laying down His life for them. In that context, Peter turned to the relationship between a husband and a wife. He believed that Christian faith should be evident in the way that each spouse treated the other.

## UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

### 1 PETER 3:1-12

The original biblical ideal for marriage is recorded in the creation account (Gen. 1-2). Both the man and the woman were equally created in God's image (1:27). The woman came to the man as his "complement" (2:20). In marriage they were "one flesh" (2:24). It's also clear that after humanity's fall into sin, the first marriage became deeply flawed. Further, throughout the Old Testament, we observe a number of historical developments regarding marriage, many of them sad. We might say that God permitted but certainly never endorsed such practices. Thus, polygamy became acceptable—and along with it the notion that wives were inferior, perhaps considered as new possessions to procure. This was certainly the case when men acquired concubines, who were often the servant girls of the wives (as with Rebekah and Hagar). Certain Old Testament laws sought to regulate

divorce and remarriage (Deut. 24:1-4). Nevertheless, the original ideal was praised, as Proverbs 31 and Song of Songs demonstrate.

When we fast-forward to the times of the first Christians, consider this: On one hand was the complicated history of marriage reflected in the Old Testament (brought to the table by Jewish Christians). On the other hand were current pagan practices, including polygamy, perversion, and treating wives as not having legal rights (brought to the table by Gentile Christians). What was to be the Christian perspective? It was critical for the apostles to speak into the issue of marriage. They did so, affirming the original ideal from Genesis, as well as offering their own inspired teachings.

As we study Peter's teaching on the marriage relationship in this week's session, we'll see that he immediately followed his teaching on marriage by adding important general insights about living in good relationships with others, whether they are believers or non-believers (3:8-12). If you are married (or strongly considering marriage), pay special attention to the first part of the study. Whatever your marital status, look carefully at the last part of the study and seek God's wisdom on how to apply the teachings to your own relationships.

## EXPLORE THE TEXT

### FOR THE WIFE (1 PET. 3:1-6)

#### VERSE 1

The apostle was explicitly speaking about the relationship of each Christian wife to her husband. Further, some of the Christian women Peter had in mind were married to unbelievers, as the last part of the verse makes clear. The command to **submit**, however, was applicable to all Christian wives.

The verb translated *submit* has been the focus of intense study. Without question, this verb is used in other places in the New Testament, and always it implied a relationship of obedience to legitimate authority. Here are a few examples: Jesus submitted to His earthly parents (Luke 2:51). Citizens are to obey government (Rom. 13:1; 1 Pet. 2:13). Servants are to comply with masters (Titus 2:9; 1 Pet. 2:18). Wives are to submit to husbands (Col. 3:18; 1 Pet. 3:5).

Additional comments are warranted. First, submission did not imply inferiority. Wives and husbands, like slaves and masters, for example, are equally created in God's image and equally in need of salvation. Second, submission of the wife is given willingly, rather than coerced. The Christian wife is able to do this because she understands and accepts that her role is assigned by God Himself. Submission in Christian marriage is the will of the Lord. Third, the wife's submission to the Lord takes precedence over obeying her husband. A wife is not to participate in sinful activities dictated by her husband. Further, no wife should remain in life-threatening situations, either for herself or her children.

Peter wrote that Christian wives with unbelieving husbands had an additional incentive for cheerful obedience. Such submission might be

### BIBLE SKILL

*Use other Scripture to help understand a Bible passage.*

The New Testament provides explicit instructions about the relationship between husbands and wives. Two significant passages are Ephesians 5:22-33 and Colossians 3:18-19. Read these passages and compare them with what Peter wrote. How are their emphases similar? How are they different? What insights do you gain by reading all three passages together?

### 1 PETER 3:1

<sup>1</sup> In the same way, wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands so that, even if some disobey the Christian message, they may be won over without a message by the way their wives live

recognized by the husband as evidence of life transformation by the power of Christ. He might then be so attracted to Christ that he is **won over** to believe and obey the gospel without a message from his wife. In these cases, Christian character is more persuasive than argument.

**Why does willing submission of a wife to her husband not prove that she is inferior to him? How would you explain such submission to newlyweds who are also new to Christian faith?**

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### 1 PETER 3:2

<sup>2</sup> when they observe your pure, reverent lives.

#### VERSE 2

Christian character is observable by words, deeds, and attitudes. In any marriage, each partner can **observe** the other's way of living. Peter noted two wifely qualities involved in winning over husbands. **Pure** means free from moral defilement, a reminder that submission never includes obeying demands that are morally wrong. **Reverent** can also be translated "with fear," referring to commitment to God above all (see 1:17; 2:17).

### 1 PETER 3:3-4

<sup>3</sup> Your beauty should not consist of outward things like elaborate hairstyles and the wearing of gold ornaments or fine clothes. <sup>4</sup> Instead, it should consist of what is inside the heart with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very valuable in God's eyes.

#### VERSES 3-4

Several ancient writers lamented that many first-century women went to extremes to underscore their physical attractiveness. Peter cited culturally specific examples of ways in which he had seen women go overboard: **elaborate hairstyles** as well as **gold ornaments** and **fine clothes**. He was not forbidding women from taking care of their appearance; he was rather urging restraint rather than ostentation.

The apostle understood that true beauty is indeed desirable. Yet true beauty becomes evident from the inside out; that is, it originates **inside the heart**. The woman (or man) who focuses on external attractiveness is playing a losing game. Time ultimately reveals that external beauty is fleeting. Thus the godly woman is better advised to be intentional about what is **imperishable**, that which is **very valuable in God's eyes**. The apostle noted **a gentle and quiet spirit**. *Gentle* has been traditionally translated "meek," meaning "not pushy" or "not demanding of one's own way." *Quiet* implies peaceful. Christians develop such character because we have learned to trust God completely to meet our needs.

**In what ways should Peter's instruction for Christian women to avoid ostentation in appearance be carried out today? Why is the inner beauty of a godly character imperishable?**

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## VERSES 5-6

Peter had previously cited the Old Testament as evidence that his teachings were not novel but rather consistent with God's dealings with His people over the ages (for example, 1:24-25; 2:6-8). Following this same pattern, here he indicated that **the holy women** written about in Scripture illustrated the principle of submission to their husbands. Two points should be noted. First, their primary loyalty (and submission) was to God. These women **put their hope in God**. Second, this pattern of living made them beautiful to God and to their husband. There is something quite compelling about a woman whose godly character is on display.

To drive home the point more specifically, Peter reminded his readers about **Sarah**. He made it explicit that her submission to her husband **Abraham** expressed itself in a pattern of obedience. Further, she recognized him as her master or **lord**, a culturally appropriate expression (see Gen. 18:12). When we read the story of Sarah's life, we realize that obeying her husband involved following him into the unknown, including difficult circumstances (see Gen. 12-22).

Christians are familiar with Abraham's role as our spiritual ancestor: "Those who have faith are Abraham's sons" (Gal. 3:7). We are not as well acquainted with Sarah's role as the spiritual mother for Christian wives: **You have become her children**. She is the premiere model of wifely submission. She is commended because of all the times she did what was good by obeying Abraham, despite occasional acts of disobedience (Gen. 16:2,6; 18:15). Further, she refused to be frightened by anything alarming. (When we read her story, there were any number of alarming episodes as she traveled with Abraham.) Sarah succeeded as the model wife because she trusted in God, just as her husband did.

## FOR THE HUSBAND (1 PET. 3:7)

### VERSE 7

With the words **in the same way**, Peter transitioned to focus on Christian husbands. First, each man was to live in relationship with his wife with **an understanding of their weaker nature**. Husbands are to be considerate of the fact that women are physically *weaker* than men. The apostle was not referring to a fragile character or to moral weakness. Because men are typically stronger, they may be tempted to abuse their wives physically. To indulge in this is to take unfair advantage of their greater size and strength.

Showing the wife **honor** emphasizes the Christian husband's relationship to his wife spiritually. He is to respect her. The woman was equally created in God's image in the beginning. Here, the emphasis is on women as equally redeemed. In a culture in which women were looked down on as inferior, the apostle was right to note that women who trust in Christ are coheirs of the grace of life along with men. Gender is irrelevant in matters of salvation (Gal. 3:28).

Peter provided an additional incentive to Christian men. Honoring your wife meant that **your prayers will not be hindered**. Simply put, men who disregard this instruction are blatantly disobeying God. There is no

## 1 PETER 3:5-6

<sup>5</sup> For in the past, the holy women who put their hope in God also beautified themselves in this way, submitting to their own husbands, <sup>6</sup> just as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. You have become her children when you do what is good and are not frightened by anything alarming.

## 1 PETER 3:7

<sup>7</sup> Husbands, in the same way, live with your wives with an understanding of their weaker nature yet showing them honor as coheirs of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered.

reason to expect that the Lord will answer the prayers of those who are not obeying Him.

**What is the relationship between a husband's understanding his wife well and honoring her? Why do you think Peter emphasized these aspects of the husband's responsibility to his wife?**

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## FOR ALL BELIEVERS (1 PET. 3:8-12)

### VERSES 8-9

With the words *now finally, all of you*, Peter made a transition from instructions for specific relationships to general exhortations applicable to all believers all the time. He began with responsibilities to fellow believers.

- We are to be *like-minded*, that is, to seek to live harmoniously with those in our spiritual family. Our desire is to live in unity (though not necessarily uniformity) with our brothers and sisters.
- *Sympathetic* suggests sharing the feelings of others. We hurt when they hurt; we rejoice when they rejoice (Rom. 12:15).
- We *should love believers* because we are in the same family, whether we find our Christian brothers and sisters lovable or not (1 Pet. 1:22).
- *Compassionate* could be rendered "tender hearted." The Gospels use a related verb for Jesus' compassion, of which the underlying idea was that His insides churned (Matt. 9:36).
- Those who are *humble* consider others more highly than themselves.

Next, Peter turned to focus on the duties we have to unbelievers, especially those who are mean or hostile. The Lord Jesus had ordered His followers not to retaliate (Matt. 5:43-48). Paul wrote similarly (Rom. 12:17; 1 Thess. 5:15). Instead of cursing or retaliating, believers can bless others—speaking well of them and praying for them. When we bless those who curse us, we put ourselves in a position to *inherit a blessing* from God. It's not that we earn God's blessing; rather, as we bless our opponents, we will see God's grace at work in our lives. Peter went so far as to argue that Christians have been called to behave in ways that include seeking to bless those who we think don't deserve it.

**Which is more challenging for you: living harmoniously with fellow believers or blessing an unbeliever who wishes harm you? Why? Which item from verse 8 might God be calling you to be more intentional about in your relationship with those in your church fellowship? Why?**

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### 1 PETER 3:8-9

<sup>8</sup> Now finally, all of you should be like-minded and sympathetic, should love believers, and be compassionate and humble, <sup>9</sup> not paying back evil for evil or insult for insult but, on the contrary, giving a blessing, since you were called for this, so that you can inherit a blessing.

## VERSES 10-11

Peter again followed his pattern of supporting his teaching with Scripture. This time he turned to the Psalms. Verses 10-12 are taken from Psalm 34:12-16, which may well be called “An Ancient Recipe for a Happy Life.” The essence of Peter’s application of the psalm is that we believers experience the blessings of God as we practice righteousness and peace in our daily lives.

The original language of the psalm focused on living a long lifespan (Ps. 34:12). Peter broadened the application to consider a good quality of life, with his emphasis on loving life and seeing good days.

- The first key to a good life is integrity of speech. God’s people of every age are expected to keep their **tongue from evil** and their **lips from speaking deceit**. The most extensive New Testament passage on the dangers of the uncontrolled tongue is James 3:1-12.
- The second key to a great quality of life is upright deeds. This includes the negative (**turn away from evil**) as well as the positive (**do what is good**). Throughout the New Testament, good works are the fruit of salvation, never the root. Peter knew that believers would be tempted to retaliate, so this served as his added push.
- The third key to the good life is peacemaking in relationships. To **seek peace and pursue it** implies diligent, sustained effort.

## VERSE 12

Peter followed the psalmist in noting that God favors those committed to following His ways. Believers who strive for practical righteousness have **the eyes of the Lord** on them. This means more than that He sees; rather, He observes and cares for them and looks after them. Similarly, **His ears are open** means more than that He hears the prayers of His people. He responds to their pleas. Peter did not mean that godly believers will never suffer or that they will have a trouble-free life. He had already acknowledged the various trials of his readers (1:6; 2:19-20). Rather, Peter meant that the Lord will provide spiritual strength to sustain believers in times of suffering.

In Psalm 34:16, David had declared that those **who do what is evil** will be blotted out of all memory. In the present context, the words also stand as a warning to those who give the appearance of professing Christ but then live evil, dishonorable lives. They do so at the grave peril of experiencing that the face of the Lord is against them, to their own sorrow.

Verses 8-12 do not teach salvation by good works, because Peter’s first readers had already been born again and were waiting for their heavenly inheritance (1:3-5). Yet there is a correlation between righteous living and the experience of God’s blessing. Any believers who have slipped into careless living are hereby warned. We are called to holy living (3:9), and Peter has provided powerful reasons to live in good relationships with others, believers and non-believers alike.

## 1 PETER 3:10-11

<sup>10</sup> For the one who wants to love life and to see good days must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit, <sup>11</sup> and he must turn away from evil and do what is good. He must seek peace and pursue it,

## 1 PETER 3:12

<sup>12</sup> because the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and His ears are open to their request. But the face of the Lord is against those who do what is evil.

# LEAD GROUP BIBLE STUDY

## FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

**GUIDE:** As the group arrives, hand each person a blank index card. Be sure everyone has a pen or pencil. Lead the group to write a piece of advice for a relationship on the card—either for a husband, a wife, or a believer in general. Collect the cards and read the responses.

**SAY:** *Sometimes wedding showers feature activities such as the one we just completed, where attendees provide guidance for the soon-to-be married couple. Relationship guidance abounds, and it can be helpful to sort valid from invalid counsel.*

**GUIDE:** Direct attention to **Pack Item 7** (Poster: *Relationship Builders*). Refer to the last session. Briefly recall the groups Peter mentioned. Point out that these groups represent relationships of increasing intimacy, moving from society in last week's session to family in today's study.

**TRANSITION:** *Today's session provides the scriptural basis for how believers can honor God through healthy relationships, including those closest to us.*

## EXPLORE THE TEXT

**INTRODUCE:** *Verse 1 references Peter's previous discussion about slaves and masters in 1 Peter 2:18-25. Peter had encouraged slaves to submit themselves to their masters in the hopes that they would see the attitude of Jesus in them. He encouraged wives, likewise, to submit to their unbelieving husbands in the hopes that the wives would lead them to Christ.*

**GUIDE:** Form two listening teams. As you read aloud 1 Peter 3:1-4, instruct one team to listen for Peter's counsel to wives in regard to internal beauty. Direct the second group to listen for Peter's counsel regarding external appearance. Invite volunteers to share responses.

**SAY:** *Peter called on wives to submit to their own husbands, to focus on inner beauty, and to live godly lives. If her husband is an unbeliever, the goal of the wife is to win him to Christ through these actions.*

**ASK:** *How could a Christian wife's submission to her unbelieving husband help win him to Christ? (PSG, p. 55)*

**EMPHASIZE:** *Submission was voluntary, not forced by the husband. It did not indicate inferiority of the woman; rather, it was a voluntary act for the purpose of evangelizing her husband. Submission does not mean wives are to participate in sinful activities dictated by husbands or to remain in life-threatening situations.*

**READ:** Read aloud 1 Peter 3:5-6. Explain that Peter used holy women of the past, specifically Sarah, to illustrate how a wife should focus on inner beauty rather than outward beauty.

**DISCUSS:** *How does Sarah serve as the example of the attitude a wife should have toward her husband? (PSG, p. 56)*

**READ:** Call for a person to read 1 Peter 3:7. Invite volunteers with different translations to read the passage as well. Lead the group to identify the differences in each translation and how a combination of the differences gives a clearer view of the passage.

**EXPLAIN:** Use the information under Understand the Context (PSG, pp. 53-54) and Verse 1 (pp. 55-56) to explain why Peter addressed slaves but not masters in 1 Peter 2, and why he may have used six verses to address wives and only one to address husbands in 1 Peter 3.

**EMPHASIZE:** *It's likely Peter directed most of his comments in both sections toward those who had less power. He was elevating the status of women in society, a radical move in light of the culture he was addressing.*

**DISCUSS:** *What does a man's treatment of his wife and other women reveal about his view of himself and of God? (PSG, p. 57)*

**TRANSITION:** *Peter turned from husband/wife relationships to the relationships of all believers.*

**READ:** Invite a volunteer to read aloud 1 Peter 3:8-12, directing the group to listen for specific ways believers are to relate to others.

**DISCUSS:** *How could following Peter's directives impact society? How could it impact people in the church? (PSG, p. 59)*

**EXPLAIN:** *Peter alluded to Psalm 34:12-16 in 1 Peter 3:10-12. Rather than fight back and return insults, Peter encouraged believers to adopt the attitude of Psalm 34. Invite the group to locate three responses the psalmist suggested to persecution that Peter encouraged his own readers to follow.*

**DISCUSS:** *What are some of the biggest challenges Christians face in understanding how to honor God through marriage and healthy relationships? Which verse from today's study speaks most clearly to these? Why?*

**MEMORIZE:** Encourage the group to memorize 1 Peter 3:8 this week as a summary of how believers should relate to each other. Distribute a copy of **Pack Item 5** (*Bookmark: Memory Verses*) to those who need one.

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## SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

**READ:** Read the statements under In My Context (p. 60) to present a summary of the study: *Wives demonstrate Christ by submitting to their husbands and possessing a pure lifestyle. Husbands demonstrate Christ by protecting, understanding, and respecting their wives. Believers can be a blessing to others by offering godly compassion and love.*

**CHALLENGE:** Direct the group to consider their responses to the questions under In My Context (PSG, p. 60). Then focus on the last question set: *Begin each day this week by reading 1 Peter 3:8-12 and asking God to help you recognize opportunities to be a blessing to others, especially those who insult or mistreat you in some way.* Encourage the group to record information about the opportunities God grants them in a journal or prayer guide.

**PRAY:** Thank God for the opportunity to live in relationship with each other. Ask Him to help each person apply Peter's guidance to his or her specific situation so that God will be honored.



## PRACTICE

- Spend time praying for your group members who are in unhealthy relationships.
- Text or email the group, thanking them for the opportunity to be in relationship together through the Bible study group.
- Encourage the group to begin memorizing 1 Peter 3:15 for the upcoming session.

## MORE IDEAS

### FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

To replace or supplement the focus idea, play songs about relationships as everyone arrives. Lead them to identify themes among the songs, and list themes on the board. Evaluate the themes at the end of the session, comparing them with principles from Scripture discussed during the session.

### EXPLORE THE TEXT

- To replace the listening team activity, lead the group to discuss how fashion styles evolve over time. Point out that the worldly definition of beauty changes, yet God's interpretation is timeless. Discuss: *How can women focus on inner beauty in a society that is externally focused?*
- To replace or supplement the discussion of slavery in Peter's time, lead the group to name other people in today's culture who are marginalized. Discuss ways believers can help elevate these groups.
- To replace or supplement the activity about Psalm 34, form teams of two or three people. Instruct each team to study 1 Peter 3:8-12 and (1) identify a truth it teaches and (2) name an action it suggests. Encourage individuals to identify an action they will take in response.

### SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

To supplement the challenge: Point out that Jesus' apostles in several places provided explicit instructions about the relationship between husbands and wives. The two most significant passages in Paul's writings are Ephesians 5:22-33 and Colossians 3:18-19. Lead the group to read these passages and compare them with what Peter wrote. Ask: *How are their emphases similar? How are they different? What insights do you gain by reading all three passages together?*

### SUGGESTED MUSIC IDEA

Lead the group to read responsively the words of "God Give Us Christian Homes," by B. B. McKinney, alternating every other line (separated by commas or periods).

# ALWAYS READY

Believers honor God by sharing His hope with others.

## 1 PETER 3:13-22

**MEMORY VERSE: 1 PETER 3:15**

### PREPARE TO LEAD THE GROUP TIME

- **READ** 1 Peter 3:13-22, First Thoughts (p. 64), and Understand the Context (pp. 64-65). Make notes about words and concepts that may require additional explanation during the Bible study session.
- **STUDY** 1 Peter 3:13-22, using the commentary found on pages 65-69. Read the verses the first time, picturing yourself as one of Peter's original readers—a suffering believer. Read the passage a second time, looking specifically for Peter's instruction and encouragement. Read it a third time, noting ways you can guide your group to apply Peter's words to their specific situations.
- **PLAN** the group time using ideas under Lead Group Bible Study (pp. 70-71). Modify your group plans using More Ideas (p. 72) and those online at [Blog.LifeWay.com/ExploretheBible](http://Blog.LifeWay.com/ExploretheBible). Look for ways to incorporate the Key Doctrine (Evangelism) in the PSG (p. 63) into the session.
- **GROW** with other group leaders at the Groups Ministry blog ([LifeWay.com/GroupMinistry](http://LifeWay.com/GroupMinistry)).
- **GATHER** the following items:  Personal Study Guides;  A ball or wadded-up paper to toss;  **PACK ITEM 5** (*Bookmark: Memory Verses*) as needed. For More Ideas, gather:  Things that represent preparedness (first-aid kit, road-side emergency kit, candles, etc.). Prepare to display the following Pack Item:  **PACK ITEM 13** (*Poster: 1 Peter 3:15*).



## FIRST THOUGHTS

### KEY DOCTRINE

#### *Evangelism*

It is the duty of every child of God to seek constantly to win the lost to Christ by verbal witness undergirded by a Christian lifestyle, and by other methods in harmony with the gospel of Christ.

Be prepared! This advice applies to many areas of our lives. Sometimes we follow the advice; oftentimes (to our regret) we ignore it. For example, we know we should keep first-aid supplies at home: bandages, antiseptic, thermometer, etc. How about an emergency kit for your house? Items such as a flashlight, drinking water, battery-operated radio, and ready-to-eat food are recommended. How about your vehicle? Jumper cables and flares are some of the basics people carry. Then there's a matter of being ready for the unexpected on the job: the boss makes a sudden request; you're asked to make a presentation on a moment's notice. Other areas of life surely come to mind as well. We need to be ready for whatever life throws at us in our families and other relationships.

(In PSG, p. 62) **What actions have you or your family taken to be prepared for the unplanned or unexpected?**

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### BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR

For additional context, read "Noah as New Testament Imagery," available digitally in *Biblical Illustrator for Explore the Bible* at [LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator](http://LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator).

Often we as Christians get nervous when we think about sharing our faith with others. We feel unprepared, afraid we'll say the wrong thing. Or we've heard that other people automatically "turn off" when they think someone is trying to evangelize them. Peter was no stranger to thinking about how to point others to Christ. On one hand, he once had the miserable experience of denying that he even knew Jesus. On the other hand, by the time he wrote this letter, he had been a leader and spokesman for the first Christians for decades. His first readers were persecuted believers who surely had questions about the right approach to defending their faith. In this week's lesson, we'll investigate what Peter said about the way believers honor God by sharing His hope with others.

## UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

### 1 PETER 3:13-22

We've seen a number of recurring themes in 1 Peter. For example, you will recall Peter's emphasis on hope (confidence in God's future plan), suffering (a privilege), and holiness (becoming Christlike in character). You'll find all three of these included in the verses we are studying this week.

Another principle we've seen is that Peter liked to turn to the Scriptures of his day—the Old Testament—to provide a biblical foundation for his teaching. Again, we'll see this emphasis, although in an unexpected way. He turned to the life and times of Noah from the Book of Genesis (Gen. 6–9). Noah is best known as the one who built the ark and escaped the flood of God's judgment. There are two significant points about Noah worth noting.

First, Noah boldly proclaimed God’s truth (2 Pet. 2:5). We actually know very little about Noah’s preaching, but we know that during his very long task of building the ark he was a witness to God’s revelation (Heb. 11:7). Further, he did not have any converts. Nobody outside his family was persuaded by his message. What a striking illustration of faithful proclamation of God’s truth.

Second, the ark and the waters of the flood were critical for Noah and his family. In the ark was salvation from drowning, and the waters of the flood were a sign and an important part of that salvation because they buoyed Noah above the destruction. Peter came to think of Christ as the “ark of salvation,” with water baptism as a significant sign of that salvation, symbolizing the cleansing from sin.

In this week’s session we look at one of the most fascinating—and baffling—passages in the New Testament. And if the Noah connection stretches your thinking, just wait until we focus on what Peter said about Christ’s proclamation to the spirits in prison.

## EXPLORE THE TEXT

### READY TO DEFEND (1 PET. 3:13-17)

Peter exhorted his readers to honor Christ and to keep a clear conscience no matter what. That way, if they suffered, it would be because they had done something good as opposed to doing something evil.

#### VERSES 13-14

Peter launched into his subject matter by asking a rhetorical question, a question for which—once asked—the answer appears obvious. The expected answer is, “Nobody.” Yet as we will see in the next verse, the apostle acknowledged that there are some exceptions to the predictable answer.

We can all agree that **harm** is not the normal reward for good behavior. Generally, good behavior does not result in insult or injury. The verb translated **deeply committed** can also be rendered “zealous” or “passionate.” The point is that we Christians are to be consumed with doing the right thing, and we expect that this will not get us into trouble.

The words **even if** in verse 14 reflect an original-language construction implying that the unlikely may happen. Some of Peter’s first readers were in this category, as his earlier advice to household slaves made clear (2:20). If believers get in trouble for doing good, however, there is a special blessing from God for those believers. The term **blessed** is the same one that Jesus had used in the Beatitudes: “Those who are persecuted for righteousness are blessed, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs” (Matt. 5:10). *Blessed* conveys the notion of divine favor or spiritual well-being.

In the second part of verse 14, Peter alluded to Isaiah 8:12 to encourage believers who might face persecution because of their faith. In Isaiah 7–8, Judah was threatened by Israel and Aram. Those nations sought to remove Judah’s king and place their own puppet king on the throne. The nation of

## BIBLE SKILL

*Dig deeper into the background and usage of key words or phrases.*

The Greek word *apologia* is the basis of the word “apologetics,” the term referring to reasoned arguments in support of or defending a position. It is found eight times in the New Testament (Acts 22:1; 25:16; 1 Cor. 9:3; 2 Cor. 7:11; Phil. 1:7,16; 2 Tim. 4:16; 1 Pet. 3:15). Read these passages and look at the various uses of the term. Make notes of any findings that help you better understand the term.

### 1 PETER 3:13-14

<sup>13</sup> And who will harm you if you are deeply committed to what is good? <sup>14</sup> But even if you should suffer for righteousness, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear or be disturbed,

Judah trembled in terror. Isaiah spoke the Lord's promise that He would protect them against those who threatened them. The apostle Peter used this reference as a reminder to his readers to put their trust in God alone; God would take care of them.

## 1 PETER 3:15-16

<sup>15</sup> but honor the Messiah as Lord in your hearts. Always be ready to give a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you. <sup>16</sup> However, do this with gentleness and respect, keeping your conscience clear, so that when you are accused, those who denounce your Christian life will be put to shame.

### VERSES 15-16

The first part of this verse is a paraphrase of Isaiah 8:13. From the perspective of Christian theology, Peter was indirectly acknowledging that our **Messiah** is God ("the LORD of Hosts" in Isaiah's original). The main point, however, is that if we Christians receive opposition for doing the right thing, we are to recommit ourselves to Jesus Christ as **Lord** over all things. He is in control, not those who harm us; therefore we **honor** Him, giving Him the reverence due Him.

One important way to honor Christ is to be a good witness for Him. The terms **always** and **anyone** suggest that such witnessing is the responsibility of every believer. **Defense** means a reply to an accusation, whether formal or informal. It does not mean holding a defensive attitude. **Ready** implies forethought and preparation. Thus, an especially good time to witness is when someone asks us about our faith.

Attitudes in witnessing matter greatly, as much as the words we use. Peter noted three important attitudes to keep in mind:

- **Gentleness** suggests courtesy as opposed to arrogance or pushiness. This is the attitude we take toward the ones we are approaching with the gospel.
- **Respect** is traditionally translated "fear." This is the attitude we take toward God. We are His ambassadors as we speak, and He has entrusted us with a serious responsibility.
- **Keeping your conscience clear** is the attitude we must have regarding ourselves. If we drift into morally shoddy lives, how can we expect to be good witnesses? In such a case, we are shams.

The last part of the verse is parallel to what Peter wrote in 2:12. There are malicious people who will want to denounce or slander believers and what we stand for. If we have kept a good conscience and have been passionate for doing good works, then we should expect that any charges will be proven unfounded. The phrase **Christian life** reflects a term Peter had used earlier, meaning "lifestyle" or "pattern of conduct" (1:15). Accusers will be put to shame and their accusations will cease.

### VERSE 17

In 2:20, Peter had asked slaves to endure unjust suffering willingly. Here in verse 17, he expanded the thought and applied it to all believers. The grammatical construction implies that this scenario is not normal, but it may occur. All such cases, moreover, fall under the category of **God's will**. God is not surprised, and He will see to it that good and not evil will be the result of suffering for the right reasons (see Rom. 8:28). In context, one result may be that this form of witnessing will lead to the conversion of persecutors. We may not be able to understand God's purposes at the time,

## 1 PETER 3:17

<sup>17</sup> For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.

but we can be confident as Christians that He is our loving Lord. In any case, we should not expect God's blessing if we are **doing evil** and suffer consequences. Verse 17 summarizes everything Peter had been saying in the paragraph.

(In PSG, p. 66) **Why is suffering for one's faith a powerful witness to those who do not believe in Jesus?**

## POINT TO CHRIST'S WORK (1 PET. 3:18-20a)

By a natural transition of thought, Peter moved from unjust Christian suffering to our Lord's suffering. He suffered to secure our salvation and to bring others to the Father.

### VERSE 18

There are two evident points of connection between verses 18-20a and the preceding verses. First is the concept of unjust suffering. Jesus is the ultimate illustration (see also 2:21-24). Second, Jesus is the One to whom we bear witness. This verse summarizes what we can say as we give a reasonable answer to those who question us about our Lord.

Our Lord **suffered** and died, never to be repeated (in contrast to the repeated sacrifices offered at the Jewish temple; see Heb. 10:11-14). He suffered **for sins**, that is, the sins of others, not His own sins. The phrase **the righteous for the unrighteous** introduces an important truth in Christian thought: Jesus died as a substitute for sinners. A good Man died instead of bad men and women. A good Man died to pay the price for the sins of bad people. The goal of His death was to **bring you to God**. Sinners now have access to God Himself through faith in Christ. The verb *bring* was used in contexts in which a person was ushered into the presence of a dignitary.

### VERSES 19-20a

Almost as a side thought, Peter mentioned our Lord's own witnessing in a special situation. Bible students have struggled to understand what the apostle meant. Thus, when and where and to whom Jesus **made a proclamation** have been scrutinized. Consider three interpretations:

1. The **spirits** are humans to whom the preincarnate Christ witnessed through the preaching of Noah during the days when the ark was being prepared. These persons refused to repent and believe, so they perished and are now eternally condemned (**in prison**).

2. The spirits are fallen angels who sinned before the flood and are now under condemnation awaiting their final judgment. Peter actually referred to this situation in 2 Peter 2:4 (see also Jude 6). In this view, Christ's preaching to them was not evangelistic, but rather a proclamation to them of His resurrection victory over Satan and all demons (see Col. 2:15).

3. According to the third view, the reference is to evil human beings who have died and have been offered a second opportunity for salvation.

## 1 PETER 3:18

<sup>18</sup> For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, that He might bring you to God, after being put to death in the fleshly realm but made alive in the spiritual realm.

## 1 PETER 3:19-20a

<sup>19</sup> In that state He also went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison <sup>20a</sup> who in the past were disobedient, when God patiently waited in the days of Noah while an ark was being prepared.

However, this view directly contradicts other explicit biblical teachings (see Heb. 9:27). Further, it does not explain why Peter referred to **the days of Noah**. The dead will not get another opportunity to receive Christ.

Both of the first two views are viable, but the third view must be rejected. The principle truth of this passage is in verse 18, with its wonderful emphasis on the saving work of Christ, who is now alive.

**Based on this passage, what is important to emphasize about the nature of Christ's suffering as you seek to share your faith? What was the goal of His suffering and death?**

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### DISPLAY YOUR FAITH (1 PET. 3:20b-22)

Peter compared water baptism to the ark that Noah and his family boarded. He explained that salvation is secured through the resurrection of Jesus, with baptism as the public display of that salvation. He understood baptism to be a symbol of the cleansing and the new life that persons receive when they trust in Christ.

#### VERSE 20b

Peter's thought had moved naturally from unjust Christian suffering to Christ's suffering. Now, in another transition, he moved naturally from Noah to the role of various waters. These comments were intended to help his readers deal with suffering: the flood and Christian baptism are parallel. Peter zeroed in on the **few** persons that were **saved through water**—Noah and his wife, his three sons, and their wives. The main point is that they were indeed saved from disaster. Recall that the flood waters that brought death to the wicked were the same waters that held up the ark so that Noah and his family safely floated into a new world.

#### VERSE 21

Peter's purpose was to remind his readers what their baptism meant. The verb **corresponds to** could be translated "symbolizes" or "is compared to." The flood represented **baptism**, which in turn represents salvation. What was the analogy? Consider the following:

- The flood was the water of judgment, because most humans perished in the water. Baptism by immersion provides a picture of judgment, showing what we deserve: death and burial.
- The flood marked the transition from Noah's old life to his new life. Baptism is the sign of our transition from an old life of sin to our new life in Christ.
- Noah and his family came out of the waters of the flood, saved from disaster. Believers come up out of the waters of baptism, portraying our salvation.

### 1 PETER 3:20b

**20b** In it a few—that is, eight people—were saved through water.

### 1 PETER 3:21

**21** Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the pledge of a good conscience toward God) through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The act of baptism itself does not save. It cannot remove **the filth of the flesh**, that is, our sinfulness. Instead, what baptism does is to provide **the pledge of a good conscience toward God**. The apostle was referring to the sign value of baptism, both to the candidate and to others. What has happened inside a person (cleansing from sin) is represented outwardly by the washing of baptism.

Consider another analogy: the wedding ring. Wearing a ring doesn't make someone married or even prove they are married. Yet, for a married person, the ring functions as a sign or symbol of the pledge made in the marriage ceremony. Baptism, likewise, doesn't make someone a Christian or prove one is a Christian. Baptism functions as a sign or symbol of the faith in Christ that one confesses at the time of baptism.

To drive home the point again, Peter noted that we are saved by **the resurrection of Jesus Christ**, not by any ritual. (The apostle had already noted the importance of the suffering and death of Jesus. Here he went on to the importance of the resurrection.) Further, when we think about baptism, it is plainly a picture of Jesus' own death, burial, and resurrection, as well as a picture of our own union with Him. (See Rom. 6:1-10 for Paul's reflection on this topic.)

#### VERSE 22

Peter made one more significant transition in thought. He moved from the resurrection to the ascension. Here is one of the few New Testament passages that explicitly mention that the Lord Jesus **has gone into heaven**. Luke 24:50-52 and Acts 1:9-11 are the two narratives of the ascension, which Peter had seen with his own eyes. After His ascension, the Lord Jesus was seated **at God's right hand**, the highest honor imaginable.

The apostle concluded his thoughts about Christ by reminding his readers of Christ's authority over all the beings in the invisible supernatural realm, whether they are righteous or wicked: **angels, authorities, and powers**. If all these beings are subject to Him, then He has the power to make things right, in the end, for suffering Christians. We have been united to Christ—symbolized by baptism—and so we share already in His victory. Note that the passage that had begun with the somber reminder of Christ's suffering (3:18) now ended with a glorious note on Christ's victory.

**Based on this passage, what is the meaning of baptism for Christians?  
How does baptism display that a person is a follower of Jesus?**

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#### 1 PETER 3:22

<sup>22</sup> Now that He has gone into heaven, He is at God's right hand with angels, authorities, and powers subject to Him.

# LEAD GROUP BIBLE STUDY

## FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

**ENGAGE:** As the group arrives, enlist a person to toss a ball several times to you. Act out these responses as it is tossed: distraction, inattention, and readiness to catch. Comment that Christians sometimes approach sharing their faith with others the way you responded to the ball. Sometimes we're distracted, and other times we're not paying attention. Direct attention to the session title and stress that we need to be "always ready" to share our faith.

**INTRODUCE:** Use information under Understand the Context (PSG, p. 63) to explain that Peter returned to his overall purpose for the letter in 1 Peter 3:13-22. He wrote the letter to encourage believers to stand firm while enduring suffering.

## EXPLORE THE TEXT

**READ:** Invite a volunteer to read aloud 1 Peter 3:13-17, directing the group to listen for phrases that Peter used to describe a believer's response to suffering.

**DISCUSS:** *Do you think that people are shocked in today's world when they hear about persecuted Christians? Do you think believers are shocked or surprised when they experience persecution or oppression? Explain.* (PSG, p. 64)

**GUIDE:** Direct attention to **Pack Item 13** (Poster: 1 Peter 3:15). Comment that 1 Peter 3:15 also is this week's memory verse. Distribute copies of **Pack Item 5** (Bookmark: Memory Verses) if needed. Guide everyone to work in pairs to restate the verse in their own words.

**DISCUSS:** After reading 1 Peter 3:15, lead them to reflect on Peter's denial of Christ (Luke 22:54-62). Ask: *How do you suppose Peter's past influenced his counsel for sharing God's hope with others? How does Peter's example encourage you about sharing God's hope?*

**GUIDE:** Use the information under Verses 15-16 (p. 66; PSG, pp. 65-66) to provide insight into the word "defense." Ask the group to locate how Peter encouraged Christians to defend their faith to their accusers ("with gentleness and respect"). Lead the group to discuss the importance of defense while also maintaining these attitudes.

**REFLECT:** *What keeps believers from being prepared to share Jesus with others? On a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being the greatest, how prepared do you think believers are to defend their faith in Christ?* (PSG, p. 65) Encourage the group to write a number between 1 and 10 (with 10 being the greatest) in their PSG, representing how well they feel prepared to defend their faith in Christ.

**READ:** Re-read verse 17 before reading verses 18-20a, telling the group to listen for the connection between verse 17 and Christ's work as described in verses 18-20a.

**EXPLAIN:** *When suffering because of cultural conflicts, it is easy to get distracted by important issues and forget what is most important. Peter pointed to the example of Christ, who suffered and yet was used by God.*

**ASK:** *Why is suffering for one's faith a powerful witness to those who do not believe in Jesus?* (PSG, p. 66) *How can a good or noble cause become a substitute for pointing others to Christ? How can it become a vehicle for pointing others to Christ? What is the difference?* (PSG, p. 68)

**CLARIFY:** Refer to information under Verse 19 (PSG, p. 67) to acknowledge that opinions vary about the verse. Make it clear that the dead will not get another opportunity to receive Christ. Refer to Hebrews 9:27 to support this statement.

**ASK:** Note that Peter used the story of Noah to illustrate a point. *How does the story of Noah give greater understanding to what Peter is saying?*

**READ:** Direct someone to read 1 Peter 3:20b-22, inviting the others to listen for the transition from Noah's family on the ark to Christ's ascension to heaven.

**EXPLAIN:** *Like Noah, the Christians Peter addressed were a small, persecuted minority. Peter reminded them that God had spared Noah's family, and He had not forgotten them either.*

**ASK:** *How can those who are suffering today be sure that God has not forgotten them?*

**STATE:** *Just as the ark was a reminder of God's salvation, baptism also reminds us of the salvation we gain through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.*

**CLARIFY:** *Peter surely did not intend to mean that the physical act of baptism saves a person. Baptism does not remove the filth of the flesh, but it represents the pledge that a person has made by putting faith in Jesus Christ.*

**STATE:** *While believers are enduring suffering on earth, Jesus has gone to heaven, where He sits at the right hand of God.*

**ASK:** *How does the authority of Jesus bring you comfort and courage to faithfully stand for Christ?* (PSG, p. 69)

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## SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

**EXPLAIN:** Read the first paragraph under In My Context (PSG, p. 70) to summarize the session: *We can face suffering with confidence, knowing that we do so to bring honor to God. All life situations include opportunities to point others to Christ. Christ died on the cross to secure salvation for all who are willing to accept Him.*

**GUIDE:** Highlight the first question set under In My Context (PSG, p. 70). Lead the group to list potential actions they can take to support other Christians who are suffering around the world. Identify one or two immediate actions (such as praying) and one or two longer-range actions. Identify steps and dates for implementation.

**INVITE:** *Christ died on the cross to secure salvation for all who are willing to accept Him.* Highlight the third question set under In My Context (PSG, p. 70): *Examine your spiritual life. If you have not accepted Jesus, look at the information on the inside front cover and discuss this decision with another group member. If you have accepted Christ, identify one person with whom you can share Jesus this week.* Instruct the group to turn to the inside front cover of the PSG for information about how to become a Christian. Offer to meet with anyone in the group wanting to know more about making a commitment to Christ.

**PRAY:** Briefly refer to the opening activity about being ready. Pray that each person will remain in a constant state of readiness to share God's hope with others in all situations.



## PRACTICE

- Contact those who expressed a desire to visit with you about making a commitment to Christ.
- Begin to implement the steps identified by the group in supporting other Christians who are suffering around the world.
- To encourage memorizing Scripture, remind your group about **Pack Item 5** (*Bookmark: Memory Verses*) that includes each session's memory verse. Also, ask them to read the article "Meet David" on page 145 in the PSG.

## MORE IDEAS

### FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

To replace the focus idea, display items that represent being prepared. Use the display to generate discussion about situations in which people need to be prepared. Summarize information under First Thoughts on page 62 of the PSG. Discuss: *What actions have you or your family taken to be prepared for the unplanned or unexpected?* (PSG, p. 62)

### EXPLORE THE TEXT

- To supplement the discussion about the Greek transliteration word *apologia*, meaning a "verbal defense," use information under Bible Skill activity (p. 65) to introduce the study of apologetics. Invite volunteers to read some of these New Testament passages in which the word appears: Acts 22:1; 25:16; 1 Corinthians 9:3; Philippians 1:7,16; 2 Timothy 4:16; 1 Peter 3:15.
- To supplement the discussion of suffering because of cultural conflicts, lead the group to name cultural issues that can distract from pointing people to Christ. Say: *Fighting cultural wars is extremely complex, because the ultimate goal is to point others to Christ, who can change hearts from the inside out. Identify ways your group can focus on Christ's work and avoid being distracted by cultural conflicts.*
- To supplement the discussion on displaying your faith, pre-enlist someone to research mission groups supported by your church. Call on the person to share his or her findings, especially ways the groups help share God's love in a different setting. Then discuss: *What principles from their ministry setting can we apply to our own as we share God's hope?*

### SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

To personalize the challenge: Lead everyone to create a three-minute testimony they could use when sharing Christ's hope with others. Suggest that they focus on a specific life situation in which they recognized Christ's work in their lives. Form pairs within the group and allow individuals to share their testimonies with each other.

### SUGGESTED MUSIC IDEA

To close the session, lead the group in singing or play a recording of "I'll Tell the World That I'm a Christian," by Baynard L. Fox. As an alternate, read or sing "God of This City," by Chris Tomlin.

# EQUIPPED TO LIVE

Believers honor God by loving others in all circumstances.

## 1 PETER 4:1-11

**MEMORY VERSE: 1 PETER 4:9**

### PREPARE TO LEAD THE GROUP TIME

- **READ** 1 Peter 4:1-11, First Thoughts (p. 74), and Understand the Context (pp. 74-75). Take note of the words and phrases used for how believers are to love others.
- **STUDY** 1 Peter 4:1-11, using Explore the Text (pp. 75-79). Look for ways Peter conveys urgency in living for Christ and honoring God by loving others in all circumstances. Consult the *Explore the Bible Adult Commentary* (available in print and digital format from *LifeWay.com*) for additional insight.
- **PLAN** the group time using the ideas under Lead Group Bible Study (pp. 80-81), More Ideas (p. 82), in *QuickSource*, and online at *Blog.LifeWay.com/ExploretheBible*. Recruit a volunteer from the group, possibly a potential apprentice leader, to review the ideas with you and offer suggestions. Email your group to encourage them to read the article “Meet David” (PSG, p. 145).
- **GROW** from expert insights on weekly studies through the Ministry Grid (*MinistryGrid.com/Web/ExploretheBible*).
- **GATHER** the following items:  Personal Study Guides;  Copies of **PACK ITEM 5** (*Bookmark: Memory Verses*) as needed. For More Ideas:  A blank sheet of paper or inexpensive notepad for each person. Prepare to display the following Pack Item:  **PACK ITEM 8** (*Poster: Key Passages on Suffering*).



## KEY DOCTRINE

### *Last Things*

God, in His own time and in His own way, will bring the world to its appropriate end.

## BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR

For additional context, read "Peter's Eschatological Understanding," available digitally in *Biblical Illustrator for Explore the Bible at LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator*.

## BIBLE SKILL

*Read, reflect on, and react emotionally to a Bible verse.*

Focus on 1 Peter 4:7. Read the verse aloud several times. Each time, emphasize different words or phrases as you read. For example, in one reading, emphasize "end of all things"; in another reading, emphasize "therefore." Then read the verse again, emphasizing the action words. Take note of your thoughts. How does the verse move you emotionally? What feelings were evoked by the different words and phrases as you emphasized them?

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# FIRST THOUGHTS

My family has always enjoyed vacations. A wise friend once told me that I should schedule a vacation every year with my family. Whether expensive or cheap, it does not matter. Vacations give our family a date to look forward to in the future. Even though the pressures and demands of work often close in on our family, we have a future date for a vacation where we know all the activity will cease and we can have time together in a peaceful place. In some ways this gives us strength to keep pushing when everything gets harried because we know a better day is coming.

(In PSG, p. 72) **What do you look forward to the most when thinking about a vacation? How does a vacation provide sanity in a crazy world?**

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The return of Christ is a future date on everyone's calendar that carries great promise for those who trust in Him. Believers who look to Christ when facing persecution can have the strength to keep living for Him in the present because they know a better day is coming. God has a purpose for all that they are enduring, so if they live faithfully, He will accomplish His purposes through them. Instead of wasting time by living like those who do not believe, Christians can honor God by loving each other and serving each other out of love for each other.

Unlike a vacation, which has a definite date on the calendar, the return of Christ will happen at an unspecified time in the future. The passing of years since Jesus' death and resurrection should not lull Christians into complacently thinking Jesus will not return. Peter told his readers that the end was near, and he encouraged them to be serious and disciplined. If that was the case in Peter's day, it certainly remains true today.

# UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

## 1 PETER 4:1-11

Nowhere in his letter did Peter refer specifically to "the kingdom" or "kingdom of God." Yet he had heard Jesus teach at length on this topic (one of the Lord's favorite themes). Thus, it is no surprise that in this epistle Peter reflected kingdom thinking. Consider the following.

For Jesus, the kingdom of God—God's rule or reign—began in earnest with His own miracle-working ministry (Matt. 12:28). At the same time, our Lord knew that the kingdom had not yet come in its final, glorious form. The magnificent consummation of the kingdom awaits the King's return when He will be the Judge and the righteous will "inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matt. 25:34).

In other words, Jesus taught that there's an "already" and a "not yet" perspective that His followers are to adopt regarding the kingdom of God. That's really the essence of what Peter was driving at in this week's lesson. Believers have already begun to experience the reality of the kingdom; therefore, we need to live out the rest of our earthly days as kingdom citizens, following Christ in holiness and relating to the world around us wisely. Yet Jesus' followers eagerly await the end of all things when final judgment arrives and every creature in the universe acknowledges that "to Him belong the glory and the power forever and ever" (1 Pet. 4:11). In this study, we see that when we are overwhelmed with the wonderful reality of the "not yet," it makes a difference in the way we live out the "here and now."

## EXPLORE THE TEXT

### LIVING FOR GOD (1 PET. 4:1-4)

#### VERSE 1

Peter introduced this section of his epistle with **therefore**, pointing back to his previous reference to Christ's suffering as a model for Christian suffering (3:18). Our Lord's suffering **in the flesh** refers to the entire period of Jesus' earthly life as a time in which He endured hostility. This pain included not only physical abuse but also verbal attacks and certainly what we would call emotional suffering.

With Jesus' example solidly before believers, Peter exhorted his readers to **equip yourselves also with the same resolve**. We need the right kind of resources to meet challenges, and Jesus' attitude or mind-set is just the thing that believers need. We are to love truth and righteousness just like Jesus did, to the point of suffering for it, if necessary, just like Jesus did.

Bible students have wrestled to interpret Peter's meaning in the last part of this verse. He can't mean that people who suffer physically don't sin anymore at all, or that we should seek to suffer as a way to cease our sinning. Neither Scripture nor common sense support such views. His point seems to be that voluntary suffering for righteousness' sake has a way of straightening out our priorities. Sins that once seemed powerful or attractive become insignificant when we choose righteousness over convenience. When we decide to obey God rather than to avoid difficulty, we are showing that we have definitely made a break with our previous sinful habits and practices. Voluntary suffering shows that sin's power over us has been severed.

#### VERSE 2

The years of anyone's earthly lifespan are brief at best. The apostle summed it up as **the remaining time in the flesh**. In choosing Christ, believers have already declared that their intention is to live **no longer for human desires**, that is, giving priority to the appetites that dominated us before we became followers of Christ. Our intention instead is to live **for God's will**. Nobody can serve two masters: self-interest and God's interests.

#### 1 PETER 4:1

<sup>1</sup> Therefore, since Christ suffered in the flesh, equip yourselves also with the same resolve—because the one who suffered in the flesh has finished with sin—

#### 1 PETER 4:2

<sup>2</sup> in order to live the remaining time in the flesh, no longer for human desires, but for God's will.

Have you ever behaved in a way that shows you are obeying God rather than your own personal (selfish) desires? What was the outcome?

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### 1 PETER 4:3

<sup>3</sup> For there has already been enough time spent in doing what the pagans choose to do: carrying on in unrestrained behavior, evil desires, drunkenness, orgies, carousing, and lawless idolatry.

#### VERSE 3

Not only are we to live differently because we have chosen a new Master, we are to live differently because we were radically changed—from the inside out—when we were converted. We became new creatures in Christ (even though we have not yet become fully mature). The apostle thus reminded his readers—mainly converts from pagan religions—that there had already been *enough time spent* in doing unholy things. They didn't need more experience in what the world, the flesh, and the Devil offer. The vices the apostle condemned are lifestyle issues, as the terms *time spent* and *carrying on* suggest. These sins focus on partying, drinking, and sexual immorality. It's striking that many of today's unbelievers behave essentially the same as those of the first century:

- **Unrestrained behavior** refers to debauchery or indulgence, excesses that shock decency, like the wild living of the prodigal son in Luke 15:13.
- **Evil desires** are immoral sexual lusts.
- **Drunkenness** was also the target of Paul's condemnation in Ephesians 5:18.
- **Orgies** are festivals given over to excess, perhaps in honor of pagan deities or holidays.
- **Carousing** refers to a drinking party, with other sinful behaviors in abundant supply.
- **Lawless idolatry** includes any worship of a false god.

### 1 PETER 4:4

<sup>4</sup> So they are surprised that you don't plunge with them into the same flood of wild living—and they slander you.

#### VERSE 4

What did Peter think the normal response of persons in secular society would be when they see that Jesus' followers don't plunge with them into the same flood of wild living? First, **they are surprised**. Godly behavior—which includes refusal to participate in sinful lifestyle activities—will always be thought of as strange. Unbelievers find such behavior perplexing: “Why don't you join in the fun? You're missing out,” they might say.

Second, in some cases, **they slander you**. In the original language, the verb is a form of the word from which our English term *blasphemy* is derived. The term refers to verbal abuse. The logic is something like this: when Christians refuse to participate in sinful activities, this implies they are condemning such behavior as morally unacceptable. Rather than change their ways, unbelievers malign those who have pricked their conscience. Further, unbelievers sometimes seek to justify their sins by spreading gossip that “those self-righteous Christians” are immoral too.

Have you ever resisted sinful living in a way that resulted in others being surprised or even condemning you, perhaps as a hypocrite? What was the outcome?

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## ANSWERING FOR THE GOSPEL (1 PET. 4:5-6)

### VERSE 5

It is difficult to live on the narrow road that Jesus asked His followers to follow (Matt. 7:13-14). Thus, Peter offered encouragement to his readers: a day of reckoning is ahead for everyone. None will escape accountability to their Creator for the way they have lived; **they will give an account**. In other Bible passages, the verb for *give an account* was used for an employee's responsibility to his employer or for a citizen's duty to the government (Luke 16:2; Acts 19:40).

No human knows the hour of his or her death. God stands ready to judge. At any time He can call us to judgment, and we are to live accordingly. Those who are still alive should not suppose that death is the end and that they will by that means escape judgment. No, both **the living and the dead** will face Him. God is the Judge of every human being who has ever lived (Matt. 12:36-37).

(In PSG, p. 77) **How does God's holding everyone accountable serve as motivation for enduring persecution? Why would it be important for a person facing persecution to be reminded of God's judgment?**

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### VERSE 6

**Those who are now dead** refers to individuals who, while they were alive, were recipients of the gospel message preached to them. Peter was referring to persons who indeed repented and believed the good news. They became Christians, but now they have passed away. (Consult the *Explore the Bible Adult Commentary* for additional insight on this verse.) **In the fleshly realm** (what can be seen with the eyes), people pronounce judgment on Christians. They insult and scorn them for not joining in their ungodly pursuits. These unbelievers think they have the final word. However, Christians **live by God in the spiritual realm**. We have a spiritual identity. It is not clear whether Peter was referring here to the new spiritual life we receive at conversion, or whether he meant the spiritual existence of deceased believers with the Lord. What is certain is the great advantage to those who have received the gospel.

### 1 PETER 4:5

<sup>5</sup> They will give an account to the One who stands ready to judge the living and the dead.

### 1 PETER 4:6

<sup>6</sup> For this reason the gospel was also preached to those who are now dead, so that, although they might be judged by men in the fleshly realm, they might live by God in the spiritual realm.

## REDEEM THE TIME (1 PET. 4:7-11)

### 1 PETER 4:7

<sup>7</sup> Now the end of all things is near; therefore, be serious and disciplined for prayer.

#### VERSE 7

Having mentioned the future judgment of both the wicked and the righteous (4:5-6), the apostle developed the teaching that we are to be aware that ***the end of all things is near***. This age will not go on forever. Nothing hinders Christ's return. God's great redemptive acts in history have been accomplished (such as our Lord's incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection, as well as the Spirit's outpouring). The next major event will be the culmination of history in the return and reign of Christ over all. The term *end* implies "goal." History has a purpose. Thus, we are to live faithfully for God during the remaining season. God, of course, does not reckon time from our limited perspective (2 Pet. 3:8-9).

The first duty of end-time living is ***prayer***. And if our prayers are to be effective, they cannot be haphazard. We are to be ***serious and disciplined for prayer***. Serious prayer requires serious effort.

### 1 PETER 4:8-9

<sup>8</sup> Above all, maintain an intense love for each other, since love covers a multitude of sins. <sup>9</sup> Be hospitable to one another without complaining.

#### VERSES 8-9

The second duty of end-time living is ***love***. This is a verb form of the famous Greek noun *agape*. This love is to be ***intense***. Not only are believers to be diligent about our relationship to God in prayer, we are to be equally serious about our relationship with fellow believers. ***Above all*** suggests that expressing love is to have highest priority (see Jesus' teaching in Matt. 22:37-39; John 13:34). ***Love covers a multitude of sins*** is borrowed from Proverbs 10:12 (see also Jas. 5:20). Genuine love causes us to forgive others again and again (Matt. 18:21-22).

The third duty of end-time living is hospitality. This is a specific way to show love for our fellow brothers and sisters (Rom. 12:13; 1 Tim. 3:2). In the first-century world, safe hotels and convenient restaurants were a rarity and proportionately very expensive compared to today. Believers should be quick to open their homes to one another. Peter realized that this practice can be inconvenient, so he noted that ***complaining*** or grumbling are threats that his readers should recognize and eliminate.

### 1 PETER 4:10

<sup>10</sup> Based on the gift each one has received, use it to serve others, as good managers of the varied grace of God.

#### VERSE 10

The fourth duty of end-time living is use of spiritual gifts. The term ***gift*** is *charisma* in the original language. The term is also used in Paul's longer discussion of spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12. Further, the term is related to *charis* in the original language, meaning "grace." The apostle made the following points:

- Spiritual gifts are not earned; they are ***received*** from God.
- Every believer (***each one***) has a spiritual gift (or perhaps more than one). These are individualized gifts from God to His children.
- The purpose of such gifts is ***to serve others*** in the body of Christ. Just as a birthday present must be opened to be enjoyed, so spiritual gifts must be used to be enjoyed (1 Cor. 12:7).

- Believers are accountable to God for using their gifts well. We are to be **good managers** of what God has entrusted to us. The language of stewardship suggests a trusted servant who cares for his master's estate, faithful to the task entrusted to him.
- Spiritual gifts are **varied**, not uniform, even as natural talents are different from one person to another. God has distributed diverse gifts so that the body of Christ will lack nothing it needs for effective worship and ministry.

#### VERSE 11

Peter mentioned two broad categories of gifts: verbal and non-verbal. He first noted gifts involving speaking. Preaching, teaching, encouraging, and sharing the good news are examples. Those with such gifts have a great responsibility. Such a gifted person is to recognize that he or she speaks **as one who speaks God's words**. Thus, flippancy or carelessness is never called for by God's messengers.

The second category of spiritual gifts is serving. The word in the original language is the basis for our word "deacon." Yet Peter was not thinking of a particular office. Rather, he had in mind all the things it takes to keep a congregation running smoothly, such as administration, showing acts of mercy, and giving generously. This kind of work can be wearying, requiring more than mere human energy. Thus, **the strength God provides** is available so that believers can carry out the tasks entrusted to them.

What is the motive for all our speaking and serving in the body of Christ? Peter told us: **so that God may be glorified**. We exist so that God will be praised. We were converted so that God will be praised. We exercise our spiritual gifts with God's strength—and God is praised. This applies to everything, in particular to all the duties Peter has just noted (prayer, love, hospitality, and gifts).

The apostle concluded this section of his letter with a brief doxology, a word of praise (see also 5:11). The **Him** refers to our Lord Jesus (the immediately preceding reference). This section that began with a reminder that the end is at hand now concluded with an exclamation that everlasting **glory** and **power** belong to Jesus. All this is a powerful incentive for us to redeem the time that we have been given.

**Reflect on the four duties of end-time living in your own life: prayer, love, hospitality, and use of spiritual gifts. Which one are you the strongest in expressing? The weakest? What insights from this passage can you use to better redeem the time God has given you?**

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#### 1 PETER 4:11

<sup>11</sup> If anyone speaks, it should be as one who speaks God's words; if anyone serves, it should be from the strength God provides, so that God may be glorified through Jesus Christ in everything. To Him belong the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen.

# LEAD GROUP BIBLE STUDY

## FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

**BRAINSTORM:** As the group arrives, ask: *Who do you turn to when you need insight about suffering? What book or books have you read that helped you better understand the pains we face in life?* (Possible answers include *Good Grief, When You Can't Come Back, The Problem of Pain, Suffering and the Sovereignty of God*, etc.) If you emailed the group about the article “Meet David” (PSG, p. 145), take time to discuss how memorizing Scripture can help us face difficulty with confidence in God.

**GUIDE:** Call attention to **Pack Item 8** (*Poster: Key Passages on Suffering*). Highlight the number of times Peter appears on this listing (5 of 18 times). Characterize Peter as a person who understood the nature of suffering and how difficulty works in God’s plan. Challenge the group to look for principles that will help them better understand suffering in this world.

**INTRODUCE:** *Peter encouraged his readers who were facing persecution for their faith that a better day—the return of Christ—was coming. He provided guidance to help them live in the meantime: to honor God instead of wasting time by living like those who do not believe. The same hope applies today. Believers are to look to Christ when facing persecution for their faith, knowing that He has a greater plan.*

**TRANSITION:** Use information under Understand the Context (pp. 74-75) to explain the persecution and suffering Peter’s readers were experiencing.

## EXPLORE THE TEXT

**EXPLAIN:** *Peter knew his readers needed a hope that could sustain them as they endured such trials. He addressed the hope that believers have in the return of Jesus Christ.*

**DISCUSS:** *How does suffering motivate believers to live for Christ rather than for their own will? (PSG, p. 75) How does the reminder of Christ’s suffering affect the way you face challenges in life?*

**READ:** Read aloud 1 Peter 4:1-4, as others listen for Peter’s instructions on time management.

**GUIDE:** Lead everyone to identify the what and when of Peter’s instructions to believers in verses 1-4. Encourage them to consult the PSG (pp. 74-75) for assistance. Invite volunteers to share responses (ex.: *what*: live with Christ as our example when suffering; *when*: the remaining time, or time until Christ returns).

**FOCUS:** Invite the group to locate references to pagan behavior. Use information under Verse 3 (PSG, p. 75) to explain Peter’s list of vices that the pagan world embraced.

**CLARIFY:** *The unbelievers were surprised that Christians did not join them in these selfish, ungodly pursuits. Their surprise led them to hurl insults or slander Christians.*

**DISCUSS:** *How does the root of persecution help you to understand those who are administering it? Does knowing the source of persecution help a person more readily endure it? Explain. (PSG, p. 76)*

**READ:** Direct a volunteer to read aloud 1 Peter 4:5-6. Explain that the time will come when everyone will give an account to God of his or her life.

**EXPLAIN:** Use information under Verse 5 (p. 77; PSG, p. 76) to explain how giving an account applies to both believers and unbelievers.

**ASK:** *How does God's holding everyone accountable serve as motivation for enduring persecution? Why would it be important for a person facing persecution to be reminded of God's judgment?* (PSG, p. 77)

**CLARIFY:** Interpret the preaching to the dead (v. 6) in terms of believers who heard the gospel, accepted it, and have since died. Clearly state that people do not have another opportunity to receive Christ after they have died.

**READ:** Call for a volunteer to read aloud 1 Peter 4:7-11, directing everyone else to listen for Peter's sense of urgency.

**SAY:** *Peter reminded his readers that the end is near, when Christ will return. He provided guidance for believers to use the remaining time productively.*

**GUIDE:** Lead the group to search 1 Peter 4:7-11 for ways Peter directed believers to live. Call for volunteers to share responses; list their responses on a posterboard (ex.: be serious and disciplined for prayer, maintain an intense love for each other, etc.). As a group, rank the actions from easiest to hardest. Discuss your responses.

**STUDY:** Read aloud 1 Peter 4:9, the memory verse for this session. Distribute **Pack Item 5** (*Bookmark: Memory Verses*) as needed. Use information under Verse 9 (PSG, pp. 78-79) to provide background about hospitality and complaining. Invite the group to write the verse in the white space of their PSG, followed by the word "when" and a blank line. Encourage the group to consider circumstances when they feel most challenged to be hospitable and avoid complaining. Suggest that they list one of those circumstances in the blank line.

**ASK:** *Reflect on the four duties of end-time living in your own life: prayer, love, hospitality, and the use of spiritual gifts. Which one are you the strongest in expressing? The weakest? What insights from this passage can you use to better redeem the time God has given you?* (PSG, p. 79)

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## SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

**DISCUSS:** Read the summary statements under In My Context (PSG, p. 80). Highlight the last sentence: *Believers honor God by loving each other and serving others out of love.* Invite volunteers to share experiences when they served out of love, or someone served them out of love. Challenge the group to be open to opportunities to serve out of love in the coming week.

**DIRECT:** Review **Pack Item 8** (*Poster: Key Passages on Suffering*) again, and discuss how living expectantly can help us have proper perspective when facing suffering. Then identify the ways 1 Peter 4:1-11 stresses the importance of living expectantly for Christ's return.

**CHALLENGE:** Direct the group to the second question set under In My Context (PSG, p. 80): *Discuss ways the Bible study group can hold each other accountable in light of God's future judgment. How can accountability be established without being burdensome or unmotivating?*

**PRAY:** Close with a time of prayer, asking the group to pray for one another as they honor God by loving others in all circumstances.



## PRACTICE

- Contact those who were absent from the group time, asking them for prayer requests. Use the opportunity to encourage them in their spiritual lives.
- Text or email the group later in the week, encouraging them to follow up on the Summarize and Challenge activity for holding each other accountable. Encourage them to identify action steps to make improvement in those circumstances.
- Evaluate the extent to which you live by principles in this week's Scripture. Be aware of the areas in which you struggle most. Identify ways this study can strengthen you.

## MORE IDEAS

### FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

To supplement or replace Focus Attention: As the group arrives, direct attention to the word "Countdown" written prominently somewhere in the room. Lead the group in a countdown to begin the session. Start with the number 10. Then, instead of counting down sequentially, call out random numbers, such as 6, 2, 7, 1, 4, 3, 5. Then explain: *Believers are living on a countdown to the future time when Christ returns. Unlike a typical countdown, which follows a predictable pattern, the return of Christ is at an unspecified time in the future. Christ's return is a future date on everyone's calendar that carries great promise for those who trust in Him.*

### EXPLORE THE TEXT

- To add to the discussion of 1 Peter 4:1-4, discuss: *How does having an awareness of a limited amount of time influence your actions?*
- To support the discussion about giving an account to God, invite the group to picture a modern courtroom setting. Invite volunteers to read aloud Matthew 12:36; Luke 16:2, Acts 19:40; and Hebrews 13:17. Use information under Verse 5 (p. 77; PSG, p. 76) to contrast judgment of the believer and the unbeliever.
- To supplement the activity about how believers are to live based on 1 Peter 4:7-11, lead everyone to evaluate their lives based on the characteristics listed on the posterboard. Encourage them to select one area for improvement on which to focus in the coming week.

### SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

Distribute a blank sheet of paper or inexpensive notepad to each person. Direct attention to the third question set under In My Context (p. 80): *Keep a journal of the next seven days, looking for ways you are involved in the four actions identified by Peter. Evaluate what you record. How can your speech and service better reflect the glory of Christ?* Encourage the group to write their reflections on the paper or notepad.

### SUGGESTED MUSIC IDEA

Review the words of "Living for Jesus," by Thomas O. Chisholm. Invite volunteers to share which parts of the hymn encourage them the most. Sing the hymn as a group to close the session.

# WHEN RIDICULED

Believers honor God by faithfulness through persecution.

## 1 PETER 4:12-19

MEMORY VERSE: JOHN 16:33

### PREPARE TO LEAD THE GROUP TIME

- **READ** 1 Peter 4:12-19, First Thoughts (p. 84), and Understand the Context (pp. 84-85). Reflect on the statement from the PSG (p. 84): *Instead of being shocked at the experience of suffering, Christians should rejoice when suffering for Christ.*
- **STUDY** 1 Peter 4:12-19, using Explore the Text (pp. 85-89). As you study, observe ways Peter encouraged his readers to respond to suffering. Summarize Peter's comments in a format you could share with someone who is facing ridicule as a believer.
- **PLAN** the group time using ideas under Lead Group Bible Study (pp. 90-91) and ideas in *QuickSource*. Add variety to the plans for your group this session by using at least one suggestion from More Ideas on page 92. Reference *Blog.LifeWay.com/ExploreTheBible* for ideas to customize your session.
- **GROW** with other group leaders at the Groups Ministry blog (*LifeWay.com/GroupMinistry*).
- **GATHER** the following items:  Personal Study Guides;  Posterboard and markers;  **PACK ITEM 2** (*Outline of 1,2 Peter; Jude*). Prepare to display the following Pack Item:  **PACK ITEM 8** (*Poster: Key Passages on Suffering*).



## FIRST THOUGHTS

### KEY DOCTRINE

#### *God the Holy Spirit*

The Spirit's presence in the Christian is the guarantee that God will bring the believer into the fullness of the stature of Christ.

Ahmet grew up in a family that had no Christians. He left his homeland to study in a university in the United States, and there he encountered Christians for the first time. They were patient with him and engaged him in conversation about the gospel. After he returned to his homeland, he continued to seek answers to life and to his spiritual condition, and one day he turned to Christ. Things were not easy for Ahmet from that point forward. Some ridiculed him for his faith. Others dropped their friendship with him. One boss fired him from his job, even though he was more than qualified and was doing his best. The opposition he faced caused him to question his decision to follow Christ. But Ahmet grew stronger as a Christian despite the persecution. As Ahmet read the Bible, he saw more evidence suffering is sometimes a part of God's plan, not a punishment for doing wrong.

(In PSG, p. 82) **Why do people sometimes assume they are outside the will of God when they suffer for Christ? Why do others see suffering only in terms of God's abandonment of them?**

### BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR

For additional context, read "The House of God: A New Testament Understanding" in the Fall 2016 issue of *Biblical Illustrator*. Available at [LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator](http://LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator).

Writing to churches that were beginning to feel the effects of persecution, Peter returned to the theme of suffering he had first mentioned in 1 Peter 1:6-7. He wanted the churches in Asia Minor to realize that suffering was not a sign they were outside the will of God. Rather, God could use their suffering to refine them and identify them with a suffering Savior. They could face their suffering with the confidence God was using their trials to purify them and prepare them for meeting Him in eternity. He also reminded them that those who were persecuting the churches have a judgment day awaiting them in the future.

## UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

### 1 PETER 4:12-19

The apostle Peter had suffered many things as a Christian. The Book of Acts tells how he was arrested multiple times, flogged, and even sentenced to death (Acts 4:3; 5:18,40; 12:3-5). Two companions, Stephen and James, were killed because of their faith (7:58-60; 12:2). All this happened in Jerusalem, and the forces leading the opposition against these early believers were Jewish religious leaders.

Neither Acts nor the rest of the New Testament describes other hostilities against Peter. What is certain is that, as the gospel radiated out from its original home in Jerusalem, Gentile religious and political leaders joined the fray in trying to put a stop to the followers of Jesus. The latter

part of Acts shows how this worked out in the life and ministry of Paul. Acts ends with Paul waiting for his appeal of charges against him to be heard in Rome, sometime in the early A.D. 60s.

That emperor was Nero, who reigned A.D. 54–68. During the first years of his rule, he was a competent (if immoral) administrator. Paul was confident he would get a fair hearing before Nero. The defining event of Nero’s reign was the fire of Rome, which destroyed half the city in A.D. 64. The cause of the fire—accident or arson—is uncertain. It is reasonably clear, however, that the people of the city blamed the emperor, and in order to shift the blame, Nero targeted Rome’s Christians. The Roman historian Tacitus described how Christians were thrown to the dogs; others were crucified and burned. Whether this vicious treatment extended to the provinces where Peter’s first epistle was sent is unknown. Yet surely these believers knew all about it. Whatever suffering they were experiencing, their faith was bolstered by Peter’s counsel to them about finding joy whenever they suffered unjustly for Christ’s name.

## EXPLORE THE TEXT

### EXPECT RIDICULE (1 PET. 4:12-14)

#### VERSE 12

Addressing his readers as *dear friends*, Peter moved on to a fresh topic. He had concluded the previous section with a brief doxology (4:11). Now he emphasized that suffering is normal for Christians. First-century believers were not to consider persecution as something unusual, and neither should we. Peter had experienced his share of persecution (see “Understand the Context”). If persecution is common for Christians, then we shouldn’t **be surprised** whenever it comes our way.

Peter was not thinking about suffering in the sense of ill health, financial setbacks, or the distress caused by a painful marriage or rebellious children. (These are indeed painful life experiences which call for perseverance and faith.) What the apostle had in mind was nothing less than a **fiery ordeal** because of the insults and injuries heaped on believers because of their faith, as 4:14 makes clear (see also 1:6-7; 2:20-21). Such persecution is included in God’s plan for a number of reasons, and one of those reasons is to **test** believers. Peter had already developed this concept in 1:6-7, comparing God’s testing of believers through suffering to the way a refiner purifies gold through fire. The term translated *fiery ordeal* could also refer to the burning of a literal fire (Rev. 18:9,18). Indeed, some Christian martyrs have given their lives by being burned at the stake.

#### VERSE 13

In the days of Jesus’ earthly ministry, when Peter was traveling with the Lord, the apostle had rejected the idea that the Messiah would suffer (Matt. 16:21-23). Then Peter had become a witness of

### BIBLE SKILL

Create a compare/contrast chart to study a passage.

Create a comparison chart. On one side, identify words and phrases that describe behaviors that might lead a Christian to suffer harm for righteousness’ sake. On the other side, note words and phrases that describe behaviors that might lead someone to suffer deservedly so. Use the chart to study 1 Peter 4:12-19. Include additional insights from 2:18-20 and 3:8-17.

### 1 PETER 4:12

<sup>12</sup> Dear friends, don’t be surprised when the fiery ordeal comes among you to test you as if something unusual were happening to you.

### 1 PETER 4:13

<sup>13</sup> Instead, rejoice as you share in the sufferings of the Messiah, so that you may also rejoice with great joy at the revelation of His glory.

Jesus' sufferings. Soon after, he too began experiencing reproach because he identified with Jesus. On one such occasion, having been flogged, Peter and the other apostles were "rejoicing that they were counted worthy to be dishonored on behalf of the Name" (Acts 5:41). Now, years later, Peter was urging his readers to take this same approach: **rejoice as you share in the sufferings of the Messiah**. He did not mean that his readers were going through the exact same verbal and physical abuse that Jesus went through; rather, he meant that their painful experiences were on account of Christ. Therefore, they were sharing in His sufferings.

Those willing to go through the darkest season with rejoicing are promised that this is only temporary. There will come a time when they will **rejoice with great joy**. The pain and the suffering will then become the merest whisper of memory. Earthly joy during suffering is only a prelude to final joy, but such great joy is not promised during earthly life. It waits for **the revelation of His glory**, at His return. It's included in the believer's inheritance (1:4). The consistent biblical teaching is that suffering is the pathway to glory. For our Lord, there was no crown without the cross. Those who follow His example should expect to find it the same.

#### VERSE 14

Peter offered a specific example of Christian suffering: being **ridiculed for the name of Christ**. The term *ridiculed* is a form of the verb Jesus used in the Sermon on the Mount: "You are blessed when they insult and persecute you ... Be glad and rejoice" (Matt. 5:11-12). Just as Jesus had pronounced a blessing, so did Peter, using the exact same word for blessed. Perhaps Peter was remembering that he'd heard Jesus say these words and was passing them on to his readers.

Peter went on, however, to specify the way these believers were to receive slander as a blessing. This was evidence that the Holy Spirit was resting on them in an obvious way. Note the unusual way in which Peter described the Spirit. He is **the Spirit of glory**; therefore, He will minister a foretaste of glory divine even in the midst of suffering. He is the **Spirit of God**, the One who strengthens believers in times of trial. Some Bible students have noted that Peter may have been thinking of Isaiah 11:2, a prophecy about the coming Messiah: "The Spirit of the LORD will rest on Him." Just as the Holy Spirit rested on Christ throughout His ministry, giving Him joy in suffering, so now all those united to Him have that same Spirit resting on them, strengthening them and giving them joy.

**How do you react to the concept that suffering is normal for Christians? How seriously do you believe that you would rejoice if you were insulted because of your faith? Have you ever been ridiculed for your faith? What happened? How did the Holy Spirit impact the situation?**

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## 1 PETER 4:14

<sup>14</sup> If you are ridiculed for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.

## REPRESENT JESUS WELL (1 PET. 4:15-16)

### VERSE 15

There are good reasons for suffering. Peter had mentioned one such reason in verse 14. There are also bad reasons for suffering. We may experience negative personal consequences because we have misbehaved and have been caught. This does not rise to the level of Christian suffering. We can't behave vilely and then claim that the attached penalty is undeserved. Certain sinful behaviors are utterly unacceptable for followers of Jesus. Peter named four such unacceptable reasons:

- **As a murderer.** This is prohibited by the Sixth Commandment. Jesus had warned that His followers should not even have the attitude that might lead to murder (Ex. 20:13; Matt. 5:21-26). To murder is to destroy a being created in the image of God.
- **A thief.** The Eighth Commandment forbids stealing (Ex. 20:15). To take another's property is to refuse to love one's neighbor as oneself.
- **An evildoer.** In the original language, this term was a broad, general term referring to anyone working evil.
- **A meddler.** The term was not commonly used. It carried the idea of being nosy into the affairs of another person and making mischief.

(In PSG, p. 86) **How do you counsel people who protest as unfair the suffering that results from their own moral lapses?**

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### VERSE 16

Peter had mentioned in verse 14 the possibility of being ridiculed for the name of Christ. Such ridicule indeed counts as suffering. Here, the apostle noted the possibility of a believer suffering *as a "Christian."* The very name *Christian* was the point of the ridicule. We are so accustomed to *Christian* as a broad label that it can appear almost meaningless. But in Peter's day, *Christian* was a new term, and it was not meant as a compliment but as a criticism. The original implication of the term was "follower of the Christ" (parallel to "Herodian" as a "follower of the Herods," Mark 3:6). The only other times *Christian* is used in the New Testament are in Acts 11:26 (where believers in Antioch were dubbed "Christians") and Acts 26:28 (where King Agrippa used the term in his conversation with Paul). In both instances the term seems to be applied in disdain.

The point Peter was making is that believers should live in such a way that they will **not be ashamed** of bearing the name that others use with disdain. While others may intend it as an insult or criticism, believers are to live in such a way that bearing that name is a reason to **glorify God**.

### 1 PETER 4:15

<sup>15</sup> None of you, however, should suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or a meddler.

### 1 PETER 4:16

<sup>16</sup> But if anyone suffers as a "Christian," he should not be ashamed but should glorify God in having that name.

(In PSG, p. 87) **How do people try to shame believers into hiding their faith or rejecting their faith in practice? What is the relationship between living unashamed and remaining faithful to Christ?**

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## FOCUS ON THE CREATOR (1 PET. 4:17-19)

### VERSE 17

When we think of judgment, we often think it refers only to condemnation. But the term Peter used for **judgment** meant “evaluation,” resulting in either approval or disapproval. Further, as the apostle had already made clear, the process of testing or evaluating is intended to result in purifying—as in the case both of gold and faith (1:7). Thus, the experiences of suffering for righteousness’ sake that Peter’s readers endured were evidence that **time has come for judgment to begin**.

The apostle referred to his readers as **God’s household**, literally, “God’s house.” (See 2:5, where the same word for “house” refers to believers as God’s new temple.) Some Bible students have suggested that Peter had in mind Old Testament passages in which divine judgment began at the temple and spread outward from there (Ezek. 9:1-6; Mal. 3:1-4). With this in mind, follow the apostle’s reasoning: Peter argued that the judgment which demonstrates God’s holy justice is so great that **it begins with us**, His own people, who in His plan undergo the fiery ordeal of suffering for righteousness’ sake. If this is so, then **what will the outcome be** for those who are not God’s house, that is, for **those who disobey the gospel of God?** Peter did not answer his question. But the answer is clear: it will be the fiery ordeal of final condemnation.

(In PSG, p. 88) **How would you define the difference in the purpose of judgment for believers and unbelievers? Why would this be important to remember for believers?**

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### 1 PETER 4:17

<sup>17</sup> For the time has come for judgment to begin with God’s household, and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who disobey the gospel of God?

### 1 PETER 4:18

<sup>18</sup> And if a righteous person is saved with difficulty, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?

### VERSE 18

Peter followed the pattern we have seen earlier in the letter of quoting the Old Testament to confirm that his teaching had a scriptural foundation. (See, for example, 1:24-25; 2:6-8; and 3:10-12.) Here in verse 18, Peter quoted Proverbs 11:31. Salvation is possible only by God’s costly provision, the death of His Son. The only way for a rebel against God to become righteous is to receive this salvation freely, as God’s gift, by faith. However, as Peter already noted, such persons are saved and yet experience suffering and difficulty. Some translations use the wording “barely saved” instead of **saved with difficulty**. The term Peter used does

not mean that the righteous just barely receive salvation; rather, there is no such thing as easy salvation.

Just as Peter did not answer the question he asked at the end of verse 17, likewise he did not answer the question asked by the writer of Proverbs here in verse 18. But the answer is equally clear—and it is the same answer: ***the ungodly and the sinner*** (apt descriptions of those who have never received the gift of salvation) will receive the fiery judgment of final condemnation.

#### VERSE 19

This verse aptly summarizes the entire message of 1 Peter. Followers of Jesus who suffer for righteousness' sake do so not because of chance or fate or bad luck. They do so because it is ***God's will*** for them to do so. He is the Sovereign, and nothing happens contrary to His loving plan. How then shall we respond in such circumstances? We are to remember, to trust, and to keep on.

- We are to remember that the God who has saved us is our ***faithful Creator***. As the One who made us, He knows our strengths and our weaknesses. He knows what will stretch our faith and purify us. His magnificent plan is not just for us as individuals, but for the entire universe. As our Creator, His is faithful and trustworthy. We can count on Him to keep His promises and to give us the power of His Spirit to follow His will for our lives, even when that includes suffering.
- We are to trust God in the midst of every circumstance. The verb translated ***entrust*** is actually different than the usual word for faith or belief. The term means “to give something to someone for safekeeping and care.” Jesus used a form of this word as He suffered according to God’s will on the cross: “Father, into Your hands I entrust My spirit” (Luke 23:46, quoting Ps. 31:5).
- We are to keep on doing what we were doing that brought about suffering in the first place. In the original language, ***doing what is good*** is a single word that broadly describes the way Christians live, with a gentle inference that we are never to be “doing what is bad.”

(In PSG, p. 89) **Why do you think Peter emphasized God as Creator in verse 19? How does God’s relationship to us as the Creator help us to trust Him more?**

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#### 1 PETER 4:19

<sup>19</sup> So those who suffer according to God’s will should, while doing what is good, entrust themselves to a faithful Creator.

# LEAD GROUP BIBLE STUDY

## FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

**GUIDE:** As the group arrives, lead them to imagine good friends who are going through a difficult experience. The friends are believers, and the difficulty is related to their faith. Ask: *What would you say to encourage them through an email or text message?*

**TRANSITION:** *Today's session includes Peter's message to his dear friends who were being persecuted and ridiculed for their faith.*

**INTRODUCE:** Call attention to **Pack Item 2** (*Outline of 1,2 Peter; Jude*). Remind the group of the previous study, which focused on the end times and following Jesus until He returned. In this week's study, Peter returns to his theme about responding to suffering.

## EXPLORE THE TEXT

**READ:** Read aloud 1 Peter 4:12-14, directing attention to the word "surprised" (v. 12) in conjunction with the word "sufferings" (v. 13).

**DO:** Write the words "Situation" and "Response" on a posterboard. Form pairs. Instruct pairs to search 1 Peter 4:12-14 for situations and responses (*situation: fiery ordeal; response: don't be surprised; situation: sufferings; response: rejoice; situation: ridiculed; response: blessed*).

**EXPLAIN:** In verses 12-14, Peter was explaining how God used suffering to refine believers. Call on volunteers to read aloud Psalm 66:10; Zechariah 13:9; and Malachi 3:1-4.

**DISCUSS:** *How does a person's suffering help him or her share in Christ's suffering? Why does the temporary nature of suffering encourage those who are enduring it? (PSG, p. 84) How does the presence of the Holy Spirit help those enduring insults and ridicule? (PSG, p. 85)*

**EMPHASIZE:** Refer to **Pack Item 8** (*Poster: Key Passages on Suffering*), instructing the group to discuss how their views on Christian suffering have changed throughout this study.

**READ:** Direct volunteers to read aloud 1 Peter 4:15-16 from different Bible translations.

**GUIDE:** Lead the group to compare the translations, looking for ways they are different and the same, especially the four categories of poor character listed in verse 15. Then use the information under Verse 15 (p. 87; PSG, pp. 85-86) to explain the four categories.

**ASK:** *How do you counsel people who protest as unfair the suffering that results from their own moral lapses? (PSG, p. 86)*

**COMPARE:** Contrast the types of people listed in verse 15 with the use of "Christian" in verse 16. Use the information under Verse 16 (p. 87) to explain how the word "Christian" moved from a term of derision used by those outside the faith to an encouragement to those who believed in Jesus.

**DISCUSS:** *How do people try to shame believers into hiding their faith or rejecting their faith in practice? What is the relationship between living unashamed and remaining faithful to Christ? (PSG, p. 87)*

**READ:** Invite the group to listen again for the distinctions between Christians and unbelievers while a volunteer reads aloud 1 Peter 4:17-19.

**SAY:** *The purpose of suffering in the church was to differentiate those who genuinely believed in Jesus by standing firm and those who falsely professed faith in Him by falling away.*

**GUIDE:** Explain the following progression of today's Scripture passage:

- Peter began by explaining that believers should not be surprised by suffering because it was testing their faith (v. 12).
- He explained that this must be suffering for Jesus rather than for poor moral decisions (vv. 15-16).
- Peter returned to show the positive effect of suffering in purifying the people of God (v. 17).

**EMPHASIZE:** *Peter reminded his readers to depend upon God even in the midst of persecution, knowing that trials would refine their faith and that God is trustworthy.*

**READ:** Lead the group to locate how God is described in 1 Peter 4:19. Then invite a volunteer to read 1 Peter 2:23, which describes Jesus' response to suffering as a model for believers.

**REVIEW:** *God is Creator and made us along with everything else in the world; certainly we can count upon Him to care and provide for us even when things are difficult in our lives.*

**ASK:** *Why do you think Peter emphasized God as Creator in verse 19? How does God's relationship to us as the Creator help us to trust Him more?* (PSG, p. 89)

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## SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

**EXPLAIN:** *Peter devoted an average of four verses per chapter to suffering in 1 Peter. He did not mention suffering in a general sense. He always referred to the type of suffering that resulted from opposition to one's faith.*

**BRAINSTORM:** Lead the group to complete the Bible Skill activity (PSG, p. 86), creating a comparison chart on Christian suffering, based on 1 Peter 2:18-20; 3:8-17; 4:12-19. Duplicate the chart on a posterboard, and invite volunteers to share responses and insight.

**MEMORIZE:** Encourage individuals to memorize Scripture to strengthen them when facing ridicule. Read aloud John 16:33 in unison. Then ask volunteers to share specific words from the verse that encourage them.

**REFLECT:** Direct the group to consider silently the third question set under In My Context in the PSG (p. 90): *How is God testing and refining your faith? What has He taught you about Himself in the process? Share your responses with another believer to encourage him or her.* Encourage individuals to share their responses with someone in the coming week.

**PRAY:** Close the session by praying specifically for those who are experiencing persecution.



## PRACTICE

- Follow up on any questions the group had during this week's study.
- Be aware of any situations in your community that could result in ridicule or persecution for believers. Pray for your group, that they will trust the Holy Spirit to provide strength when they encounter adversity for their beliefs.
- Email or text your group during the week, encouraging them to be faithful in praying for believers who are experiencing persecution or are in challenging areas of ministry.

## MORE IDEAS

### FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

To replace the Focus idea, tell in your own words the story of Ahmet under First Thoughts (p. 84; PSG, pp. 82-83). Discuss: *Why do people sometimes assume they are outside the will of God when they suffer for Christ? Why do others see suffering only in terms of God's abandonment of them?* (PSG, p. 82)

### EXPLORE THE TEXT

- To supplement the study of 1 Peter 4:12-13, lead the group to discuss the joy they have found in following Jesus Christ and how they can focus on that joy in the midst of difficulty. Read Revelation 21:4 for further encouragement.
- To replace the reading of 1 Peter 4:15-16 from different translations, ask the group to restate the verses in their own words. Discuss: *In what ways might the four categories of poor character (v. 15) have changed from Peter's time to today?* Point out that the specific actions might have changed, but the fact that they are wrong remains the same.
- To enhance the discussion of 1 Peter 4:17-19, lead the group make a list of general prayer requests for missionaries. Share the websites of missions organizations supported by your church. Encourage the group to pray for these missionaries and organizations in the coming weeks.

### SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

Lead the group to name challenges to standing for Christ in your community. Discuss: *What can we as a Bible study group do to help each other more consistently stand for Christ?*

### SUGGESTED MUSIC IDEA

Sing or read all three verses of "Be Strong in the Lord," by Linda Lee Johnson, as a prayer of commitment.

# ALERT LIVING

Believers must humbly depend upon God's strength to overcome Satan.

## 1 PETER 5:1-11

**MEMORY VERSE: 1 PETER 5:7**

### PREPARE TO LEAD THE GROUP TIME

- **READ** 1 Peter 5:1-14, *First Thoughts* (p. 94), and *Understand the Context* (p. 94). As you read, reflect on verses 12-14 that conclude Peter's first letter. Take note of Peter's stated purpose for writing the letter. Reflect on how Peter's purpose applies to believers today.
- **STUDY** 1 Peter 5:1-11 and *Explore the Text* (pp. 95-99). Locate word pictures or imagery Peter used in the passage, such as shepherding God's flock, clothing with humility, and the devil as a prowling lion. Reflect on how Peter's word choice enhances his message. Consult the *Explore the Bible Adult Commentary* (available in print and digital format from *LifeWay.com*) for additional insight.
- **PLAN** the group time using the ideas under *Lead Group Bible Study* (pp. 100-101), *More Ideas* (p. 102), ideas included in *QuickSource*, and ideas available at *Blog.LifeWay.com/ExploretheBible*.
- **GROW** from expert insights on weekly studies through the *Ministry Grid* (*MinistryGrid.com/Web/ExploretheBible*).
- **GATHER** the following items:  Personal Study Guides;  **PACK ITEM 5** (*Bookmark: Memory Verses*) as needed. For *More Ideas*:  Locate a weather alert sound on your smartphone or computer;  A plastic sandwich bag and sheet of paper for each person. Prepare to display the following Pack Item:  **PACK ITEM 8** (*Poster: Key Passages on Suffering*).



## KEY DOCTRINE

### *God the Father*

God as Father reigns with providential care over His universe, His creatures, and the flow of the stream of human history according to the purposes of His grace.

## BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR

For additional context, read "The Minister as a Shepherd," an archive *Biblical Illustrator* article provided on the CD-ROM in the Fall 2016 *Explore the Bible: Leader Pack*.

## BIBLE SKILL

*Identify the imagery in a verse or passage and discover what it communicates.*

Observe the words and phrases in 1 Peter 5:1-4 that describe the shepherd and the flock. What does each word and phrase communicate to you about living the Christian life? How does the imagery of the shepherd and the flock in an earthly church setting compare to the imagery of Christ as our chief Shepherd in the eternal setting?

# FIRST THOUGHTS

Accidents happen. Sometimes we back our car into another car in the parking lot because we are not as alert as we should be. At times we take a wrong step on the stairs because we are not paying attention to our surroundings. Living life every day requires we be alert to our surroundings and to the pitfalls all around us. The same is true spiritually.

(In PSG, p. 92) **What are some ways that you have suffered by not being alert to your surroundings? How could you have avoided those situations?**

To remain alert, we need responsible spiritual leaders who are leading receptive spiritual followers. One of the benefits of living in community as a church is that it brings together strong Christian leaders with people who are humble enough to follow them. Together, leaders and followers can expose the work of our enemy, Satan, and can live lives that bring glory to God and magnify His grace in our lives.

# UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

## 1 PETER 5:1-14

If you have been using these lessons to study 1 Peter for the past two months, you have seen a number of themes that the apostle emphasized: hope (confidence in God for the future), suffering (a privilege and a part of God's plan), holiness (growth in Christlike character), and humility (following Jesus' example). This week's lesson emphasizes humility again. Peter offered advice about how various members of the congregation relate to one another. By way of review, here is the simple outline for the epistle that we have been following for these studies:

1. Finding our identity in Jesus (1:1–2:10; sessions 1, 2, and 3).
2. Living as foreigners (2:11–4:11; sessions 4, 5, 6, and 7).
3. Thriving in persecution (4:12–5:14; sessions 8 and 9).

This is our last study in 1 Peter. Thus, pay attention to the spiritual truths and guidelines for living that were uppermost in the apostle's heart as he brought the letter to a close. We will give focused attention to 5:1-11. Do not, however, overlook 5:12-14, the formal conclusion to the letter. These verses provide important clues about the origin and background that led to Peter's composing and sending out his inspired epistle.

# EXPLORE THE TEXT

## RESPONSIBLE SHEPHERDS (1 PET. 5:1-4)

### VERSE 1

In the early churches, spiritually minded leaders were essential for congregations to function well. These leaders were called by a variety of names, the most common of which were **elder** and *overseer* (traditionally translated “bishop”). Occasionally the term *pastor* (which can be translated “shepherd”) was also used (see Acts 20:17-36; Eph. 4:11; 1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9). In his epistle, Peter had just written that judgment begins with God’s house (1 Pet. 4:17); if so, then the leaders are particularly accountable to God and need special urging (Jas. 3:1). Further, when the congregation’s spiritual leaders are fulfilling their responsibilities well, members will be better able to handle suffering rightly (1 Pet. 4:19).

The apostle, knowing that he was about to exhort the elders to serve humbly, began by modestly calling himself **a fellow elder**. He was certainly aware of his status as an apostle (1:1), but by using this language he communicated that he understood the burdens associated with leading a congregation. The verb translated **exhort** can be translated “appeal” or “urge.” It is gentler than the term for “command.”

Peter was a personal witness to the sufferings of the Messiah, as the Gospels make clear. Although he was not specific, he may have had in mind the most embarrassing and painful episode of his life—when he denied even knowing Jesus. Because he knew his own failings, he could urge the elders he was writing to be patient in dealing with members of their flock who failed.

As we have seen in the letter, **glory** follows suffering (3:18; 4:13). Peter had suffered for Jesus’ sake. Thus, he was confident he would be a participant in the glory of Christ. Of course, our Lord already has entered His glory, but His splendor will be revealed for all to see at His return. Only at that time will Peter, faithful church leaders, and indeed all believers share in His glory (1:7).

### VERSES 2-3

The overall instruction Peter gave the elders was **shepherd God’s flock**. The verb *shepherd* is closely related to the noun translated “pastors” in Ephesians 4:11. It is a form of the same verb the risen Lord gave to Peter personally in John 21:16: “Shepherd My sheep.” Note that the flock does not belong to the pastors or elders; rather, it is God’s flock. The role of under-shepherds is to guide, feed, and protect those given to their temporary care.

Peter followed up his general command with three contrasting pairs of comments that explain the attitude that great spiritual leaders exude. Each begins with a negative attitude and moves to the positive alternative.

- **Not overseeing out of compulsion.** The church’s spiritual leaders should never serve because “someone has to do it.” This is parallel to Paul’s instruction on Christian financial giving (2 Cor. 9:7). No one who leads in a congregation should do so because he has been pressured, **but freely**,

### 1 PETER 5:1

<sup>1</sup> Therefore, as a fellow elder and witness to the sufferings of the Messiah and also a participant in the glory about to be revealed, I exhort the elders among you:

### 1 PETER 5:2-3

<sup>2</sup> Shepherd God’s flock among you, not overseeing out of compulsion but freely, according to God’s will; not for the money but eagerly; <sup>3</sup> not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock

**according to God's will.** The verb *overseeing* refers to supervision. The antidote for grudging service is willing service. Note Peter's striking combination of God's sovereign call of leaders (*God's will*) with human responsibility (*freely*).

- **Not for the money.** Peter was not forbidding financial compensation for pastors. Rather, he was focusing again on attitude. No church leader should be “in it for the money” but should serve **eagerly**. The antidote for greediness is enthusiasm for the opportunity to serve God's people. Church leaders are called to be zealous and to be devoted to their charges.
- **Not lording it over those entrusted to you.** Although elders must supervise, they may not be domineering. They are never to show off their power over others. Rather, they should recognize that the persons under their watch care are a divinely given trust. The antidote to browbeating people is for spiritual leaders to remember that they are **examples to the flock**. Good shepherds produce good sheep; bad shepherds produce bad sheep.

Spiritual leaders who are prone to leading out of necessity will inevitably fall into bitterness and resentment. Those prone to be in it for the money will fall into greed. Those prone to lord it over others will certainly fall into a lust for power. Sadly, the history of Christianity is littered with too many leaders who have proven to be lazy, greedy, power-mongers.

(In PSG, p. 94) **Why is it important for spiritual leaders to carefully examine their motives? How does motive impact how one leads?**

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## 1 PETER 5:4

<sup>4</sup> And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

### VERSE 4

The reward for shepherds who have led and served faithfully is not received primarily in this lifetime. It comes only when **the chief Shepherd**, the Lord Jesus Christ, **appears** visibly at His return. Earlier in the letter, Peter had referred to our Lord as “the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls” (2:25). Here is the only time in Scripture He is called *the chief Shepherd*, a wonderful title (yet similar to Heb. 13:20, “the great Shepherd of the sheep”).

The term translated **crown** was used in the first century to refer to an athletic or military victor's wreath, given as a sign of special public honor. It was often made of leaves, which withered quickly. Indeed, all earthly accolades fade away. Peter, however, wrote about **the unfading crown of glory**. (See 1:4 for Peter's reference to the believer's unfading heavenly inheritance.) Whatever this reward consists of, we may paraphrase Peter's words as follows: “Faithful shepherds will enjoy a special share in the very glory of the chief Shepherd Himself.”

## TRUSTING SHEEP (1 PET. 5:5-7)

### VERSE 5

With the words *in the same way*, the apostle showed he was continuing with the same subject: the relationship between spiritual leaders and others in the congregation. *Younger men* is not limited to men; rather, Peter was noting that it's the young people who are most likely to rebel and need the reminder he was about to give.

Peter had used the verb translated *be subject* earlier in his letter (2:13,18; 3:1). He used it when he was referring to voluntary submission to legitimate authority: to government, to employers, and to one's husband. Now he applied this teaching to church members obeying their spiritual leaders. Note that the exact ways in which submission is expressed varies in marriages and workplaces and government. Similarly, the exact way deference to a church's leaders is shown will vary from church to church and from culture to culture. However, the principle remains as an enduring biblical instruction.

With the words *all of you* the apostle broadened the context to include every member. He used the picture of putting on clothes of *humility*. This was surely a deliberate reminder of the time Jesus literally took off His garment, wrapped a servant's towel around Himself, and washed Peter's feet (John 13:4-9). Humility means an attitude of putting others first, considering their needs as more important than one's own (Phil. 2:3-4). When all the church's people practice humility, there will be little difficulty in running things smoothly.

Peter provided a motive for such humility by noting God's favorable attitude to lowly people. He quoted Proverbs 3:34 (see also Jas. 4:6). Why does God give *grace* (His favor) to the humble? Because they trust Him. Proud people trust themselves.

### VERSE 6

The apostle now transitioned from humility toward one another to humility toward God. Genuine lowliness of heart includes our attitude toward God, accepting that He is great and good and sovereign in all things. Humility with God means bowing to His wisdom and His plan. In the Old Testament, *the mighty hand of God* was a frequent phrase for God's power displayed for His people, either for deliverance or for discipline (Ex. 3:19; 6:1). Peter had the same meaning in mind.

The apostle did not state the time or circumstances in which God will *exalt* ("lift up") His humble ones. Occasionally it happens in this lifetime, for example, when faithful pastors receive recognition for their work after years of uncomplaining service. For the most part, however, this recognition will occur at Christ's return. We can trust Him to do this for us *at the proper time*.

### VERSE 7

One important way that believers express humble submission to the will of God is for us to commit all our troubles to Him. When we are consumed

### 1 PETER 5:5

<sup>5</sup> In the same way, you younger men, be subject to the elders. And all of you clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble.

### 1 PETER 5:6

<sup>6</sup> Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, so that He may exalt you at the proper time,

### 1 PETER 5:7

<sup>7</sup> casting all your care on Him, because He cares about you.

with our own worries, it is hard for us to put others first. Yet if we will let Him, He will care for our needs (but not necessarily our wants). We are to do this for two reasons. First, He has a mighty hand; He is able to do so. Second, He longs to do so, for He is a loving heavenly Father who cares about His children. Everything that creates anxiety for us, whether trivial or critically important, is a matter of concern to God.

**What is the relationship between willing submission to spiritual leaders and showing humility to one another? Is one of these more difficult for you than the other? Why?**

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## THE NEED FOR ALERTNESS (1 PET. 5:8-11)

### VERSE 8

God is in control and He cares for us, yet we are responsible not to get careless in our spiritual lives. Thus, Peter punctuated his comments with two imperatives: **Be serious! Be alert!** These verbs are similar, suggesting self-control and watchfulness. There is always a temptation to get sleepy, both morally and spiritually. Perhaps Peter had in mind his personal experience of literally falling asleep in Gethsemane when Jesus had asked him to stay awake (Matt. 26:35-45). Was there a connection in his mind between his sleepiness and his even greater failure—denying that he even knew Jesus—only a short time later?

Christians have often understood that there are three enemies of our souls: the world, the flesh, and **the Devil**. Here Peter emphasized the reality of Satan, the evil supernatural being who, with his hosts of demons, opposes God's plans and means to crush God's people. Note the following details:

- The Devil is our **adversary**. He is our spiritual foe. He will prompt us to pride or will cause us to be overwhelmed by our circumstances.
- The Devil is vicious. He is like **a roaring lion**, which can terrify anyone of any culture.
- The Devil is restless. He is **prowl[ing] around**, always looking for mischief (see Job 1 for an example).
- The Devil has evil intentions. He is looking **for anyone he can devour**. He uses suffering and persecution and any kind of schemes he can think of.

### VERSE 9

We need not cower before our enemy. Instead, we can **resist him**, standing against him like an army against an advancing foe. As we have seen, God resists the proud (v. 5), and He will give His humble servants the power

### 1 PETER 5:8

<sup>8</sup> Be serious! Be alert!  
Your adversary the Devil is prowling around like a roaring lion, looking for anyone he can devour.

### 1 PETER 5:9

<sup>9</sup> Resist him and be firm in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are being experienced by your fellow believers throughout the world.

to resist the Devil. (See Paul’s extensive treatment of this subject in Eph. 6:10-20, using the extended analogy of a soldier’s armor.)

Peter gave two instructions to his readers about how to resist Satan. The first is that they were to **be firm in the faith**. Bible students and translators have disagreed about exactly what Peter meant by faith. Was he talking about the content of Christianity, considered as a body of truth? Or did he mean our personal experience of trust in God’s power? Ultimately, both are true. We resist the Devil as we place our faith in the truths of the gospel, “the faith that was delivered to the saints once for all” (Jude 3). Peter’s second instruction was for them to remember that they were not the only ones facing battle. **Fellow believers throughout the world** were also experiencing spiritual warfare.

#### VERSES 10-11

Peter had completed his exhortation. Now he prayed for his suffering readers, concluding the main body of his letter. God is more powerful than the Devil. He has all the riches of His **grace** (“favor”) for those who have humbly committed themselves to Him and who resist the Devil. By reminding his readers that God **called** them, Peter noted once again God’s sovereignty. The phrase **His eternal glory** is a reminder of the reality of the future hope believers have “kept in heaven for you” (1:4). And of course, all this is possible only because of **Christ Jesus**.

On one hand, believers experience suffering in this life, but only for a short season. This life is but a moment compared to eternal glory. On the other hand, the apostle declared that what has been broken in this life will be fully repaired. The verbs **restore**, **establish**, and **strengthen** together give us another impression of glory. *Restore* suggests repairing something broken and making it whole. *Establish* implies putting in a rightful place. *Strengthen* means to establish on a firm foundation. Whatever the future holds, we can carry on well in the midst of suffering.

The doxology of 5:11 is essentially repeated from 4:11. Peter once again affirmed that God’s promises (especially those of 5:10) will be fulfilled. Because God has all **dominion** (or “power”) as well as all grace, now and **forever**, it will be done. The final **amen** means “so be it” and marks the formal ending of the body of the letter.

(In PSG, p. 99) **Is your tendency to ignore the reality of the Devil or to fear him too much? How does this passage help you to find a balanced approach to dealing with the Devil?**

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#### 1 PETER 5:10-11

<sup>10</sup> Now the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ Jesus, will personally restore, establish, strengthen, and support you after you have suffered a little. <sup>11</sup> The dominion belongs to Him forever. Amen.

# LEAD GROUP BIBLE STUDY

## FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

**DISPLAY:** Display on the door of your room or on a posterboard the words “Weather Alert.” As the group arrives, guide individuals to name types of adverse weather events (tornadoes, hurricanes, thunderstorms, flash floods, snow, ice, etc.) to which people need to be alerted.

**EXPLAIN:** Point out that weather alerts include both watches and warnings. *A watch indicates the potential exists for bad weather to develop. A warning means bad weather is present in your area and you need to take immediate protective action.*

**DISCUSS:** *Do you think believers today consider Satan’s influence more as a watch or a warning? Why? From the PSG (p. 92): What are some ways that you have suffered by not being alert to your surroundings? How could you have avoided those situations?*

**TRANSITION:** *Peter alerted his readers to a threat worse than an impending storm—Satan and his influence. Peter wanted to make sure that the leaders and the followers were all alert to the workings of the Enemy.*

## EXPLORE THE TEXT

**READ:** Read aloud 1 Peter 5:1-4, asking the group to listen for Peter’s positive direction and cautions for church leaders.

**EXPLAIN:** *Peter used the word “elder/elders” to apply to pastoral leaders in the church. “Elders” seemed to be used interchangeably with “shepherds” and “pastors.”*

**ASK:** *Why is it important for spiritual leaders to carefully examine their motives? How does motive impact how one leads? (PSG, p. 94)*

**GUIDE:** Lead the group to complete the Bible Skill activity (PSG, p. 95) to provide insight into the biblical concepts of a shepherd and his sheep. Invite a volunteer to read John 10:11, identifying Jesus as “the good shepherd.”

**DISCUSS:** Highlight the two truths of which Peter reminded church leaders in verse 4. Ask: *Which do you believe to be a stronger motivator—accountability to God or reward? Explain. (PSG, p. 96)*

**CLARIFY:** *While this passage focuses on the role of church leaders, it does not negate the responsibility of local congregations to care for the needs of their pastor and other church leaders. Encourage the group to reflect on their church leaders during the session. (Note: An opportunity to show appreciation will be discussed later in the session.)*

**TRANSITION:** *After focusing on church leaders, Peter addressed those who make up the church.*

**READ:** Direct a volunteer to read aloud 1 Peter 5:5-7. Remind the group that this passage follows verses that described godly leaders who are leading for the right reasons.

**CLARIFY:** *Verse 5 should not be restricted to men or a certain age group. It probably refers to those younger in faith who are following the leaders of the church.*

**GUIDE:** Use the information under Verse 5 (p. 97; PSG, p. 96) to describe humility.

**DISCUSS:** *How have you seen God resist the proud? How have you seen Him give grace to the humble?* (PSG, p. 97)

**TRANSITION:** *Peter directed believers to practice humility and to depend on God for their needs.*

**EMPHASIZE:** Draw attention to **Pack Item 8** (Poster: Key Passages on Suffering), and then lead the group to discuss: *What is the connection between humility and depending on God when suffering?*

**GUIDE:** Lead individuals to write 1 Peter 5:7, the memory verse for the week, in the margin of their PSG. Explain that the word used for “care” is the same as the one translated “worry” or “anxious” in Philippians 4:6.

**DISCUSS:** *Why do Christians sometimes hold on to their anxieties rather than presenting them to the Lord? What makes it so difficult to trust God’s timing and His care for us?* (PSG, p. 98)

**TRANSITION:** *Worry and anxiety can create inward focus, producing distractions and reducing awareness of other aspects of life. Peter wanted to make sure that the leaders and the followers were alert to the workings of the Devil.*

**READ:** Direct the group to listen for how believers are to respond to the Devil as a volunteer reads aloud 1 Peter 5:8-11. Invite the group to share what they discovered.

**DISCUSS:** *Is your tendency to ignore the reality of the Devil or to fear him too much? How does this passage help you to find a balanced approach to dealing with the Devil?* (PSG, p. 99)

**DIRECT:** Point out that the same God who allows the Devil to roar and seek someone to devour is the God who deeply cares for the believer. Guide everyone to read verse 10 and locate four words that describe how God protects and supports believers.

**EMPHASIZE:** Say the following from the PSG (p. 99): *Peter reminded his readers God would protect them through their suffering. He would do four things for them: restore, establish, strengthen, and support. All four words emphasize the same idea—God would see them through their suffering and make them strong enough to remain faithful to Him. This would happen after they suffered a little. No matter how long suffering is in this lifetime, it is brief in comparison to eternity.*

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## SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

**EXPLAIN:** *In order to remain alert, we need responsible spiritual leaders who are leading receptive spiritual followers. Together, leaders and followers can expose the work of our enemy, Satan, and can bring glory to God and magnify His grace in our lives.*

**CHALLENGE:** Lead the group to answer the third question set on page 100 of the PSG: *Discuss with the group ways of recognizing Satan’s attacks. How do you respond when threatened by the enemy as you see signs of his prowling?*

**PRAY:** Close in prayer for believers to be alert and depend on God’s strength to overcome Satan’s influence.



## PRACTICE

- If you used the idea from Summarize and Challenge under More Ideas below, remind the group to send a note of encouragement to a leader this week. Follow up with your own note to a church leader who has encouraged you.
- Send a message to the group that includes this session's memory verse (1 Peter 5:7) as a reminder to trust God with their worries.
- Contact those not present. Ask for their permission to share prayer requests with others in the group.

## MORE IDEAS

### FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

To supplement the focus activity, play the weather alert sound at the beginning of the session. Discuss: *How do you find out about weather hazards? How do you respond to them? What warning sources do you trust? Why?*

### EXPLORE THE TEXT

- To reinforce the concept of shepherds and their flock, refer to Psalm 23. Direct the group to locate the following tasks of the shepherd according to that psalm: to lead and correct, to provide spiritual guidance and feeding, to offer comfort, and to strengthen.
- To enhance the discussion of 1 Peter 5:7, guide individuals to reflect on a care or worry they have been reluctant to trust to the Lord. Ask: *What are some things that cause people to be reluctant to trust God with a care or worry? How can a person overcome those roadblocks?*
- To provide additional insight into resisting the Devil, point out that the Greek transliteration of "resist," *anthistēmi*, was used in several settings in the New Testament. Invite volunteers to read Galatians 2:11 and 2 Timothy 3:8. Stress that resisting is an active verb, not a passive one.

### SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

To supplement the challenge, discuss the first question set on page 100 of the PSG: *What are some of the qualities you appreciate in your leaders who care for the church? Take time to send a note, thanking them for the way they lead.* Invite volunteers to share how they have experienced God working through a church leader. Encourage the group to express encouragement to a church leader in the coming week.

### SUGGESTED MUSIC IDEA

Play or sing "Savior, Like a Shepherd Lead Us," attributed to Dorothy A. Thrupp. Review the words of the first verse to reflect on the role of shepherds, sheep, and the Good Shepherd. Reflect on the second verse to claim God's strength in resisting the Devil.

# BEING USEFUL

God's power shapes character as believers grow in their faith.

## 2 PETER 1:3-11

**MEMORY VERSE: 2 PETER 1:3**

### PREPARE TO LEAD THE GROUP TIME

- **READ** 2 Peter 1:1-11, *First Thoughts* (p. 104), and *Understand the Context* (pp. 104-105). Make note of the ways Peter assures his readers God has provided what they need to be empowered for service.
- **STUDY** 2 Peter 1:3-11 using *Explore the Bible* (pp. 105-109). As you study, note the progression of virtues listed in verses 5-7. List ways each virtue is developed, looking for ways it has been or is being developed in your own life. Consult the *Explore the Bible Adult Commentary* (available in print and digital format from *LifeWay.com*) for additional insight.
- **PLAN** the group time using the ideas under *Lead Group Bible Study* (pp. 110-111), *More Ideas* (p. 112), ideas included in *QuickSource*, and online at *Blog.LifeWay.com/ExploretheBible*.
- **GROW** with other group leaders at the *Groups Ministry* blog (*LifeWay.com/GroupMinistry*).
- **GATHER** the following items:  Personal Study Guides;  Small strips of paper with one of the virtues Peter listed in verses 5-7 written on each (enough for each person in your group);  **PACK ITEM 5** (*Bookmark: Memory Verses*) if needed. For *More Ideas*, gather:  A puzzle;  Adhesive tape;  Eyeglasses. Prepare to display the following *Pack Item*:  **PACK ITEM 9** (*Poster: Christian Virtues*).



## FIRST THOUGHTS

### KEY DOCTRINE

#### *Justification*

Justification is God's gracious and full acquittal upon principles of His righteousness of all sinners who repent and believe in Christ.

Imagine the scene at a sporting event. The fans have arrived, and everyone is waiting for the teams to enter. The players have practiced, worked out, and listened to the coaches. They're ready. Right before the teams enter, a live feed of the visiting team's head coach appears on the screens. "Men, you are completely prepared. You have done everything I've asked, and you know everything you need to know. I assure you we will win today's game!"

(In PSG, p. 102) **How would you respond if you were in the stands? What if you were a member of the home team?**

### BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR

For additional context, read "Blindness as Biblical Imagery" in the Fall 2016 issue of *Biblical Illustrator*. Available at [LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator](http://LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator).

That sounds too confident, doesn't it? There are few situations we face in which there's a 100% provision of what's needed and success is guaranteed. How different our lives would be if there were more absolutely sure things in our future. As Peter wrote his second letter, he began on a remarkably confident note. He wanted his readers to move forward in their lives with absolute assurance God had provided everything they needed to succeed in living godly lives. As we will see, for Peter, success was not about winning or losing a game but about building true character.

## UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

### 2 PETER 1:1-11

Because Peter's second epistle is even shorter than his first, we have limited data to make an accurate assessment of some of the particulars we'd like to know. For example, how much time passed between the writing of the two letters? (Perhaps a few months; maybe a few years.) Was Peter writing to the same congregations he addressed in his first letter? (Maybe; see 2 Pet. 3:1.) We can be confident that this was the apostle's final correspondence, written shortly before his death. (See 2 Pet. 1:14.) Further, he wrote with a great sense of his authority as Jesus' ambassador. (He designated himself as "Simeon Peter, a slave and an apostle of Jesus Christ," 1:1; "Simeon" is the formal form of his more familiar birth name "Simon.")

Peter followed the same letter-writing format in this letter as he had before. There's a formal salutation and greeting (see 1 Pet. 1:1-3; 2 Pet. 1:1-2). Then he launched into his subject matter, covering a variety of topics (see 1 Pet. 1:4-5:9; 2 Pet. 1:3-3:13). Finally, he wrapped up with a formal conclusion (see 1 Pet. 5:10-14; 2 Pet. 3:14-18).

What would you communicate to good friends to encourage them if you knew it was your last opportunity to write anything to them? Our study for this week considers the first—and perhaps most important—subject on Peter's mind in just this situation. He wanted his readers to be supremely

confident that God's power had already provided everything necessary for them to shape their character and to grow in godliness. Peter began by affirming God's complete provision (1:3-4). He then developed a pathway to godly character, listing one virtue after another (1:5-9). He concluded these opening thoughts with a command that his readers confirm their salvation through godly living (1:10-11).

## EXPLORE THE TEXT

### STAND ON GOD'S COMPLETE PROVISION (2 PET. 1:3-4)

#### VERSE 3

Peter's beginning point is the *divine power* that God has extended to His people. We are not dependent on our own meager strength to live as Christians. Rather, *everything required* already has been lavished upon us. Note that right away the apostle emphasized that it isn't merely *life*, but rather *life* and *godliness* that we pursue. Godliness is a synonym for "holiness" or "sanctification" found several times in 2 Peter (2 Pet. 1:3,6,7; 3:11).

Everything needed is already available to all believers; it doesn't take esoteric knowledge or specialized theological education to experience the Christian life as God means us to enjoy it. There are no super-secrets that can be revealed to only a select group of super-saints. It simply takes *knowledge of Him*, that is, relationship knowledge rather than merely knowledge about Him. The apostle emphasized three particular aspects of the Person we know:

- He *called us*. Salvation did not originate with us but rather is based on God's initiative.
- He is characterized *by His own glory*. The glory of the Father and the Son is the splendor of God's identity: who He is.
- He is characterized by *goodness*. This term refers to God's virtue or excellence in everything that He does.

#### VERSE 4

From God's power and Person flow His promises. In the Old Testament, the God of Israel made many promises to His covenant people. The Lord Jesus has made *very great and precious promises* to His new covenant people. The apostle provided a striking contrast. On one hand, because of the promises of God, we now *share in the divine nature*. Peter did not mean that we are somehow absorbed into God, losing our individual identity. Rather, we have been born again and made part of God's family (1 Pet. 1:3), or, to use a phrase familiar from Paul, we are united to Christ, that is, we are "in Him" (Eph. 1:3-11).

The other side of the coin is that we are now already *escaping the corruption that is in the world*. Peter understood that the world—thought of as life apart from God—is no friend of Christians. If someone insists on

#### 2 PETER 1:3

<sup>3</sup> His divine power has given us everything required for life and godliness through the knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and goodness.

#### 2 PETER 1:4

<sup>4</sup> By these He has given us very great and precious promises, so that through them you may share in the divine nature, escaping the corruption that is in the world because of evil desires.

following the ways of the world, the inevitable end is decay and death. At the same time, we cannot entirely blame the world. It is the personal **evil desires** of individuals that lead them to make choices in favor of the world and in opposition to God.

Note the contrasting ideas that verses 3-4 have presented: *life and godliness versus corruption; knowledge of Him versus evil desires*. We began to experience amazing positive blessings when we first trusted Christ, and we can be assured God will bring them to completion. In the next verses, Peter wrote about our responsibility as we continue this journey.

**List two or three specific promises of God that you rely on. What connection do you see between God’s promises and living a life of godliness, sharing in the divine nature?**

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## CULTIVATE YOUR CHARACTER (2 PET. 1:5-9)

### VERSES 5-7

**For this very reason**, that is, because of God’s power, Person, and promises, we cannot sit back and “just let God do it.” God’s grace puts us to work. When we understand the gospel, we make every effort to cultivate the new life implanted when we were born again. Peter was not creating some legalistic form of works righteousness; rather, he was showing how gospel transformation works. He noted eight virtues, or character qualities, which result in a balanced and fruitful Christian life. He began with faith and culminated with love. We may picture these as being successive rungs on a ladder—or steps up to a platform. Certainly faith is the wellspring of the Christian life, and love is greatest virtue of all (1 Cor. 13). We should not suppose Peter had in mind a rigid relationship among these virtues. Thus, it’s not as if we can’t start developing goodness until we’ve become mature in faith, and so on. The relationship among these eight qualities is organic; they overlap with each other (like the fruit of the Spirit in Gal. 5:22-23).

1. **Faith.** By faith we were born again. We live by faith, and living by faith is not passive but active. Thus, we Christians are called on to **supplement** our faith. The verb *supplement* is unusual in the New Testament, implying vigorous and generous cooperation in a particular endeavor.

2. **Goodness.** This is the same quality that Peter attributed to God Himself in 1:3. Because God is characterized by excellence or virtue, He expects those in His family to become like Him in this regard. True human goodness is not defined by cultural norms but by the goodness that our Lord exhibited during His earthly lifetime. Such moral excellence is one of the qualities that Paul urged the Philippians to “dwell on” (Phil. 4:8).

3. **Knowledge.** Factual knowledge of truth is an important facet of the Christian life. No believer needs to fear growing in knowledge. There is no super-secret knowledge open only to certain super-Christians. The word

### 2 PETER 1:5-7

<sup>5</sup> For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with goodness, goodness with knowledge, <sup>6</sup> knowledge with self-control, self-control with endurance, endurance with godliness, <sup>7</sup> godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love.

Peter used here is similar to the word he used in 1:3. Yet here, surely, Peter had in mind the practical exercise of wisdom so that we make right choices. Knowledge for the sake of knowledge simply instills arrogance (1 Cor. 8:1).

4. **Self-control.** This virtue refers to controlling one's passions—fleshly desires, including food and drink and sex—instead of being controlled by them. Several Greek philosophers before Christ had held up this virtue as desirable but unattainable. For Christians, the means to self-control is not willpower but submission to the power of the indwelling Spirit. Sadly, in the history of Christianity, some have argued for a libertine approach to morals, supposing that Christian liberty means we are free to live according to our human passions (see 3:3 for an example in this epistle).

5. **Endurance.** If Peter's readers were the same as those addressed in his first epistle, then he may very well have had in mind patience while suffering persecution for Christ's sake. Later on in this letter, he noted that some false teachers were scoffing at the truth of Christ's return (3:3-4). The apostle may have had enduring this kind of hostility in mind as well. We may face any number of life situations that tempt us to turn away from Christ. If we have intentionally developed the quality of endurance, we will not be thrown by these difficulties.

6. **Godliness.** In 1:3, Peter had written that we have already received everything necessary for life and godliness. Here, he noted that we are to be intentional about developing this quality. Striving toward Christlikeness or personal holiness is not optional for believers.

7. **Brotherly affection.** In 1 Peter 1:22, the apostle had commended this virtue. Family members are expected to express warmth and to care for one another. In many human families, this is natural; sometimes we find it easy to be kind to our sisters and brothers in God's family. Yet people can be difficult. Christians can rub each other the wrong way. Thus, Peter applauded this virtue as a quality we are to make every effort to attain.

8. **Love.** This is the same term (*agape*) Paul used in 1 Corinthians 13, which ended with the climactic exclamation, "Now these three remain: faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love" (1 Cor. 13:13).

**Review the eight virtues in verses 5-7. Circle the virtue in which you have experienced good growth during the past year. Underline the virtue for which you need to experience the most growth during the year ahead. What steps will you take to "make every effort" to grow in this area of your life?**

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#### VERSE 8

In verse 8, Peter showed the positive outcome of growing in character. He expected a lifelong pattern of spiritual growth for Jesus' followers. As long as we are on our earthly journey of faith, we need to keep growing.

### BIBLE SKILL

*Use other Scripture to help understand a Bible passage.*

"Virtue lists" are found in several New Testament passages. Compare 2 Peter 1:5-6 to the following lists from Paul's epistles: 2 Corinthians 6:6; Galatians 5:22-23; Colossians 3:12-14; 1 Timothy 4:12; 6:11. Develop a table showing the virtues in each passage and noting which virtues appear multiple times. Which virtues are the most frequently noted? What does the frequency reveal about the importance of each virtue?

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### 2 PETER 1:8

<sup>8</sup> For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they will keep you from being useless or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We recognize that the seeds of these traits were God's gift to us when we were born again; our responsibility is to cultivate them so that they are measurably increasing. Further, as we grow, our character will inevitably overflow in good works. We won't just sit by idly, **useless or unfruitful**. Instead, we'll be useful and fruitful, just as the fruit of the Spirit is meant to result in good works. (See Paul's exhortations in Gal. 6 following his list of the fruit of the Spirit.)

Sometimes, people claim that they have knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, but their lives do not show growth in holiness and they appear to be useless in God's kingdom. It's no stretch to see that Peter's point is that such a claim is false. How tragic it is for people to suppose that merely gaining factual knowledge of Scripture or of the Lord is all there is to the Christian life.

## 2 PETER 1:9

<sup>9</sup> The person who lacks these things is blind and shortsighted and has forgotten the cleansing from his past sins.

### VERSE 9

The apostle showed the negative result of not growing in the Christian virtues. Peter used the image of physical blindness to describe those who have made no effort to grow in godliness. He also used the term **shortsighted**. How can a blind person also be nearsighted? The idea may be that the people he described were spiritually blind because they had willfully closed their eyes (just as nearsighted persons often squint).

Who is the person who has **forgotten the cleansing from his past sins**—and is therefore useless and unfruitful (v. 8)? Peter might have had in mind people whose “cleansing” was only superficial. They were not truly born again and had not received new life in Christ. (The reference to cleansing may suggest they had been baptized; see 1 John 2:19 for an example of those whose Christianity was superficial.) On the other hand, the apostle might be referring to genuine Christians who had backslidden and fallen into serious error in their understanding of the Christian life. If some of Peter's original readers fell into this category, his words were meant to startle them back into spiritual sight. Ultimately God alone knows a person's heart (see 2 Tim. 2:19).

## LIVE WITH ASSURANCE (2 PET. 1:10-11)

### VERSE 10

**Therefore**, that is, in light of what was written in verses 3-9, the apostle set before his readers a challenge. He believed they were genuine Christians, referring to them as **brothers**. The challenge was to **make every effort** (a phrase using similar vocabulary to 1:5). This endeavor would result in a personal confirmation—that is, making something firm in their personal experience. He skillfully noted both God's initiative in salvation as well as our human responsibility. On one hand is God's **calling and election** of persons. God has done everything necessary to secure our salvation. He elects us, and in the course of time He calls us to a relationship with Himself. (See Rom. 8:28-30; 1 Pet. 2:9; Rev. 17:14 for other passages in which God's choosing and calling are both noted.) On the other hand is our human responsibility to believe the gospel—and to continue to cling

## 2 PETER 1:10

<sup>10</sup> Therefore, brothers, make every effort to confirm your calling and election, because if you do these things you will never stumble.

to Christ and to do these things which Peter had just exhorted. We are to “walk worthy of the calling” to which we have responded (Eph. 4:1).

Two results follow in the lives of those who confirm God’s calling by living a godly life. First, **you will never stumble**. Peter did not mean that we will be sinless; in fact, we still falter from time to time. Peter meant that such believers will not experience spiritual disaster. God will see to it that authentic Christians persevere until the end. Good works are evidence of salvation and contribute to our assurance (1 John 2:3); they are never the basis for salvation.

#### VERSE 11

The second result to those who live lives of faith and character growth and good works happens at the end of life’s journey. The apostle piled up language that stirs our hearts so that we long to experience our final destination. He noted that our true home is **the eternal kingdom of our Lord**. This world as it now stands will disappear (2 Pet. 3:10). In some places in the New Testament “the kingdom of God” is recognized as truly arriving—if only in seed form—with the first coming of Jesus (Matt. 12:28). Here, Peter was thinking entirely of the future fulfillment of the kingdom (Matt. 25:46). The apostle here used wonderful word combinations that fill our hearts with expectation:

- **Eternal kingdom** is a phrase found here only in the New Testament.
- **Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ** is a New Testament phrase found only here and in 2 Peter 2:20; 3:18.

Those with a personal relationship with Jesus are the ones assured of this promise. This bright future will be **richly supplied** by God. The term *richly* could be translated “lavishly”; it is related to the term for “wealth” or “riches” and is the opposite of skimpy. Further, the verb translated *supplied* is a form of the same verb Peter had used in 1:5 (there translated “supplement”). Just as we are to cooperate vigorously and generously in the endeavor of growing in Christian virtues (1:5), so now we see that God has promised to supply vigorously and generously and richly all the joys associated with our entrance into Christ’s heavenly kingdom.

**How might you explain to a new believer what it means to “confirm” one’s salvation? Does this concept encourage you or cause you anxiety? How do you confirm your own salvation?**

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## 2 PETER 1:11

**11** For in this way, entry into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be richly supplied to you.

# LEAD GROUP BIBLE STUDY

## FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

**INTRODUCE:** Record on a posterboard the following activities: assemble a puzzle, build a bicycle, and bake a cake. As the group arrives, discuss: *What would give you the confidence that you could do each of these? How would you feel if you attempted one of them and realized you were missing a part or an ingredient?*

**EXPLAIN:** Comment that attempting to put together an item without an essential part or make a recipe without ingredients is an exercise in futility. Godly living is an essential part of following Jesus Christ.

**TRANSITION:** Use information from Understand the Context (pp. 104-105; PSG, p. 103) to explain that Peter had emphasized suffering and the role that it was playing in the lives of believers in his first letter. *Peter's second letter, the focus of our study today, emphasizes practical Christian living, and he warns believers against tolerating false teachers who are leading people away from the truth.*

## EXPLORE THE TEXT

**READ:** As a volunteer reads aloud 2 Peter 1:3-4, direct the group to listen for the resources believers have through Christ.

**EXPLAIN:** *Christians are saved not by their own abilities, but by God's power. Because of that salvation, God has given His children everything required for life and godliness (v. 3).* Direct attention to the information under Verse 3 in the PSG on pages 103-104 to explain eternal life and godliness.

**ASK:** *How does knowing that God has provided everything we need give us confidence in serving Him?* (PSG, p. 104)

**GUIDE:** Point out that 2 Peter 1:3 is the memory verse for the week. Lead the group in reading the verse aloud in unison. Encourage the group to write the verse in their own words in the white space of their PSGs. Distribute, as needed, copies of **Pack Item 5** (*Bookmark: Memory Verses*).

**TRANSITION:** *Even though God initiated salvation and provided everything necessary for godliness, believers still have responsibility to pursue spiritual growth. Peter encouraged Christians to make every effort to supplement their faith.*

**READ:** Direct the group to listen for a chain of grace that promotes spiritual growth in the life of a believer while a volunteer reads 2 Peter 1:5-9.

**STUDY:** Distribute strips of paper, each containing one of the virtues on Peter's list to individuals or teams of two or three people. Direct each team or individual to locate information about the virtue or virtues they received under Verses 6 and 7 in the PSG (pp. 106-107). Make sure each virtue is assigned to a person or team. After allowing time for study, call for information to be shared, one virtue at a time, in order. Record responses on **Pack Item 9** (*Poster: Christian Virtues*).

**ASK:** *In what ways have you seen believers best display these qualities to the world?*

**SHARE:** *Peter explained the point of listing the virtues in verse 8. If believers were growing in these virtues, then they would not be useless or unfruitful in their knowledge of Jesus Christ. The word for “useless” was used to describe idle workers who were wasting their time in the marketplace instead of working. Call for volunteers to read other verses that use this word: Matthew 20:3,6 and James 2:20.*

**DISCUSS:** *Why is it important to be useful and fruitful in God’s kingdom? What obstacles might you need to overcome to develop the virtues listed? (PSG, p. 107)*

**TRANSITION:** *Even though God has provided everything needed for believers to live godly lives, it is possible that we become shortsighted and live like those who do not believe. When that occurs, it is important for that person to go back and re-examine his or her calling and commitment.*

**READ:** Call on a volunteer to read 2 Peter 1:10-11, as the group listens for assurance.

**EMPHASIZE:** *Peter was not suggesting that God has any doubts about believers’ faith or calling. It is the individuals who need to be sure.*

**CLARIFY:** *Living in victory does not mean that we will never have a problem or will never sin again. Problems will come, and sometimes we yield to temptation. Peter’s emphasis is not on the individual event but on the progression of life.*

**STUDY:** Use the information under Verses 10-11 (pp. 108-109; PSG, pp. 108-109) to further explain these verses. Call for volunteers to read Philippians 1:6 and John 10:28 for encouragement.

**ASK:** *What evidence could a person point to that proves a person is truly following Christ? How does assurance of salvation impact how a person lives? (PSG, p. 109)*

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## **SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)**

**DIRECT:** Remind the group of the scenarios presented at the beginning of the group time, where they might undertake an activity without having everything they need. Lead the group to identify ways the truths found in this session give them confidence that God has provided everything they need to empower them for His service.

**DISCUSS:** *What has God done for you that assures you He will empower you for His service? How has this session encouraged you to grow in your faith?*

**DIRECT:** Challenge the group to respond to the second question set under In My Context (PSG, p. 110): *What can your Bible study group do to promote Christian growth in the lives of its members? Focus on actions that can be done as a group. Record actions that can be implemented within the group.*

**PRAY:** Re-read this session’s memory verse (2 Peter 1:3). Close with a time of prayer, thanking God for His power that shapes character as believers grow in faith.



## PRACTICE

- Follow up later in the week on the action your group selected to promote Christian growth in the lives of members.
- Participate in the memorization of 2 Peter 1:3 by emailing or texting the group and quoting the verse with them.
- Evaluate the strength of your chain of grace based on 2 Peter 1:5-7. Be aware of the areas in which you struggle most. Identify ways this study can strengthen you.

## MORE IDEAS

### FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

To replace the Focus Attention activity, provide a puzzle for the group to begin putting together as they arrive. Discuss: *What makes you trust that a puzzle has all its pieces before you begin assembling it? How would you feel if you reached the end of the puzzle and discovered a piece was missing?*

### EXPLORE THE TEXT

- To reinforce the memory verse idea, and reinforce the truth in 2 Peter 1:3 that God has given us all we need, discuss: *In our society that often focuses on seeking more and more, how can believers accept that God provides everything they need to be empowered for His service?*
- To enhance the activity for the virtues in 2 Peter 1:5-7, use adhesive tape to connect the strips of paper with virtues listed on them into a paper chain. Point out the progression of the virtues in the chain. Discuss: *How does each virtue listed make the next one possible?* (PSG, p. 102)
- To supplement the discussion of 2 Peter 1:10-11, display a pair of eyeglasses or draw the front of an eyeglass frame on the board. Explain that those who do not grow in faith have two vision problems. Write the word “blind” on one eyeglass lens. Invite a volunteer to locate and summarize the comments about being blind under Verse 9 (PSG, pp. 107-108). Write the word “nearsighted” on the second lens. Invite another volunteer to locate the related comments under Verse 9 (PSG, pp. 107-108).

### SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

To supplement the summary, guide the group to complete the Bible Skills activity (PSG, p. 105) and the questions that follow.

### SUGGESTED MUSIC IDEA

To close the session, point out that the hymn “Standing on the Promises,” by R. Kelso Carter, is based on 2 Peter 1:4. Invite a volunteer to read aloud 2 Peter 1:4. Then lead the group in singing the hymn.

# WITH TRUST

God's Word is trustworthy in all ways.

## 2 PETER 1:12-21

MEMORY VERSE: 2 PETER 1:21

### PREPARE TO LEAD THE GROUP TIME

- **READ** 2 Peter 1:12-21, First Thoughts (p. 114), and Understand the Context (pp. 114-115). Reflect on Peter's mind-set in sharing final thoughts before his death. How does this context undergird the significance of his words?
- **STUDY** 2 Peter 1:12-21, using Explore the Text on pages 115-119. As you study, notice the types or sources of revelation identified by Peter. How does each type or source reinforce that God's Word is trustworthy? Consult the *Explore the Bible Commentary* (available in print and digital format at [LifeWay.com](http://LifeWay.com)) for additional insight.
- **PLAN** the group time using the ideas under Lead Group Bible Study on pages 120-121 and More Ideas on page 122. Refer to the resources at [Blog.LifeWay.com/ExploretheBible](http://Blog.LifeWay.com/ExploretheBible) for more ideas.
- **GROW** from expert insights on weekly studies through the Ministry Grid ([MinistryGrid.com/Web/ExploretheBible](http://MinistryGrid.com/Web/ExploretheBible)).
- **GATHER** the following items:  Personal Study Guides; and  Copies of **PACK ITEM 5** (*Bookmark: Memory Verses*) if needed. For More Ideas, locate:  A recording of the children's song "The B-I-B-L-E." Display the following Pack Item:  **PACK ITEM 4** (*Time Line: 1, 2 Peter; Jude*).



# FIRST THOUGHTS

## KEY DOCTRINE

### *The Scriptures*

The Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired and is God's revelation of Himself to man.

## BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR

For additional context, read "Simon Peter's Farewell Address" in the Fall 2016 issue of *Biblical Illustrator*. Available at [LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator](http://LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator).

## BIBLE SKILL

*Memorize a verse and apply it to a real-life situation.*

Memorize 2 Peter 1:21 in your preferred Bible translation. Write the verse in your own words. Finally, write two or three sentences here or in a journal, stating how this verse can help you make a difficult decision or face a challenging situation.

In our day of social media, we have a problem determining which information is true and which is false. Hoaxes abound on the Internet. From the death of celebrities to new ways of charging your phone in the microwave, these hoaxes make people suspicious of all media. So in this day of truth and untruth, who can a person trust?

(In PSG, p. 112) **What individuals or sources do you consider trustworthy? How did you reach this conclusion about them? In your opinion, why does "trustworthiness" seem so hard to come by today?**

Trustworthiness can apply to things as well as to individuals. For example, many cooks have discovered cookbooks with recipes that always turn out great. Well-designed buildings (or bridges or airplanes) earn our confidence, and we entrust our lives to them. The apostle Peter, however, drew his readers' attention to Scripture as trustworthy in all ways. The Bible came from eyewitnesses to the truths that it described (2 Pet. 1:16-18). Peter, the writer of this letter, was one of those eyewitnesses. He had walked with Jesus. He had heard His teaching. The stories did not come to him secondhand but through his own eyes. Furthermore, Peter affirmed that the Holy Spirit inspired the Word of God as it was written, carefully guarding it against error or untruth. Peter believed that through eyewitness accounts and the presence of the Holy Spirit in the process of writing, his readers could trust the Word of God to give them everything they needed to know about God and the gospel.

# UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

## 2 PETER 1:12-21

In the first century, many religions were in competition. Rival temples and shrines filled the cities of the Roman Empire. There were the old gods of Greek mythology the Romans had adopted. There were Egyptian and Babylonian sects. Philosophies—we might call them "worldviews"—had become a source of religious truth for many intellectuals. Then there was Judaism, proportionately small as a percentage of the population. The Jews believed that God had spoken truth to their ancestors, who had written the books (actually, scrolls) they considered sacred Scripture, trustworthy and true, the very Word of God. Jesus clashed with Jewish religious leaders on many issues. Yet one area in which they all agreed was that the Jewish Scriptures were God's precious, reliable Word.

As a Jew, Peter had grown up with this understanding and also had heard Jesus' commitment to the Scriptures. But now it was decades later. The apostle was writing to Christians who had not been taught the nature of Scripture. They were living in a society with competing claims concerning the source of religious truth. Thus, as the apostle proceeded with his letter, he thought it essential to provide an understanding of what the Scriptures really were.

Peter prefaced his comments by reminding his readers how important it is to review God's truth from time to time. This was pressing for Peter because he wanted them to be able to recall God's truth after his death, which was at hand (2 Pet. 1:12-15). He went on to note his own experiences of Jesus' life. Eyewitness testimony in the Gospels is one factor involved in our accepting the reliability of what the writers recorded (1:16-18). At last, he got to the main point: God's written Word is the result of God's speaking through humans. God's Word is reliable and true; we can depend on its truthfulness (1:19-21).

## EXPLORE THE TEXT

### NEEDED REMINDERS (2 PET. 1:12-15)

#### VERSE 12

Peter knew that certain truths can easily be distorted or forgotten. By **these things** he meant the points he had made in 1:3-11 (see last week's study). The apostle was aware that he was offering a "refresher course," because his readers were **established in the truth**. His words imply that there was already a settled body of Christian teaching which the apostles and early church planters were carefully passing on. The verb rendered *established* (or "strengthened") is also found in Jesus' personal commission to Peter: "When you have turned back, strengthen your brothers" (Luke 22:32). Jesus had said this at the same time He predicted Peter would deny Him. From that time forward, Peter was painfully aware that even Jesus' loyal followers can abandon the basics and that gospel foundations must be constantly strengthened. We who think we are strong and established are to take heed, for we often are the ones who fall.

#### VERSES 13-14

These verses are highly suggestive of two related but separate sets of information. We learn a biblical understanding of bodily existence and bodily death. We also learn something about Peter's own life and approaching death.

*The nature of bodily existence and bodily death*—Our life on earth is temporary. It's like living in a **tent**, which is easily moved from place to place. Just as Israel's ancestors—Abraham and Sarah—were pilgrims who traveled in tents, so we all live in a bodily tent as "strangers and temporary residents" (1 Pet. 2:11). Further, human death may be compared to taking down such a tent. Tents then and now are designed for quick dismantling. Although these days we live in a time of fantastic medical advances, bodily

### 2 PETER 1:12

<sup>12</sup> Therefore I will always remind you about these things, even though you know them and are established in the truth you have.

### 2 PETER 1:13-14

<sup>13</sup> I consider it right, as long as I am in this bodily tent, to wake you up with a reminder, <sup>14</sup> knowing that I will soon lay aside my tent, as our Lord Jesus Christ has also shown me.

death can happen without notice. In the end, technology only delays death. I will have to lay aside my tent unless the Lord returns first.

*The nature of Peter's remaining ministry and approaching death*—Peter's ministry focus in the time he had left was to stir up believers, or as he put it, **to wake you up with a reminder**. Second, he knew he would die soon. According to Christian tradition, the apostle perished in Rome because of Nero's persecution. He likely thought this letter was his farewell address. Third, Peter had received special information from Jesus about his impending death. Whether Peter was recalling his conversation with Jesus shortly after the resurrection (John 21:18-19), or whether he had received recent revelation from our Lord Jesus Christ, is unknown.

## 2 PETER 1:15

<sup>15</sup> And I will also make every effort that you may be able to recall these things at any time after my departure.

### VERSE 15

In verse 12, “these things” meant what Peter had previously written about in 1:3-11. Here in verse 15, **these things** points ahead to some future writing project on Peter's part (note the future tense, **I will also make every effort**). What was he referring to? Some Bible students think he had in mind the remainder of the current epistle or perhaps an intended third epistle. Others have made the case that he was referring to the Gospel of Mark, an account of Jesus' life that, according to Christian tradition, was based on Peter's eyewitness memories.

Whatever Peter had in mind, he meant to leave a written record so that his readers would be able to recall these things at any time. These words strongly suggest that Peter, writing self-consciously as an apostle, composed as he did with the hope that his writings would be treasured and preserved by Christians. Here, in turn, is one of the seeds from which the Christian understanding of the New Testament books sprang. The writings of the apostles were destined to be included in God's authoritative Word. (Note that Peter referred to his death as a **departure**, the very same term used in Luke 9:31 of Jesus' own death.)

**Why was it important for Jesus' apostles to leave permanent reminders of their teachings? In your experience, why is it so easy to forget or distort the essential truths of the gospel? What processes help you remember the foundational truths of our faith?**

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## 2 PETER 1:16

<sup>16</sup> For we did not follow cleverly contrived myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ; instead, we were eyewitnesses of His majesty.

### EYEWITNESS ACCOUNTS (2 PET. 1:16-18)

#### VERSE 16

With the words **we did not follow cleverly contrived myths**, Peter was defending himself from attacks made by certain unidentified opponents of Christianity. It was fashionable in his day, just as it has been throughout the centuries until our times, for skeptics to assert that Christianity is based on imaginative, fictional stories. The apostle vigorously made the

case that the events surrounding the life of Jesus belonged to real space-and-time history. This contrasts with the various myths surrounding the religion of the Greek gods, which everyone, then and now, knew were non-historical, like Santa Claus or the Easter Bunny.

What Peter had emphasized in his preaching and teaching ministry were the present **power** and the future **coming** in glory **of our Lord Jesus Christ**. The present power of Jesus (transforming lives in conversion and bringing about godly character over a lifetime) is true only if these acts are a continuation of the ministry of the same Jesus who once walked on earth. Likewise, the future return of Jesus can only become a reality if there is continuity between Jesus in His first coming and Jesus in His second coming. (See Acts 1:11, “this Jesus.”) Thus, Peter made the important claim that he was a personal eyewitness of Jesus, as evidenced in the event that spectacularly demonstrated His majesty.

#### VERSE 17

That which especially displayed both Jesus’ power and His glory was the transfiguration (Mark 9:2-13). Peter never got over his astonishment that he (along with James and John) had the unspeakable privilege of seeing Jesus’ **honor and glory** revealed by **God the Father**. The opponents Peter was combating could claim no such eyewitness experience.

The transfiguration event has been the subject of intense scrutiny by Bible students. Why was it important for Jesus to be seen with His eternal splendor unveiled and visible to selected disciples? For Peter, the answer was to be found more in what he heard than what he saw. The **voice** from the heavenly Father (here alone in Scripture designated **the Majestic Glory**) extolled Jesus. Note the following affirmations the Father made about Jesus:

- Jesus is uniquely **My... Son**. Jesus alone is the eternal Son of the Father. As redeemed people, we are brought into God’s family as His adopted children (1 Pet. 1:14-17).
- The Father uniquely loves His Son. At the transfiguration, the Father reaffirmed aloud the affection He had proclaimed when His Son was baptized (Mark 1:11; 9:7).
- The Father is greatly pleased with His Son. Again, the heavenly voice declared again what had been spoken at Jesus’ baptism (Mark 1:11).

#### VERSE 18

Peter emphasized that he **heard this voice** because he was about to affirm that the Old Testament prophets had similarly heard from God (1:19-21). The message of the Bible is a written record of what men heard from the Almighty. Whatever opposition Peter and his readers were facing, the false teachers simply had never heard the voice of God speaking aloud to them, as had happened at the transfiguration.

The apostle again expressed his amazement: **we were with Him on the holy mountain**. The mount of transfiguration was *holy* (set apart for God) not because it previously had been dedicated or declared as a sacred space. Rather, it was holy because of what happened to Jesus there. How could Peter

### 2 PETER 1:17

<sup>17</sup> For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, a voice came to Him from the Majestic Glory: This is My beloved Son. I take delight in Him!

### 2 PETER 1:18

<sup>18</sup> And we heard this voice when it came from heaven while we were with Him on the holy mountain.

not think of the mountain as sacred when it was there that the heavenly splendor of Jesus was manifested to him? The transfiguration clearly made an enormous impact on those apostles who experienced it. As we have seen, Peter used this experience in three ways:

- He had authoritative, personal knowledge of the historical Jesus—unlike any of his opponents.
- There is continuity between the existing Scriptures and the message of the apostles (1:19-21).
- The revelation of Jesus' glory was a preview of Jesus' glory in His second coming (which the false teachers were mocking; see 3:4).

**Why does eyewitness testimony matter so much in our understanding of Christianity? Express in your own words the significance of Christ's transfiguration to your own life.**

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## WRITTEN BY GOD (2 PET. 1:19-21)

### VERSE 19

Peter affirmed the close connection between *the prophetic word* (the Scriptures of his day, which we call the Old Testament) and his eyewitness experience. The two are in a strongly confirmed relationship. Bible students understand Peter's meaning in one of two ways. Some believe that Peter was saying the Old Testament was even more certain than his own personal experience, thus declaring the total reliability of the written Scriptures. Others think he was emphasizing that his experience of the transfiguration confirmed the reliability of the Old Testament.

Peter urged his readers **to pay attention to** the Scriptures that we have. He used a familiar metaphor: Scripture is **a lamp shining in a dismal place** (see Ps. 119:105). Perhaps Peter was thinking of our hearts as murky and defiled by sin; the light reveals the dirt and is necessary for cleansing. We will walk in the lamplight of Scripture **until the day dawns and the morning star** (see p. 6) **rises**. These are references to the second coming, for Jesus is the "Bright Morning Star" (Rev. 22:16). In the full bright light of His coming, we will be transformed at last into perfect Christlikeness.

### VERSE 20

There are two major views about what Peter meant by this verse. In the first view, the apostle was explaining the origin of Scripture. He was referring to the actions of the prophets themselves. What they wrote did not come from their **own interpretation** or initiative. The Scriptures originated by the inspiration of the Spirit; therefore, they are reliable. Believers must therefore pay careful attention to them.

According to the second view, Peter was explaining how the prophecies of Scripture were to be interpreted, namely not from one's *own interpretation*.

## 2 PETER 1:19

<sup>19</sup> So we have the prophetic word strongly confirmed. You will do well to pay attention to it, as to a lamp shining in a dismal place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.

## 2 PETER 1:20

<sup>20</sup> First of all, you should know this: No prophecy of Scripture comes from one's own interpretation,

If this was his meaning, then he was arguing against independent, fanciful interpretations of the Bible, twisting texts to mean something they did not really mean. (See 3:16 for Peter’s criticism of this very practice.) By this view, Christians are to be guided in understanding the Old Testament by the interpretation of Jesus’ apostles as they were led by the Spirit to understand its Christ-centered message. Strange new Bible interpretations that no one has ever heard of before can be safely dismissed.

In light of the immediate context, particularly verse 21, the first explanation of verse 20 is preferable. Yet there is great application value whichever view is correct. We are right to affirm the divine origin of Scripture as well as to affirm that not every interpretation of a passage is valid.

#### VERSE 21

This text is crucial to our understanding of the nature of Scripture both as the Word of God and as the words of men. Peter began with a negative assertion: ***no prophecy ever came by the will of man***. However much a person may have longed to speak for God, this never happened unless God took the initiative. God was the One who took the lead with genuine prophetic words.

Peter continued with a positive assertion about the twofold nature of Scripture. On the one hand, Scripture was produced because ***men spoke from God*** and wrote down their words. On the other hand, this happened only because and when ***they were moved by the Holy Spirit***. The verb *moved* is a nautical metaphor taken from sailing a boat (Peter had been a fisherman on the Sea of Galilee). This same verb occurs in Acts 27:15,17, describing Paul’s ship as it was driven along by the wind. Here is a beautiful picture of the biblical prophets “raising their sails” to God’s Spirit who filled them and carried them in the direction He wished as they wrote. Our understanding of the nature of Scripture will always take into account that the Bible is completely the Word of God, even though it was recorded by men.

For Peter, Scripture was the Old Testament. However, we may be confident that the same process was at work as the Holy Spirit moved the apostles to write the books that would become the New Testament. Peter alluded to this at the end of this letter, where he referred to certain of Paul’s letters. After acknowledging that some of Paul’s teachings “are hard to understand,” he went on to affirm that these letters are comparable to “the rest of the Scriptures” (2 Pet. 3:16). Even in Peter’s lifetime it seems there was an acknowledgment that apostolic letters were worthy of being elevated to the status of Scripture. Indeed, the entire Bible is reliable and can be trusted as the Word of God.

**Why is it important to understand that the Scriptures are both the Word of God and the words of men? How might you use these verses to help a new believer understand why Christians believe that God’s Word is trustworthy in all ways?**

#### 2 PETER 1:21

<sup>21</sup> because no prophecy ever came by the will of man; instead, men spoke from God as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.

# LEAD GROUP BIBLE STUDY

## FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

**GUIDE:** Lead the group to identify ways people get information today. Responses may include social media, broadcast and printed news, and other people.

**DISCUSS:** *What individuals or sources do you consider trustworthy? How did you reach this conclusion about them? In your opinion, why does “trustworthiness” seem so hard to come by today?* (PSG, p. 112)

**TRANSITION:** *In today’s session, Peter stressed trustworthiness of the Scriptures. Peter believed that through eyewitness accounts and the presence of the Holy Spirit in the process of writing, his readers could trust the Word of God to give them everything that they needed to know about God and the gospel.*

## EXPLORE THE TEXT

**READ:** Invite a volunteer to read 2 Peter 1:12-15, listening for two major themes in Peter’s message (reminders about spiritual truths and his approaching death).

**EXPLAIN:** *Peter seemed to have an awareness that his death was imminent, and he desired to wake up the believers who were listening to the lies of the false teachers. The word for “wake up” could also be translated as “stir up” or “arouse.”*

**STUDY:** Lead everyone to locate three specific references to reminders about spiritual truths in verses 12-15.

**DISCUSS:** *Why would it be important to remind even mature believers of the truth? If you knew your time was short, what spiritual reminders would you give to those close to you?* (PSG, p. 114)

**EMPHASIZE:** *Peter spent his remaining time on earth strengthening believers. Draw attention to **Pack Item 4** (Time Line: 1,2 Peter; Jude), and use the information under Verse 14 (pp. 115-116; PSG, p. 115) to point out Peter’s martyrdom in Rome.*

**ASK:** *What are practical ways we could strengthen others in their faith?* (PSG, p. 115)

**READ:** Call for a volunteer to read aloud 2 Peter 1:16-18, as others listen for the comparison between myths and eyewitnesses.

**EXPLAIN:** *Both Greek and Roman religion were filled with myths about their gods, but they had no historical basis. Peter wanted his readers to know that this was not the case with Christianity. He made sure he clearly tied Christ’s ministry, death, and resurrection to history. He had firsthand knowledge of Jesus and referenced the transfiguration in verses 17-18. Use information under Verses 16-18 on pages 116-118 for further explanation.*

**STUDY:** Form three teams. Assign each team one of the following passages about the transfiguration: Matthew 17:1-13; Mark 9:2-13; and Luke 9:28-36. Allow time for the teams to review the passage and prepare a report of the transfiguration as if they were a

live-action news crew. Ask: *What details would the cameras zoom in on? What audio would be recorded? Whom would you interview, and what questions would you ask?* Invite the teams to share reports with the rest of the group.

**SHARE:** *The words of the Father to Jesus at His transfiguration (v. 17) mirrored His words at Jesus' baptism. Hearing the heavenly voice proclaim that God was well pleased with His Son was a validation that the honor and glory Jesus received on the mountain were legitimate.*

**DISCUSS:** *How would you handle critics who question the divine nature of Jesus? What would be the value of having eyewitness accounts when addressing a critic?* (PSG, p. 117)

**TRANSITION:** *Peter turned from eyewitness accounts to the prophetic words of the Old Testament Scriptures.*

**READ:** Invite a volunteer to read 2 Peter 1:19-21, as the group listens for imagery that refers to light and morning.

**EXPLAIN:** Use the information under Verse 19 (p. 118; PSG, pp. 117-118) to explain the day or morning star. *Peter reminded his readers that God's written Word was the result of God speaking through men.*

**STUDY:** Lead the group to search the information under Verse 21 (PSG, pp. 118-119) and today's memory verse (2 Peter 1:21) to identify the roles of God, the Holy Spirit, and those who wrote the Bible.

**DISCUSS:** *How would you explain the inspiration of the Scriptures to someone who wonders why they should believe a book written by humans?* (PSG, p. 119)

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## SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

**DISCUSS:** *How does 2 Peter 1:12-21 support the truth that God's Word is trustworthy at all times?* Invite the group to share additional insights gained.

**RECAP:** Read the statements under In My Context (PSG, p. 120) to present a summary of the study: *Believers can remind each other of the truth of the gospel and the Scriptures. Believers can affirm the power of the gospel through the demonstrations of that power that they have witnessed. The Bible is reliable and can be trusted as the Word of God.*

**TESTIFY:** Lead the group to answer the second question set under In My Context (PSG, p. 120): *How have you seen God demonstrate the power of the gospel in your own life? How can you share with others what you have experienced?* Invite volunteers to share their responses with the group. Suggest that individuals identify one person with whom they will share their experience this week.

**PRAY:** Thank God for the truth and power of God's Word. Praise Him for the Holy Spirit who guides us as we encounter those who are skeptical about the Bible's message.



## PRACTICE

- Based on Peter's example, reflect on the time you will "lay aside your tent." What do you need to say or do in the meantime? Prayerfully take action.
- Email the group, reminding them you are praying as they share their firsthand experience with God's power.
- Contact those who were absent. Inquire about prayer requests, and invite them to be present for the next session.

## MORE IDEAS

### FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

To replace the focus idea, play a recording of the children's song "The B-I-B-L-E." Lead the group in listening to it or singing along with the recording. Encourage them to stand up on the phrase "I stand." Discuss: *As an adult, what does it mean to "stand alone on the Word of God"? What are times or circumstances in which people are called to stand on God's Word?*

### EXPLORE THE TEXT

- To supplement the discussion about Peter's impending death, use information under Verse 13 (pp. 115-116) to explain Peter's imagery of a tent. Invite a volunteer to read 2 Corinthians 5:1-4, in which Paul used the tent imagery to describe the difference in his earthly life, which was temporary, and his spiritual nature, which was eternal. Discuss: *What other imagery could be used to describe the temporary nature of the earthly body?*
- To provide context for 2 Peter 1:12-15, give a mini-lecture about the transfiguration. Discuss: *What is the most amazing demonstration of God's power you have witnessed? How would you respond to someone who was skeptical about your experience?*
- To enhance the discussion of 2 Peter 1:19-21 and emphasize today's memory verse (2 Peter 1:21), direct the group to complete the Bible Skill activity in the PSG on page 119.

### SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

As an alternative challenge for the group, lead them to discuss the third question set (PSG, p. 120): *How do you approach those who are skeptical about the message of the Bible? Record ways you could use passages studied in this session to address the skeptic.* Lead the group to brainstorm ways they can use passages studied in this session to address a skeptic. Suggest that the group write their responses in the margin of the PSG for reference after the session.

### SUGGESTED MUSIC IDEA

Read "Word of God, Across the Ages," by Ferdinand Q. Blanchard, responsively. Read one line, and ask the group to read the next line in unison. Invite them to identify other hymns that celebrate God's Word, such as "Thy Word," "Holy Bible, Book Divine," and "Wonderful Words of Life." Sing a verse of these as time permits.

# ON GUARD

God's Word is the only standard of truth in our world.

## 2 PETER 2:1-3; JUDE 16-25

**MEMORY VERSE: JUDE 21**

### PREPARE TO LEAD THE GROUP TIME

- **READ** 2 Peter 2:1-22; Jude 1-25, First Thoughts (p. 124), and Understand the Context (pp. 124-125). Review the introduction to Jude on page 11, focusing on how to put the session passages into context. Review **PACK ITEM 10** (*Chart: A Comparison of 2 Peter 2 and Jude*) to prepare for the session.
- **STUDY** 2 Peter 2:1-3 and Jude 16-25, using Explore the Text on pages 125-129. As you read, look for words or concepts that describe the false teachers. Read the same passages in other translations and notice in what other ways the false teachers are described. Compare the descriptions to sources of false truth in today's world.
- **PLAN** the group time using the ideas under Lead Group Bible Study (pp. 130-131), More Ideas (p. 132), ideas included in *QuickSource*, and ideas online at [Blog.LifeWay.com/ExploretheBible](http://Blog.LifeWay.com/ExploretheBible) to customize the plans according to the needs of your group.
- **GROW** with other group leaders at the Groups Ministry blog ([LifeWay.com/GroupMinistry](http://LifeWay.com/GroupMinistry)).
- **GATHER** the following items:  Personal Study Guides;  A five to ten pound object or several objects;  A scale for weighing the objects. Prepare to display the following Pack Items:  **PACK ITEM 10** (*Chart: A Comparison of 2 Peter 2 and Jude*); and  **PACK ITEM 14** (*Poster: Jude 21*).



# FIRST THOUGHTS

## KEY DOCTRINE

### *The Scriptures*

The Scriptures are the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and religious opinions should be tried.

Jesus warned His followers to beware of false prophets and teachers (Matt. 7:15). His warning about wolves in sheep's clothing was essential—Christians have always had to be vigilant. One of the earliest Christian accounts of a false teacher was a man named Cerinthus, a leader of a sect in Ephesus during the time the apostle John lived there. Polycarp (one of John's disciples) later reported that once, when John was going to a public bathhouse in Ephesus, he saw Cerinthus inside. John rushed out with these words: "Let us fly, lest even the bathhouse fall down, because Cerinthus, the enemy of the truth, is within."

Our century has already produced its fair share of false teachers as well. We live in an era with an emphasis on subjective truth, tolerance, and being non-judgmental. This can leave us bewildered about how to recognize and respond to false teachings.

(In PSG, p. 123) **What is your reaction to John's words as he fled the bathhouse? How should we respond to false teachers and their teachings today?**

## BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR

For additional context, read "Heresies and False Teachings in the Early Church" in the Fall 2016 issue of *Biblical Illustrator*. Available at [LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator](http://LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator).

Both Peter and Jude helped their readers understand the false teachers that threatened their respective readers. The false teachers' motives were suspect, and they could be identified by the dangerous content of their teaching. They needed to be exposed. At the same time, readers were challenged to counter the false teachers by growing in their faith. They were responsible, further, for reaching out to those who might be susceptible to false teachings.

# UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

## 2 PETER 2:1-22; JUDE 1-25

This lesson is our primary opportunity to study the Epistle of Jude. As noted in the Bible book introduction to these studies (pp. 10-11), there is significant overlap in the content of 2 Peter 2 and Jude. Often, the writers made the same points in the same order. Consider the following examples:

2 Peter 2	Jude	Topic
v. 1	v. 4	false teachers who deny the Master
v. 4	v. 6	angels who sinned kept in chains
v. 6	v. 7	Sodom and Gomorrah as a bad example
v. 11	v. 9	(arch)angel role
v. 15	v. 11	Balaam as a bad example
v. 17	v. 13	darkness reserved for false teachers

Bible students have wondered what these similarities imply. Did Peter and Jude confer with each other? Did Jude have access to Peter's second epistle as he wrote, or, perhaps, did Peter have access to Jude's letter? There is insufficient evidence for us to be certain, and in the end, it doesn't really matter. What we have here are two early church leaders who were passionate about helping those they were writing to be on guard against false teachings and teachers.

Also as noted in the Bible book introduction, we know very little about Jude, his ministry, or the circumstances that caused him to write. We do not know the exact nature of the false teachings that he was combating. Yet his essential message is clear enough. The context passages for this lesson are 2 Peter 2 and Jude. Here's how these two texts line up:

### 2 Peter 2

Influence of false teachers (vv. 1-3)

Judgment of false teachers (vv. 4-10a)

Character of false teachers (vv. 10b-16)

Influence of false teachers (vv. 17-22)

### Jude

Salutation and purpose of the letter (vv. 1-4)

Character of false teachers, past and present (vv. 5-11)

Doom of false teachers (vv. 12-16)

Concluding exhortations and doxology (vv. 17-25)

In this week's lesson we will consider how both Peter and Jude exposed the motives and results of the false teachers (2 Pet. 2:1-3; Jude 16). Then we will look at Jude's reminder that the apostles already had warned them about the dangers of false teachers (Jude 17-19). Finally, we will see that Jude countered the false teachers by asking the readers to grow in their faith (Jude 20-25).

## EXPLORE THE TEXT

### EXPOSED (2 PET. 2:1-3; JUDE 16)

#### 2 PETER 2:1

Peter knew the Scriptures well and remembered that the people of Israel had dealt with many **false prophets**, such as the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18:19). Both Jesus and the apostles warned early disciples about present and future **false teachers** (Matt. 24:4-5; Acts 20:29-30; 1 Tim. 4:1-5; 2 John 7-11). In the present text Peter noted both their manner (**secretly**) and their content (**destructive heresies**). False teachers thrive on working indirectly, introducing doubt to people's minds. They take their cue from the Devil, who asked Eve, "Did God really say ...?" (Gen. 3:1). Heresies destroy the lives and the faith both of those who promote them and of those who receive them.

Throughout Christian history, the most serious errors have involved the Person of Jesus Christ (who He is) and the work He accomplished through His death (what He did). Peter combined these in the clause **denying the Master**

### BIBLE SKILL

Create a compare/contrast chart to study a passage.

On one side of a vertical line, identify words and phrases Jude used to describe false teachers and their teachings. On the other side, note words and phrases that describe genuine Christian teachers and teachings. Use Jude 16-25 as the basis for your study.

#### 2 PETER 2:1

<sup>1</sup> But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, and will bring swift destruction on themselves.

(His Person) **who bought them** (His work). The apostle was not implying that these false teachers were true believers. These false prophets were outwardly a part of the church—the company of those bought by Jesus—though they never repented and trusted Him for salvation. Peter expected that they would come to **swift destruction**; that is, whenever their judgment came—at Christ’s return or when they died—there would be no escape.

## 2 PETER 2:2

<sup>2</sup> Many will follow their unrestrained ways, and the way of truth will be blasphemed because of them.

### VERSE 2

There is a close connection between right beliefs and moral living. Accepting false doctrine predictably leads to immoral living. Here, Peter made the connection between the false teachers’ heresies and the **unrestrained ways** demonstrated by their lifestyle. The term *unrestrained ways* in the original language typically referred to sexual immorality. True Christianity always expresses itself in commitment to a godly lifestyle, the way of truth. False teachers eventually make light of this commitment because they have lost their sense of shame (**the way of truth will be blasphemed**).

## 2 PETER 2:3

<sup>3</sup> They will exploit you in their greed with deceptive words. Their condemnation, pronounced long ago, is not idle, and their destruction does not sleep.

### VERSE 3

In verses 1-2, Peter deftly exposed the false teachers by their manner (“secretly”), their content (“destructive heresies”), their destiny (“swift destruction”), and their lifestyle (“unrestrained ways”). Here he pointed out their motive. They were characterized by **greed**, desiring financial gain by their **deceptive words** in order to exploit the gullible. Sadly, Christianity has experienced too many leaders who have commercialized their version of the gospel to build their own reputation and their personal fortune.

Peter had already noted that such teachers face destruction; he further noted that their **condemnation** had been **pronounced long ago**. Thus, in 2:4-6 the apostle cited examples from the Old Testament of wicked people (and angels) who received divine judgment in their own day. Lest false teachers think they will get away with it because it seems that God has not acted decisively against them, they should beware: **their destruction does not sleep**. They will be judged at the right time.

## JUDE 16

<sup>16</sup> These people are discontented grumblers, walking according to their desires; their mouths utter arrogant words, flattering people for their own advantage.

### JUDE 16

We are uncertain whether Jude was condemning the same false teachers that Peter wrote about. At the very least, they were the same kind of teachers. Some of the characteristics Jude noted overlap with what Peter wrote: they were immoral, walking according to their desires rather than living according to God’s desires for holiness, and they were financially greedy, seeking their own advantage. Jude, however, expressed the following additional insights:

- They were **discontented grumblers**. Those who are never satisfied with God and His goodness and grace—as revealed in Scripture and experienced in daily life—are like the Israelites who complained and fell under God’s discipline (for example, Num. 14:26-35).
- They were always speaking **arrogant words**. We should certainly beware of those who claim to have insights into the Bible that nobody has ever heard of before.

- They were always **flattering people**. Unfortunately, many people are deceived by sweet talk. False teachers live by the premise, “Flattery will get you everywhere.”

### How do Peter’s and Jude’s descriptions help you identify today’s false teachers?

## PREDICTED (JUDE 17-19)

### VERSES 17-18

According to the Gospels, Jude, the younger half-brother of Jesus, did not accept Jesus as the Messiah during our Lord’s earthly ministry (Mark 6:3; John 7:5). Yet after the resurrection, he was numbered among the disciples (Acts 1:14). Thus, he personally knew **the apostles** and had heard them preach. He knew firsthand what they had predicted. His readers may very well have been taught personally by one of the apostles. Today, we remember by reading the apostles’ warnings as recorded in the New Testament.

Jude’s citation of the apostolic warning is not found in this exact form anywhere else in Scripture. Yet elements of the quotation are written elsewhere in Acts or the epistles:

- The apostles understood **the end time** had already arrived with the first coming of Christ (2 Tim. 3:1; 2 Pet. 3:3).
- The apostles predicted that **scoffers** would plague the churches. Jude was thinking of those who had wormed their way into churches and were creating mischief from the inside, rather than those who attacked Christianity from the outside, as verse 19 makes clear.
- The apostles understood that false teachers live immoral lives—and teach others that purity of living is optional. Such people are self-deceived, because they live **according to their own ungodly desires**.

### VERSE 19

Jude noted three additional deadly characteristics of the false teachers.

- They were divisive. False teachers create factions in congregations.
- They were worldly. The term translated **unbelievers** is the same term Paul used to describe the person who does not welcome that which comes from God’s Spirit (1 Cor. 2:14).
- They lacked the Holy **Spirit**. Often false teachers claim to have special insight from the Spirit. Ironically, they are not some special, spiritual class; they do not even have the Holy Spirit in them. Therefore, they are not truly saved (Rom. 8:9).

### JUDE 17-18

<sup>17</sup> But you, dear friends, remember what was predicted by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ; <sup>18</sup> they told you, “In the end time there will be scoffers walking according to their own ungodly desires.”

### JUDE 19

<sup>19</sup> These people create divisions and are unbelievers, not having the Spirit.

**If the characteristics of false teachers are so predictable, why do you think false teachers are still so successful today?**

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## JUDE 20-21

<sup>20</sup> But you, dear friends, as you build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit, <sup>21</sup> keep yourselves in the love of God, expecting the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ for eternal life.

## JUDE 22-23

<sup>22</sup> Have mercy on those who doubt; <sup>23</sup> save others by snatching them from the fire; have mercy on others but with fear, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh.

## COUNTERED (JUDE 20-25)

### VERSES 20-21

With the words **but you**, Jude turned from his extensive critique of false teachers to offer positive direction to the **dear friends** to whom he was writing. He began by reminding them of their **most holy faith**. At the beginning of the letter, he had spoken of “the faith that was delivered to the saints once for all” (v. 3). There, “faith” meant the body of objective truths proclaimed in the gospel. Here, at the end of the letter, *faith* refers to the subjective personal experience of the individual Christian. It is *holy* because of its source (our holy God) and its result (sinners become saints or “holy ones”). Thus, Jude reminded the readers to **build yourselves up**. As believers, we have an active role in our growth toward Christian maturity.

One critical means through which we grow spiritually is prayer. To **pray in the Holy Spirit** is to pray as He leads us, in accordance with biblical teachings, rather than praying mainly about what we want God to do for us (Eph. 6:18).

Jude’s teaching is a great summary of the Christian journey through this life, often called “sanctification.” But there is also the future experience of eternal life with Christ after our earthly pilgrimage ends, sometimes called “glorification.” Thus, Jude spoke of the importance of Christian hope: **expecting the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ**, either when He returns or when we die. We can be certain that no true believers will ever lose salvation.

### VERSES 22-23

As we have just observed, believers have a serious responsibility before God for the way we tend to our own souls. Jude was quick to indicate that we also have a spiritual duty to other people. He pointed out three kinds of people for whom we have responsibility.

- **Those who doubt.** This likely refers to Christians who have been deceived by false teachers. Rather than give up on them, we are to have mercy, gently correcting whenever this is possible.
- Those who are lost. Some persons (perhaps Jude had false teachers in mind) are on the brink of experiencing **the fire** of eternal judgment. We are responsible to reach out to lost persons with the good news and **save** some of them from condemnation.
- Those who might entangle us. There is a certain spiritual danger in seeking to reach some people, especially those whose lifestyles have been **defiled by the flesh**, or sinful nature.

We are to be careful—to conduct ourselves **with fear**—lest as believers we fall to the siren call of the sins in those we are trying to reach with the

good news. Thus, even as we show *mercy* to such persons, we are to hate their sins and all the awful messes that sin leaves behind. At the same time, we are to keep in mind Jude's vivid picture that sin clings to the sinful person just like the filthy, rotten clothes worn by someone full of oozing, bleeding sores. If we would refuse to put on the dirty shirt of such a sick person, how much more should we refuse to put on the sins of those we may be trying to reach.

#### VERSES 24-25

Jude concluded his letter with a wonderful doxology, a word of praise to God. After his attention on the ungodly, Jude drew attention to God and His greatness. God is great because He *is able to protect ... from stumbling* those who trust in Him. Christians may backslide from time to time, but God is committed to keeping us from falling into the kind of immorality or error that would cause us to stumble greatly. Parallel to this is God's greatness because He will *make you stand in the presence of His glory*. Our future glorification is assured, and by His great grace we will be able to stand before Him.

We cannot imagine what that wonderful, eternal future will be like. Jude gave two hints. We will enjoy the experience of being perfectly *blameless*. All traces of sin that we have wrestled with in this life will be gone. Further, we will be filled with unending *great joy*. We genuinely receive forgiveness and the beginnings of joy in this life, but Jude looked forward to the eternal future when we will enjoy them undiminished. Both now and in eternity, these come to us through Jesus Christ our Lord.

With a final burst of praise, Jude ascribed to *God our Savior* wonderful attributes, along the way noting that God exists beyond the limits of time. He was (*before all time*). He is (*now*). He will be (*forever*). In the words of Revelation 1:8, God is "the Alpha and the Omega ... the One who is, who was, and who is coming, the Almighty." Jude selected the following attributes of God for his readers to reflect on before his final amen:

- **Glory.** God's splendor is His bright outflowing, the manifestation of everything that He is.
- **Majesty.** The term referred to the greatness of a king, as in "your Majesty." See Hebrews 1:3; 8:1 for other biblical instances of this term used to refer to God, the greatest King.
- **Power.** God's power is His limitless strength. He is omnipotent, without any barrier to accomplishing whatever He has determined to do.
- **Authority.** God rightly uses His power to reign over everything in the realm of creation and everything in the realm of salvation. He always exercises perfect authority.

(In PSG, p. 129) **What is our role and God's role in countering false prophets? How do the two roles complement each other?**

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#### JUDE 24-25

<sup>24</sup> Now to Him who is able to protect you from stumbling and to make you stand in the presence of His glory, blameless and with great joy, <sup>25</sup> to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, power, and authority before all time, now and forever. Amen.

# LEAD GROUP BIBLE STUDY

## FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

**GUIDE:** As everyone arrives, invite each individual to lift the object you brought and estimate its weight. Record their guesses.

**DISCUSS:** *How did you decide how heavy the object is? Who is likely closest? How can you tell?*

**DO:** Display the scale. Ask: *Would you trust this scale as an accurate instrument for weighing objects? Why or why not?*

**SHARE:** *Having a recognized standard is necessary for weighing objects as well as for evaluating truth in our world. God's Word is the only standard of truth we have. Emphasize the Key Doctrine (The Scriptures) on PSG, page 124.*

**INTRODUCE:** *Today's Scripture comes from two different books of the Bible with similar contexts. Both Peter and Jude faced false teaching that was spreading in their day.*

## EXPLORE THE TEXT

**READ:** Invite a volunteer to read 2 Peter 2:1-3 and Jude 16. Instruct the group to listen for ways both Peter and Jude responded to the actions of false teachers.

**GUIDE:** Direct attention to **Pack Item 10** (*Chart: A Comparison of 2 Peter 2 and Jude*) to provide the biblical context for Jude. Use information under Understand the Context (pp. 124-125; PSG, pp. 123-124) to supplement the chart.

**EXPLAIN:** *Peter probably indicated that the false prophets considered themselves part of the church. They considered themselves as members of the church, so Peter approached it from that vantage point. Only God and the false prophets knew if they had genuine faith but misdirected theology.*

**ASK:** *Why is it important to measure all teaching by the Person of Jesus Christ?*

**GUIDE:** Create the chart described in the Bible Skill (PSG, p. 126) on posterboard. Invite the group to search Jude 16-25 and identify words and phrases Jude used to describe false teachers and their teachings. Write responses on the left side of the chart under the heading "False Teachers and Teachings."

**DISCUSS:** *Is it easier to spot false prophets by their actions or their words? Explain.* (PSG, p. 126)

**READ:** Direct someone to read aloud Jude 17-19, as the others listen for predictions about the false teachers.

**DISCUSS:** *Why did Jude appeal to the teaching of the apostles to show the rise of false teachers? What is so appealing about false teachers, especially in light of the apostles' predictions?* (PSG, p. 127)

**EXPLAIN:** Refer to the information under Verses 17-18 (p. 127; PSG, p. 126) to provide background about the teachings of the apostles to which Jude was referring.

**STUDY:** Now lead the group to search Jude 17-19 to locate words and phrases that Jude used to describe false teachers and their teachings. Add those responses to the Bible Skills activity chart. Make sure responses include specific accusations against the false teachers in verse 19.

**TRANSITION:** *Jude suggested actions in the following verses that would combat false teaching.*

**READ:** Invite a volunteer to read aloud Jude 20-23, calling for everyone to listen for preventative actions for believers.

**STUDY:** Lead the group to identify four preventative actions for believers in verses 20-23 that would combat false teaching.

**DISCUSS:** *Which of these preventative actions do you think would be the most effective? Explain.* (PSG, p. 128)

**REVIEW:** Point out that Jude 21 is the memory verse for this session. Direct attention to **Pack Item 14** (Poster: Jude 21). Lead the group to compare this verse to Titus 2:13 and discuss how these verses encourage them to wait in hope.

**TRANSITION:** *In spite of the danger of associating with the false teachers, Jude ended with a shout of praise, remembering that God was greater than any enemy they faced.*

**READ:** Lead the group in reading Jude 24-25 aloud in unison. Invite volunteers to identify specific promises in the verses that encourage them.

**DISCUSS:** *What is our role and God's role in countering false prophets? How do the two roles complement each other?* (PSG, p. 129)

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## SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

**DISCUSS:** *How has today's study helped you be more aware of false teachers and teachings? How has it reinforced that God's Word is the only standard for truth in our world?*

**DIRECT:** Focus on the first question set under In My Context (PSG, p. 130): *Based on these passages and your group's discussion, create a checklist for discerning the validity of a teaching or teacher. Discuss ways of using the checklist when confronted by questionable teaching.* List responses on the right side of the chart under the heading "Genuine Teachers and Teachings." Guide the group to use information on the chart to evaluate at least one popular teacher or teaching.

**PRAY:** Ask God to strengthen the group in being on guard for false teachers and to be willing to expose their false teachings. Pray for believers as they maintain spiritual growth and reach out to those who may be susceptible to false teachings.



## PRACTICE

- Send an email reminding the group to continue working on the preventative actions identified through the second question set under In My Context (PSG, p. 130): *Review the preventative actions identified by Peter and Jude. Outline a plan of action based on the identified actions. What are you doing to guard yourself?*
- Use the checklist on the chart under the heading “Genuine Teachers and Teachings” to evaluate yourself, as well as the resources you use for personal Bible study and session preparation.
- With Thanksgiving approaching, send a message to the group, thanking them for being part of the Bible study group and wishing them blessings for their holiday.

## MORE IDEAS

### FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

To supplement the activity with the scale, invite a volunteer to read Matthew 7:15. Comment that Jesus’ warning against wolves in sheep’s clothing was among His earliest teachings to His followers.

### EXPLORE THE TEXT

- To supplement the discussion of the dangers of false teaching, explain that false prophets denied the teaching about the return of Christ, or at least perverted it. In so doing, the false teachers encouraged Christians to minimize accountability and live an immoral lifestyle. Discuss: *How does today’s world evidence people follow false teaching?*
- To supplement the discussion of Jude 17-19, explain that the apostles saw themselves as living in the last days from the time at Pentecost that the Spirit was poured out upon the church. Discuss: *If the last days began with the Spirit’s coming at Pentecost, what does that suggest about the day in which we live?*
- As a supplement to Jude 20-25, discuss ways we can guard ourselves against false teachers. Emphasize: *The promise of eternal life with Christ motivates us to resist false teachers and to obey Christ by strengthening our faith through prayer, loving others, and keeping our hope based on Him.*

### SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

Read the first paragraph under In My Context in the PSG (p. 130): *Believers must expose false teachers and their motives. Believers must be on guard against teachers who promote lifestyles contrary to the Scriptures. Believers can overcome false teachers by maintaining their spiritual growth and reaching out to those who may be susceptible to false teachings.* Then discuss the third question set: *How can your group reach out to those who may have embraced theological error? Discuss the difference if any in confronting professing Christians versus confronting unbelievers.*

### SUGGESTED MUSIC IDEA

Review the words to “Rescue the Perishing,” by Fanny J. Crosby, which is based on Jude 23. As an option, search the Internet for the story of how she wrote the words to the hymn.

# WITH ANTICIPATION

A believer's hope is in the return of Jesus.

## 2 PETER 3:3-13,17-18

**MEMORY VERSE: 2 PETER 3:9**

### PREPARE TO LEAD THE GROUP TIME

- **READ** 2 Peter 3:1-18, *First Thoughts* (p. 134), and *Understand the Context* (pp. 134-135). Highlight or underline the reasons Peter gave for trusting that Jesus would return.
- **STUDY** 2 Peter 3:3-13,17-18. As you study, notice the actions believers are to take in anticipation of Jesus' return. Consult the *Explore the Bible Adult Commentary* (available in print and digital format from *LifeWay.com*) for additional study helps.
- **PLAN** the group time using suggestions under *Lead Group Bible Study* (pp. 140-141). Also refer to *QuickSource* and *Blog.LifeWay.com/ExploreTheBible* for other ideas. Look for ways to creatively call attention to this session's memory verse (2 Peter 3:9).
- **GROW** from expert insights on weekly studies through the *Ministry Grid* (*MinistryGrid.com/Web/ExploreTheBible*).
- **GATHER** the following items:  *Personal Study Guides*;  **PACK ITEM 2** (*Outline of 1,2 Peter; Jude*);  **PACK ITEM 5** (*Bookmark: Memory Verses*) if needed. For *More Ideas*:  Party decorations and food. Prepare to display the following *Pack Items*:  **PACK ITEM 11** (*Poster: The Day of the Lord*); and  **PACK ITEM 15** (*Poster: 2 Peter 3:9*).



# FIRST THOUGHTS

## KEY DOCTRINE

### *Last Things*

According to His promise, Jesus Christ will return personally and visibly in glory to the earth; the dead will be raised; and Christ will judge all men in righteousness.

How much of our lives do we spend waiting? We wait for the bus, wait for a taxi, or wait for our oil to be changed. We wait for church to start, for the ball game to begin, and for our children to grow up. Waiting is part of life. However, we can turn waiting into a positive. We can catch up on some reading. We can prepare our hearts for worship by spending a few moments praying. We might even use the time spent waiting to initiate a conversation about Christ with another person who is waiting. Waiting is not a bad thing; it's a necessary thing and we can make the most of it.

(In PSG, p. 133) **What are your favorite things to do when you have to wait for something? Why do you enjoy doing those things as you wait?**

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## BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR

For additional context, read "A New Heaven and a New Earth," available digitally in *Biblical Illustrator for Explore the Bible* at [LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator](http://LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator).

Some people might look at the return of Christ as an unnecessary wait. But His delay is not arbitrary. Though Jesus' return is certain, the Father is patiently waiting for those who will be saved to come to Christ.

As Peter concluded his second letter, his thoughts turned to the return of the Lord. The apostle had now lived long enough to witness the rise of those who professed to be followers of Jesus yet scoffed at the idea of a literal second coming. Thus, he concluded with a strong reminder believers are to be confident in the return of Christ. Further, Peter encouraged his readers to build up their character (thus expressing their assurance of His return) and to demonstrate God's grace by sharing Christ with all people.

# UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

## 2 PETER 3:1-18

As we wrap up our lessons for this quarter, it will be helpful to recall the topics Peter and Jude have brought to our attention. Here's a brief review.

First Peter: (1) finding identity in Jesus Christ, 1:1-2:10, sessions 1-3; (2) living as foreigners, 2:11-4:11, sessions 4-7; (3) thriving in persecution, 4:12-5:14, sessions 8-9.

Second Peter: (1) experiencing grace, 1:1-11, session 10; (2) trusted eyewitnesses, 1:12-21, session 11; (3) exposing false teachers, 2:1-22, session 12; (4) expecting Jesus' return, 3:1-18, session 13.

Jude: contending for the faith, verses 1-25, session 12.

In this final session, the larger context is all of 2 Peter 3. These verses include Peter's teaching on "the Day of the Lord" as well as his concluding words. As has been the case for our earlier studies in this epistle, there is much that we do not know. Who were the false teachers who were denying

the second coming? Were they the same as the teachers he had condemned earlier in the letter? Although we can make educated guesses, we really don't need to know the specifics. It is abundantly clear that Peter believed the best way to undercut those who scoffed at the second coming was to offer a positive presentation about the certainty of His return.

Peter's teaching in this chapter can be organized as follows:

- Scoffers will deny the coming of the Lord (3:1-7).
- The Lord is patient regarding His return because He wants more people to repent (3:8-10).
- Believers are to live godly lives in light of the Lord's return (3:11-13).
- In conclusion, believers are to be on guard spiritually and morally at all times (3:14-18).

Our focus in this final lesson will be selected verses that draw our attention to the return of Christ (3:3-13). Then we will conclude our study with Peter's own conclusion (3:17-18), reaching a grand finale with a crescendo of praise and a final "Amen."

## EXPLORE THE TEXT

### A SURE RETURN (2 PET. 3:3-7)

#### VERSES 3-4

With the term **first**, Peter meant to call attention to a topic he wanted to emphasize as important (see also 1:20). By **the last days**, he meant the era that began with the first coming of Christ, because the "first days" meant the Old Testament period—the centuries of preparation for the coming of the Messiah and the outpouring of the Spirit (see Acts 2:17). Peter knew that **scoffers** (those who disdain or look with contempt) would be characteristic of this entire period. Not only would they mock **the promise of His coming**, they would live immoral lifestyles, **according to their own desires**. Many Bible students believe these were the same false prophets condemned earlier (2:18-19). Such scoffers are still prominent today.

What Peter introduced here is another component of their teaching. They were questioning the truthfulness of the promise that Jesus will come again. They had observed a delay in His coming; therefore, they concluded He was not going to return. Everything was going to keep on keeping on as it had been since the beginning of creation. In other words, the natural order will never experience the kind of divine intervention in human affairs that the second coming implies.

Bible students have offered alternative understandings of whom Peter meant by **the fathers**. He may have meant the Old Testament patriarchs (such as Abraham and Isaac). Or he may have had in mind the first generation of Christians who already **fell asleep**; that is, they had died (such as Stephen and James; Acts 7:60). Whichever is correct, Peter did not explain why the false teachers were so eager to deny Christ's return.

### BIBLE SKILL

*Read, reflect on, and react emotionally to a verse.*

Focus on 2 Peter 3:9. Read the verse aloud several times. Each time, emphasize different words as you read. For example, in one reading emphasize words referring to human beings, such as "some," "you," and "any." Then read the verse again emphasizing all the actions, such as "delay," "perish," and "repentance." Make notes on your thoughts. How does this verse move you emotionally? What feelings were evoked by the different words and phrases as you emphasized them?

### 2 PETER 3:3-4

<sup>3</sup> First, be aware of this: Scoffers will come in the last days to scoff, living according to their own desires, <sup>4</sup> saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? Ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they have been since the beginning of creation."

## 2 PETER 3:5-6

<sup>5</sup> They willfully ignore this: Long ago the heavens and the earth were brought about from water and through water by the word of God. <sup>6</sup> Through these waters the world of that time perished when it was flooded.

## 2 PETER 3:7

<sup>7</sup> But by the same word, the present heavens and earth are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.

## 2 PETER 3:8

<sup>8</sup> Dear friends, don't let this one thing escape you: With the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day.

Could it be that their desire to live immoral lives led them to mock biblical teaching and those who live according to Scripture?

### VERSES 5-6

Peter demonstrated the fallacy in the argument that there will be no future divine intrusion to the natural order by pointing out that God already had dramatically intervened in the natural order. Indeed, the scoffers were deliberately ignoring important, unassailable truths from the Book of Genesis. First, it was ***the word of God*** that had brought about the original creation of ***the heavens and the earth***. God had said, "Let there be," and creation came into being (Gen. 1:3,6,14). Peter's emphasis on the place of ***water*** in the creation is similar to the emphasis found in Genesis (1:6-10).

Peter picked up the theme of water to make his second point about divine intervention: the world of that time went ***through these waters***, and all people and animals perished. The flood is, of course, a supreme example of divine judgment being brought about by the word of God, as the historical narrative of Genesis 6–9 makes perfectly clear.

Thus, the original creation and the flood of judgment in the days of Noah are two obvious examples of God's intervention in the world. For the scoffers to overlook these two, Peter thought, was a matter showing that they willfully ignored the facts of history.

**In light of Peter's argument, why is it important for Christians to affirm that God was actively involved in the creation of the heavens and the earth? Why is it important to believe that the Genesis flood was a historical event and not some kind of pious religious fiction?**

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### VERSE 7

Peter now drew the net on his logic. ***The same word*** of God that brought the world into existence and then judged the world is now sustaining ***the present heavens and earth***. But God's preservation is not indefinite; it will not last forever. The current state of affairs will last only until God is ready to judge the world again, this time with ***fire***. As surely as the flood resulted in the destruction of ungodly men, so in His return the Lord Jesus will unleash ***the day of judgment***. The references to fire and destruction should not be understood to refer to an annihilation of the wicked. Peter and the other writers of the New Testament understood that a literal hell lies ahead for the unrepentant. (See comments on 3:10 later in this lesson.)

## THE PATIENT FATHER (2 PET. 3:8-9)

### VERSE 8

By referring to his first readers as ***dear friends***, Peter turned to a new topic (as he had done in 3:1; see last week's lesson). He had effectively

shown that the scoffers were wrong to deny the fact of God's future intervention. God had done so in the past and promised to do so in the future. Now Peter showed the reasons why God seemed to be delaying the second coming. The first reason is that God has a different perception of the passing of time than we humans do. He created space and time, and we humans are locked into a narrow sliver of time (seventy or so years, if we have a typical lifespan). God sees all times equally, and this fact must not escape us. In the light of God's eternal perspective **one day** is no different than **a thousand years** and vice versa (Ps. 90:4). Thus, we as humans often seethe with impatience at God's timeline, but He sees everything in the light of eternity.

#### VERSE 9

The second reason that God seems to be delaying the second coming is not His indifference but rather that He **is patient** with people. He is waiting so that all who will **come to repentance** and faith in Christ will do so. As the God of creation and judgment, He is **not wanting any to perish**. He provided the Savior and offers salvation. Yet He will not force salvation on those who refuse Him. Just as surely, however, as God's patience finally ran out in the days of Noah and the judgment waters of the flood destroyed the world, so too will God's patience finally run out and the judgment fire connected with Christ's return will fall.

**The Bible teaches that believers should long for Christ's return but also that Christ has not returned yet so that more people may turn to Him. How can you keep these truths in balance?**

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### THE WARNING ISSUED (2 PET. 3:10)

#### VERSE 10

Certain prophets of old had introduced the theme of **the Day of the Lord** as a time of God's decisive judgment against evil (see Isa. 2:5-22; Amos 5:18-20). Peter equated Christ's return with this time of judgment. Peter included the following in his understanding of the Day of the Lord.

- It will come suddenly. Just as **a thief** breaks in without warning, so Christ's return will be (1 Thess. 5:2). His coming is certain, yet its time will be unexpected.
- It will come universally. No person will escape (just as in the flood of Noah). Peter described a cataclysmic event: **the heavens will pass away and the elements will burn and be dissolved**. Ultimately, there will be a new heaven and new earth (Rom. 8:18-25; Rev. 21:1-8).
- It will come as a final evaluation. Not only will the earth itself be exposed, so will **the works** that people have done. Everything at last

#### 2 PETER 3:9

<sup>9</sup> The Lord does not delay His promise, as some understand delay, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish but all to come to repentance.

#### 2 PETER 3:10

<sup>10</sup> But the Day of the Lord will come like a thief; on that day the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, the elements will burn and be dissolved, and the earth and the works on it will be disclosed.

will be disclosed. Again, Peter was not teaching the obliteration of the wicked; rather, he was teaching the certainty of judgment.

(In PSG, p. 137) **What illustrations other than a thief could be used to describe the Day of the Lord?**

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## 2 PETER 3:11

<sup>11</sup> Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, it is clear what sort of people you should be in holy conduct and godliness

## 2 PETER 3:12-13

<sup>12</sup> as you wait for and earnestly desire the coming of the day of God. The heavens will be on fire and be dissolved because of it, and the elements will melt with the heat. <sup>13</sup> But based on His promise, we wait for the new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness will dwell.

## WHILE WAITING (2 PET. 3:11-13,17-18)

### VERSE 11

Peter made a transition from the future back to the present. In light of the truth that the natural order as we know it is temporary (***all these things are to be destroyed***), there are radical implications for our lives now. As believers, the ***sort of people*** we should be comes more sharply into focus. We are to live for that which is eternal, not for that which is destined to be demolished. Peter noted two moral qualities—near synonyms—that will enable us to (1) avoid the devastation of the last judgment and (2) last for eternity.

- ***Holy conduct*** is a phrase meaning a lifestyle that shows we are set apart for God and His purposes. The term *holy* is the same term used in the phrase “Holy Spirit” and is related to the term traditionally translated “sanctification.” In many other New Testament passages, believers are called “holy ones” (traditionally, “saints”).
- ***Godliness*** was one of Peter’s favored terms for Christlike character in this letter (1:3,6,7).

### VERSES 12-13

Although we are growing toward Christian maturity, we recognize that we will not achieve the goal of moral perfection in this life. Thus, we are to live with a stance of anticipation. We ***wait for and earnestly desire*** the time when we will finally attain the goal for which we have been longing. These verbs suggest intensity of hope for these things. Here, Peter changed the language slightly, from speaking of “the Day of the Lord” to referring to ***the day of God***. Notice that the descriptions of this event are quite similar to the way the Day of the Lord had been earlier described. The heavens will be permanently changed, as they ***will be on fire and be dissolved***. The earth too ***will melt with the heat***. We do not know exactly what Peter was describing, but it does not really matter. What matters is that God will at last bring these things about, and we are to be expectant.

Of course, we are not waiting only for the negative (dissolution of the universe). What makes this worth waiting for are ***the new heavens and a new earth***. Some Bible students have understood Peter to be indicating that this will be a brand new universe, created by the word of God from nothing just like the original creation (3:5). Others believe Peter was talking about

a transformation of the elements of the existing universe. Further, there are certain indications in Scripture that the final home of the resurrected, redeemed saints will be the New Jerusalem that has come down to the (re-)created earth (Isa. 65–66; Rev. 21–22). Whatever the case, Peter’s main point is that our final destination—as those who have been born again and lived lives of holiness and godliness—will be **where righteousness will dwell**. Just think about it: at last all the marks of sin and evil will be gone, and we will enjoy God’s holy presence forever and ever.

#### VERSE 17

As Peter concluded his letter, he referred one more time to his readers as **dear friends**—the fourth such reference in this chapter (see 3:1,8,14). His epistle had told them in advance about the coming of false teachers (2 Pet. 2). They were therefore to be **on ... guard** against distorting the essential truths of the gospel as they had been taught (see 3:15-16). One evident characteristic of false teachers is an acceptance of immorality based on an erroneous understanding of God’s law. Believers are to recognize such **lawless people** as a dangerous threat to their spiritual stability.

#### VERSE 18

Avoiding error in the Christian life is only part of what we are about. The positive way forward may be summarized as growing in **grace** and growing in **knowledge**. The good news of the gospel is best expressed in one word: *grace* (God’s unmerited favor). At the same time, grace is coupled with truth or *knowledge*, for example, knowledge about the certainty of Christ’s return and coming judgment. Peter had emphasized knowledge at the very beginning of his letter (1:2-3,5-6).

At last, Peter was ready for his conclusion. There was no better way to end than with a brief doxology, a word of praise (a bit briefer than Jude’s doxology, which we considered in last week’s study). God receives all the praise **now**, perfectly in heaven (Isa. 6:1-3; Rev. 4–5) and imperfectly on earth. Yet we look forward to the time when God will be unendingly and perfectly praised throughout all **eternity**. Peter concluded his song of praise with a hearty **Amen**.

We have seen that believers can be confident in the return of Christ. We can urgently show God’s grace by sharing Christ with all people. And we demonstrate assurance of the return of Christ by building godly character in anticipation of His return.

**How might you explain to a new believer why confidence in the return of Christ makes a difference in the way you live now? How could you include “grace” and “knowledge” in your explanation?**

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## 2 PETER 3:17

<sup>17</sup> Therefore, dear friends, since you know this in advance, be on your guard, so that you are not led away by the error of lawless people and fall from your own stability.

## 2 PETER 3:18

<sup>18</sup> But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.

# LEAD GROUP BIBLE STUDY

## FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

**DISCUSS:** *What are your favorite things to do when you have to wait for something? Why do you enjoy doing those things as you wait?* (PSG, p. 133)

**TRANSITION:** *As Peter concluded his second epistle, he turned toward waiting for the return of Christ. He concluded his letter with a strong reminder that believers are to be confident in the return of Christ.*

**INTRODUCE:** Direct attention to the outline on page 10 of the PSG, or refer to **Pack Item 2** (*Outline of 1,2 Peter; Jude*). Use information from Understand the Context (pp. 134-135) to connect Peter's comments about the false teachers in 2 Peter 2 with the return of Christ in chapter 3.

## EXPLORE THE TEXT

**READ:** Read aloud 2 Peter 3:3-7, directing the group to listen for ways Peter described the false prophets.

**STATE:** *Peter reminded his readers that they could rest assured of the return of Christ regardless of what the false teachers may declare.*

**STUDY:** Form two teams to search for insight into those who scoffed about Christ's return. Instruct the first team to scan information under Verses 3-4 in the PSG (p. 134) to find the two charges for the false prophets' scorn. Instruct the second team to scan the information under Verse 5 and Verse 6 in the PSG (pp. 134-135) to locate two great events the false prophets overlooked. Return the teams to the large group and call for reports.

**DISCUSS:** *What are some reasons people doubt the second coming of Christ today?* (PSG, p. 135) *How do today's reasons compare with the reasons heard in Peter's day?*

**TRANSITION:** *Peter said that God could hold back the day of judgment and the destruction of ungodly men. This would happen eventually, but it was not time.*

**READ:** Read 2 Peter 3:8-9, while the group listens for the reason for the delay between Christ's ascension and His return.

**STATE:** *Peter pointed to God's delay in the second coming as an act of God's grace that allows for more to come to Him in repentance.*

**GUIDE:** Direct attention to **Pack Item 15** (*Poster: 2 Peter 3:9*), and guide the group to discuss the mercy we find in the Lord's patience.

**DISCUSS:** *How do the creation story and the flood event pointed to by Peter illustrate God's grace and mercy? How is God's timing of the second coming an act of both grace and mercy?* (PSG, p. 137)

**TRANSITION:** *Peter assured his readers that the Day of the Lord would come, so they should not be presumptuous of God's grace, missing the opportunity to accept His forgiveness.*

**READ:** Invite a volunteer to read aloud 2 Peter 3:10, while the others listen for three things that would happen when Jesus returned. Use information under Verse 10 (pp. 137-138) to help provide clarity for this verse.

**STUDY:** Refer to **Pack Item 11** (*Poster: The Day of the Lord*). Invite volunteers to take turns reading the verses listed and to discuss how they add to our understanding of the Lord's eventual return. Additional verses that reference the Day of the Lord being like the arrival of a thief include Matthew 24:43-44; Luke 12:39; 1 Thessalonians 5:2; Revelation 3:3; 16:15.

**DISCUSS:** *What illustrations other than a thief could be used to describe the Day of the Lord?* (PSG, p. 137)

**READ:** Invite a volunteer to read 2 Peter 3:11-13,17-18 while the others listen for contrasting images. Invite volunteers to share their responses.

**GUIDE:** Direct the group to read the paragraphs under Verses 11-12 and Verse 13 (PSG, p. 138) to discover how Peter instructed believers to live in anticipation of Christ's return.

**ASK:** *How is the life we are to live in anticipation of the return of Jesus a reflection of the life we will have after His return?* (PSG, p. 139)

**EXPLAIN:** Refer to verses 17-18. *Peter ended his letter where he started it—by encouraging his readers to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ.*

**DISCUSS:** *If a person is growing in his or her spiritual life, all the other issues faced in this life become secondary. Do you agree or disagree? Explain.* (PSG, p. 139)

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## SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

**CHALLENGE:** Form pairs to discuss the first question set under In My Context in the PSG (p. 140): *How can you use the truths presented in this passage when confronted by a skeptic who denies the return of Jesus? Record key points. With whom can you share these insights?* Suggest that each person in the pair take a turn being the skeptic and the respondent. Encourage the group to record key points and identify someone with whom they can share their insights.

**STUDY:** Lead in a brief review of the previous sessions in this study of 1,2 Peter and Jude. Direct attention to the last paragraph under In My Context in the PSG (p. 140): *Quickly review the previous sessions in the study, looking for insights you highlighted and actions you identified. How have these insights been turned into action in the course of this study? Share with the Bible study group how you have grown, encouraging each other in your spiritual walks.* Encourage everyone to look for insights they highlighted and actions they identified during the previous sessions. Ask: *How have these insights been turned into action during the course of this study?* Invite volunteers to share responses.

**PRAY:** Guide the group in a silent prayer of commitment to live confidently and expectantly toward the return of Christ.



## PRACTICE

- Be sure each group member has a PSG for the new study, which will begin next week.
- Early in the week, contact group members and thank them for their participation in the previous study. Encourage them to continue memorizing Scripture. This week's verse is 2 Peter 3:9.
- Later in the week, send the group a link with a song about Jesus' return as a reminder to live confidently and expectantly each day.

## MORE IDEAS

### FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

To supplement the focus idea, select an event—such as a birth, a graduation, or a wedding—that most directly connects with the people in your group. Decorate the room for such an occasion and provide theme-related food. Ask: *How does waiting for this event compare to waiting for Christ's return?* Use the festive atmosphere to initiate discussion about anticipating Christ's return.

### EXPLORE THE TEXT

- To supplement the discussion of scoffers about Christ's return, conduct a debate. Enlist part of the group to be scoffers, and the rest of the group to be believers. Use 2 Peter 3:3-7 and information under those verses in the PSG (pp. 134-135) as background for both groups.
- To enhance the study of 2 Peter 3:8-9, refer to **Pack Item 15** (*Poster: 2 Peter 3:9*). Use the Bible Skill (PSG, p. 136) to read, reflect on, and react emotionally to 2 Peter 3:9. Remind the group that 2 Peter 3:9 is the memory verse for this session.
- To drive home the importance of anticipating Christ's return, state that the book *What to Expect When You're Expecting* is a perennial bestseller and resource used by expecting mothers who read pregnancy books. Lead the group to make a list of "What to Expect When We're Expecting Christ's Return" based on 2 Peter 3:11-13,17-18.

### SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

As part of anticipating Christ's return, remind the group of the importance of sharing Christ with those who have not accepted Him. Lead them to complete the second question set under In My Context (PSG, p. 140): *Write the names of people you know who have not yet accepted Jesus. Thank God for His patience, ask that He send someone to share with them, and express a willingness to be that person.*

### SUGGESTED MUSIC IDEA

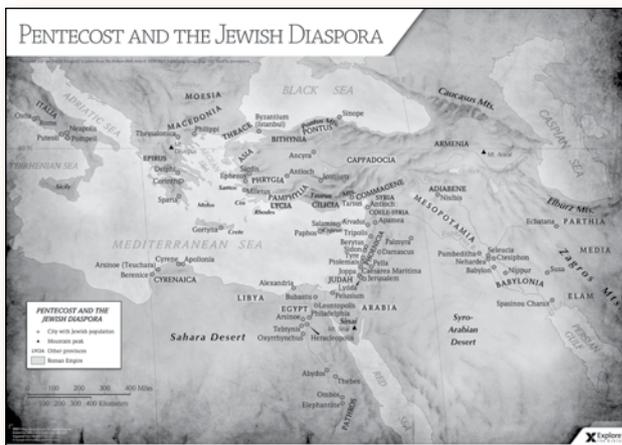
In anticipation of Christ's return, read the lyrics to or lead in singing "What If It Were Today?" by Mrs. C. H. Morris, or "The King Is Coming," by William J. Gaither.

# LEADER PACK IDEAS

## ➤➤ PACK ITEM 1

*Map: Pentecost and the Jewish Diaspora*  
Sessions 1-13

Locate a map in a Bible atlas that shows the locations of Pontus, Cappadocia, Bithynia, Rome, Asia, and Babylon.



**Pack Item 1 example** from *Explore the Bible Leader Pack* (The Pack is available for purchase at [LifeWay.com/ExploreTheBible](http://LifeWay.com/ExploreTheBible).)

## ➤➤ PACK ITEM 2

*Outline of 1,2 Peter; Jude*  
Sessions 1-13

Refer to the outline printed on page 12.

## ➤➤ PACK ITEM 3

*Poster: Fall 2016*  
Sessions 1-13

Create a sign to post on the door where your group meets to welcome them to the new study of 1,2 Peter and Jude.

## ➤➤ PACK ITEM 4

*Time Line: 1,2 Peter; Jude*  
Sessions 1-13

Locate a study Bible with a time line of the major people and events in 1,2 Peter and Jude (from A.D. 1–180). Use it as a reference during this quarter's study.



**Pack Item 3 example** from *Explore the Bible Leader Pack* (The Pack is available for purchase at [LifeWay.com/ExploreTheBible](http://LifeWay.com/ExploreTheBible).)

## PACK ITEM 5

*Bookmark: Memory Verses*  
*Sessions 1-13*

Make a list of these suggested memory verses to distribute to your group:

- 1 Peter 1:8
- 1 Peter 1:22
- 1 Peter 2:10
- 1 Peter 2:12
- 1 Peter 3:8
- 1 Peter 3:15
- 1 Peter 4:9
- John 16:33
- 1 Peter 5:7
- 2 Peter 1:3
- 2 Peter 1:21
- Jude 21
- 2 Peter 3:9

## PACK ITEM 6

*Poster: Christ in 1 and 2 Peter*  
*Sessions 1, 3*

Create a poster that lists the titles of Jesus Christ as listed in 1 and 2 Peter: Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 1:1); Lord (1:3); Lamb (1:19); Living Stone (2:4); Cornerstone (2:6); Rejected Stone (2:7); Stumbling Block (2:8); Example (2:21); Shepherd (2:25); Guardian (2:25); Messiah (3:15); Chief Shepherd (5:4); Savior Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 1:1); and Beloved Son (1:17).

## PACK ITEM 7

*Poster: Relationship Builders*  
*Sessions 4, 5*

Create a chart with the following columns:  
*Authorities; Slaves and masters; Wives;*

*Husbands; Other believers.* Then lead the group to record what they learn about each of these groups as they study 1 Peter 2:11-20; 3:1-12 during sessions 4 and 5.

## PACK ITEM 8

*Poster: Key Passages on Suffering*  
*Sessions 7, 8, 9*

Use a Bible concordance or dictionary to find common Scriptures that help us to understand the purpose of human suffering.

## PACK ITEM 9

*Poster: Christian Virtues*  
*Session 10*

Explain that 2 Peter 1:1-7 speaks of the union believers have with Christ that allows them to overcome the moral corruption of the world by nurturing eight qualities of Christian character in their lives. Guide the group to list the eight qualities in these verses, define each, and brainstorm ways a believer's life can demonstrate each quality.



**Pack Item 9 example** from *Explore the Bible Leader Pack* (The Pack is available for purchase at [LifeWay.com/ExploreTheBible](http://LifeWay.com/ExploreTheBible).)

## »» **PACK ITEM 10**

*Chart: A Comparison of 2 Peter 2 and Jude  
Session 12*

Read the following sets of Scriptures from 2 Peter 2 and Jude. Identify their common theme and discuss their application to our daily lives.

- 2 Peter 2:1-3; Jude 4
- 2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6
- 2 Peter 2:6; Jude 7
- 2 Peter 2:9; Jude 14b-15
- 2 Peter 2:10; Jude 8
- 2 Peter 2:11; Jude 9
- 2 Peter 2:12; Jude 10
- 2 Peter 2:13,17; Jude 12-13
- 2 Peter 2:15; Jude 11
- 2 Peter 2:18; Jude 16

## »» **PACK ITEM 11**

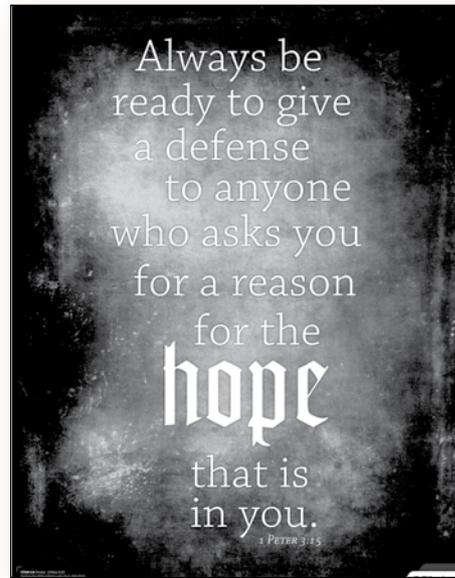
*Poster: The Day of the Lord  
Session 13*

Search online or in a Bible dictionary for information on references to “the Day of the Lord” in 1,2 Peter and Jude.

## »» **PACK ITEM 12**

*Poster: 1 Peter 1:22  
Session 2*

Display 1 Peter 1:22 on a whiteboard or large sheet of paper.



**Pack Item 13 example** from *Explore the Bible Leader Pack* (The Pack is available for purchase at [LifeWay.com/ExploreTheBible](http://LifeWay.com/ExploreTheBible).)

## »» **PACK ITEM 13**

*Poster: 1 Peter 3:15  
Session 6*

Display 1 Peter 3:15 on a whiteboard or large sheet of paper.

## »» **PACK ITEM 14**

*Poster: Jude 21  
Session 12*

Display Jude 21 on a whiteboard or large sheet of paper.

## »» **PACK ITEM 15**

*Poster: 2 Peter 3:9  
Session 13*

Display 2 Peter 3:9 on a whiteboard or large sheet of paper.



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# MEET DAVID: HE'S MEMORIZED 15 BOOKS OF THE BIBLE

by GB Howell Jr.



Memorizing God's Word—it's a goal that many set for themselves. David Kennedy, who works at LifeWay, has for several years been memorizing verses and chapters. To date, he has memorized 15 complete books of the Bible.

## ***David, how did you get started memorizing Scripture?***

Let me say that I am only one person—not the final authority. I offer what little I may know. From the day I got saved, I had an instant thirst for God's Word. Reading the Bible was part of my daily life. But reading was not memorizing.

Memorizing began when I started losing the center vision of my eyes due to the onset of ocular histoplasmosis, a condition that produces an effect similar to macular degeneration. I had this sudden, unsolicited inability to read the Word. Large print Bibles weren't large enough! At the time, the only audible forms of the Word were vinyl records, which were difficult to use. Before things got any worse, I worked to get as much Scripture in me as possible. I was DESPERATE! In a week I had memorized Philippians and Philemon.

## ***How do you memorize text?***

For the person just starting, memorize what you'd like or what the Spirit has laid on your heart. Do one verse. Repeat it until you know it as well as you do your phone number. If you are trying to do a series of verses, learn the second verse the same way. While you are at it, memorize the chapter and verse number, its address. Put them together. Drill.

## ***How do you retain what you have memorized?***

Memorization is one thing—retention is another. I've had the honor of speaking to several who've memorized multiple lengthy passages; each has affirmed what I have learned—review is essential to retention. Proverbs 6:21 instructs, "Bind them continually on your heart!"

I use a myriad of procedures to keep some order to what I have memorized. I have a listing of places I commonly make errors. This list contains the verse in its correct form along with the location of the verse on the page. R for right hand side of the page, L for the left.

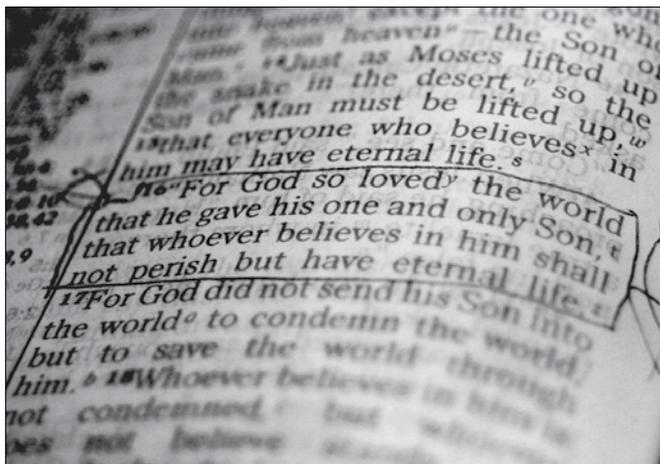
For reviewing, I have a regular process. Step 1: I begin by reviewing the corrections of the mistakes I made the last time I recited the text. Step 2: Then I record the text, as best as I can, from memory. I have a small pocket-sized digital recorder that works fine for this. I will quote and record the text during my 30-minute commute. Step 3: After I record what I remember, I listen to it comparing it to the written Word. And I keep a running schedule for when I review specific texts. It works.

## ***What misconceptions might someone have about memorizing Scripture?***

Ah, that's an interesting question. Some people believe memorization is a special gift. It IS a gift—like walking, talking, seeing are gifts. But memorization is not a special gifting; it's a manifestation of the love that someone has for Jesus Christ.

Additionally, some people believe they have to be like someone who has memorized lengthy passages. They may say, "I can never be like him or her." Those who memorize Scriptures cannot make such comparisons. Second Corinthians 8:12 says, "according to what a man has, not according to what he does not have." We are not in a competition here! Do what you can!

I seriously believe that if a person makes a front-burner effort to memorize the Word and in a year's time all he or she gets is 1 Thessalonians 5:16, "Rejoice always" or John 11:35, "Jesus wept," that person has done a commendable thing. That individual was very faithful in that effort. And based on Luke 16:10, this believer will become faithful in more. This increase is based on what I refer to as a memory muscle. It's like increasing an arm's tone or strength, even without increasing its size. Similarly, the ability to hide His Word gets stronger.



## ***What advice would you give to someone who wants to memorize Scripture?***

First, they need to remember that the number one qualifier, enabler, and equipper to memorizing the Word is based on Psalm 1:2, "But his delight is in the Law of the LORD, and in His Law he meditates





day and night.” Memorizing has to become a passion! For a sports fan of any team, the trivia about that team is demonstrated in various levels. For one who is a co-participant in the risen Lord, He is our primary interest, passion, and love. His interests become our interests—whether it’s people, His Word, evangelism, or other aspects of living a God-honoring life.

My second piece of advice is to practice what I call pictorial or placement memory. We visualize the text on the page, as in, “That verse is in the lower left hand of this Bible.” Understand that this does not require a photographic memory.

Related to this is my third piece of advice: a person has to make an initial, yet lifetime decision to use a particular translation, version, and format of a Bible from which to memorize. I cannot emphasize this enough! Since a Bible can wear out, a memorizer needs to purchase multiple copies. My suggestion is that you get two or three identical, good study Bibles. Later, you’ll be glad you did.

Finally, be ready to work hard. Is this difficult? For me, absolutely! For someone smarter, this may be a lot easier. Regardless, though, the work has rewards as implied in Proverbs 14:23: “In all labor there is profit.”

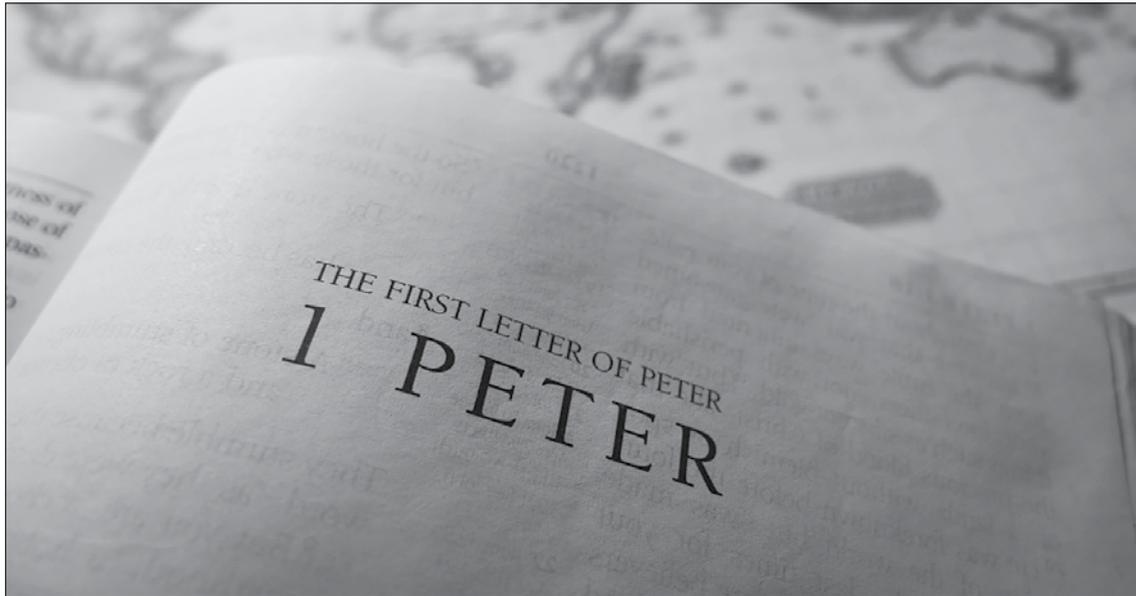
So what’s my encouragement? Start your journey. Start the joy of a renewed mind. Start the delight of having instant accessibility to various parts of God’s Word. Start to learn His language, His native tongue so as to speak, to aid you when He speaks. And as we travel, we are only scratching the surface of the inexhaustibility of His infinite wisdom, understanding, knowledge, and character. Go for it!

This article was adapted from the Explore the Bible blog. You can find it at [Blog.LifeWay.com/ExploreTheBible/?s=meet+dauid](http://Blog.LifeWay.com/ExploreTheBible/?s=meet+dauid). GB Howell Jr. is the content editor of *Biblical Illustrator*.

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# THE PURPOSE AND LIFE SITUATION OF 1 PETER

By Rudy D. Gonzalez



To the community of biblical scholars, Peter's first epistle remained in the shadows for years. This was largely because of an overwhelming fondness for Paul and his letters. But things have changed in recent years. And as providence would have it, Peter's message may be just what the church needs to hear today.

## WHERE?

First Peter is a "general" epistle because it was meant to have broad appeal. We certainly get this sense from the extent of the region 1 Peter intended to reach—dispersed believers in five of the larger provinces of Asia Minor (1 Pet. 1:1).

At the time Peter wrote this epistle (ca. A.D. 62–64), Asia Minor had a landmass covering some 291,000 square miles, a bit larger than the state of Texas, and was generally characterized as rugged, mountainous, and filled with bandits. Given the region's size, terrain, and dangers, the fact that the gospel had achieved such broad penetration within the span of no more than 30 years was impressive. When one considers that Asia was divided into small and mutually hostile states, surely ethnic diversity only compounded the difficulty of the mission. Yet despite the issues and perceptions that can tear at the social fabric of any diverse confluence of humanity, followers of Jesus were coming together under a common experience in Christ, as we shall see below.

## WHO?

The implication of 1 Peter causes us to ask how such a broad distribution of Christians might have come about. We know Paul established churches in the area of Pamphylia and southern Galatia as early as A.D. 48–49 (Acts 13:13–14:28). Later, Paul traveled through



those same areas where he had previously founded some churches (15:40–16:5). Though his initial stay at Ephesus was brief (18:19–21), he returned to the Asian city during his third missionary journey, with churches being started during that time (18:23–19:14). Was Peter writing to churches Paul founded? He never mentioned Paul in the letter, so we do not know. Regardless, early Pauline churches and those that other believers founded certainly took their evangelistic mandate seriously. Acts 16:5 confirms that the churches “were strengthened in the faith and increased in number daily.” Over the span of 10 to 15 years, those pioneer works had surely penetrated their world, and not just numerically.

In fact, the discipleship of new believers had been so successful that families and close friends had taken notice of changed lifestyles, and this did not sit well with many. This then was the reason Peter wrote this epistle; the transformed lives of the believers stood in stark contrast to their former lifestyles. These changes had prompted an acute negative reaction. To be precise, believers were being subjected to harassment and mistreatments. Although this was happening broadly, we find no evidence that indicates Rome had instituted a formal policy throughout Asia Minor to persecute Christians. What is more likely is that many people had come to faith in Christ in a dramatic, life-altering way, and this was causing a kind of verbal backlash from their kinsmen and friends, more severe in some places than in others.

## WHY?

In this connection, Peter’s characterization of his readers as temporary residents, a theme he repeats (1:1,17; 2:11), is crucial to the interpretation of this letter. Passages such as 1:18; 2:10; and 4:3–4 suggest the readers were predominantly Gentiles. Although the vast majority of readers had come out of paganism, the new believers were experiencing a kind of social ostracism from communities that no longer saw them as belonging. But they were not alone. To his beleaguered audience, Peter wrote from his own “Babylon” (5:13), the archetypal place of exile and alienation in the biblical record (see Ps. 137; Isa. 39:5–7; Jer. 20:4–5; Matt. 1:11).

Peter acknowledged that individuals who had known and cavorted with these Christians before their conversion took offense at the believers’ transformed lifestyles. The result was fiery ordeals for believers (1 Pet. 4:12). But what exactly was the nature of these ordeals? His readers, Peter explained, had recently been the recipients of various trials (1:6), had suffered unjustly (2:19), and had endured grief (v. 20), insults (3:9), slander (4:4), and ridicule (v. 14). Yet in spite of the many vexing injustices, the apostle never signaled retreat to the former life to avoid such tribulations. Instead, his answer to the crisis was three-fold: believers were to resist, defend, and rejoice. While those reading his epistle were to resist Satan (5:8–9), Peter expected the trials would continue, providing them with an opportunity to defend their faith (2:12; 3:13–16). These were the first two, but what about the third?

Throughout this brief epistle, Peter reminded his readers of Jesus and His suffering (2:21–23; 3:18; 4:1–2,13–14). Jesus was their ultimate example of One who suffered unjustly. And herein is the irrefutable scandal of this epistle. Peter dared to cast Christians’ suffering in a new light, even though Satan might have inspired their hardship and his willing accomplices carried it out. The apostle identified their sufferings with those of Christ, challenging them to “rejoice as you share in the sufferings of the Messiah, so that you may also rejoice with great joy at the revelation of his glory” (4:13). Readers should be clear—while 1 Peter does offer eschatological hope, the letter is not escapism, for suffering always comes with the territory and can be a source of rejoicing in our new identity in Christ.

Rudy D. Gonzalez is dean of the William R. Marshall Center for Theological Studies and professor of New Testament at the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary campus at San Antonio, Texas.

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# TEACHING FROM THE OVERFLOW

By Mike Livingstone



Effective Bible teaching is artesian in nature. The word artesian describes a well through which water rises naturally to the surface as a result of internal pressure. Charles Spurgeon used this metaphor with reference to preaching: “True preaching is artesian; it wells up from the great depths of the soul. If Christ has not made a well within us, there will be no outflow from us.” What is true for preachers is true also for small group Bible study leaders—God’s Word is most effectively communicated from the overflow of what God is doing in our lives.

This being true, the key to transformational Bible teaching begins with recognizing the difference between preparing a lesson and preparing the leader of the lesson. Make no mistake; I’m a strong proponent of lesson preparation. Artesian teaching doesn’t negate the need for personal study, though a prepared heart is more critical. If we have only prepared a lesson but have not spiritually prepared ourselves, we are unprepared to teach the Bible.

How, then, can we prepare ourselves to teach from the overflow? Rather than offering a step-by-step process of preparation, let’s consider three general principles of spiritual preparation:

## **1. PREPARE ON YOUR KNEES.**

It’s not the physical posture of kneeling that matters, but the posture of the heart—dependency on and submission to God. E. M. Bounds once said: “A prayerless ministry cannot know God’s truth and, not knowing it, cannot teach it.”



The apostles gave priority to two things in ministry, according to Acts 6:4: prayer and teaching the word. Certainly this means they considered their responsibility to pray to be no less important than their responsibility to communicate the word to others, and knew the two priorities could not be separated.

## 2. PURSUE GOD.

It's one thing to go to the Bible in search of lesson material. It's another thing altogether to go to the Scripture in pursuit of the Person of God. How important it is not to allow the former to take precedence over the latter!

Leonard Ravenhill maintained that "A man may study because his brain is hungry for knowledge, even Bible knowledge. But he prays because his soul is hungry for God." The effective Bible teacher prays not just that God will give him something to say; he prays because he desires God.

In the days of the prophet Jeremiah, the Lord condemned the priests because of a grave sin: "The priests quit asking, 'Where is the LORD?' The experts in the law no longer knew Me" (Jer. 2:8). Those who dealt with the law of God did not seek God and thus had no first-hand knowledge of what they taught. The Bible is God's personal Word to the leader before it is lesson material for the next meeting.

## 3. PRACTICE WHAT YOU TEACH.

"Never traffic in unpracticed truth," Dr. Howard Hendricks used to say. Ezra, the Old Testament priest, scribe, and teacher of God's law, provides a model. According to Ezra 7:10, he "determined in his heart to study the law of the LORD, obey it, and teach its statutes and ordinances in Israel." The order is significant: study, obey, and teach. If we haven't studied the Word, we are not ready to teach it. If we're not obeying it, we are not qualified to teach, for we can't understand the truth of the Word if we are not practicing it.



Let's not emphasize lesson preparation to the point that we lose sight of the more important thing—heart preparation. Prepared hearts make prepared lessons. May Christ make a well in the depths of our hearts out of which flows the truth of God's Word in sincerity and power.

Mike is a content editor on LifeWay's Explore the Bible team. He has been an editor of Bible studies at LifeWay for 24 years. Prior to coming to LifeWay, Mike served as a pastor and missionary in Kenya. He leads a weekly Bible study at Hermitage Hills Baptist Church in Nashville, Tennessee, and blogs at [Mikelivingstone.com](http://Mikelivingstone.com). Find him on Twitter: @m\_livingstone.



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