

Explore the Bible.®

PERSONAL STUDY GUIDE

1, 2 Peter; Jude

Fall 2016 > HCSB

Jeff Iorg, General Editor

LifeWay | Adults

LIFE BY DESIGN

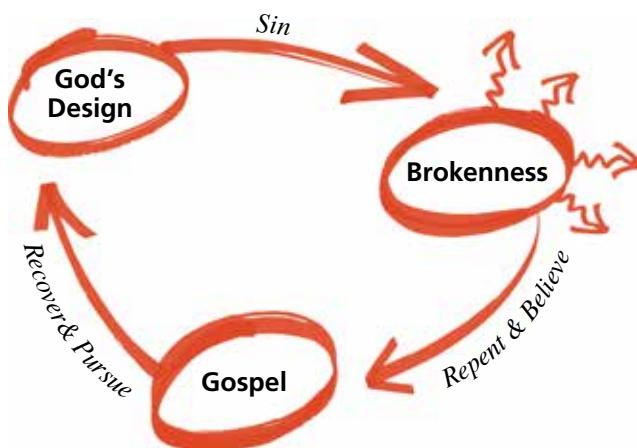
We live in a broken world. This brokenness is seen in suffering, violence, poverty, pain, and death around us. Brokenness leads us to search for a way to make LIFE work.

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 WRITER

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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.

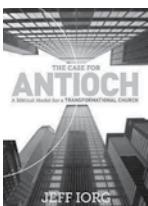
The Books of 1 and 2 Peter were written by one of Jesus' closest friends. As one of the original twelve disciples, Peter witnessed the persecution, arrest, crucifixion, and resurrection of his Savior. In these letters, he wrote to believers who were facing severe persecution for their faith, drawing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



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

MONTH 1

- 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

MONTH 2

- 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

MONTH 3

- 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



INTRODUCTION TO 1,2 PETER; JUDE

Friction can be defined as the act of rubbing one thing against another. It can also be the force that causes one object to slow down as it moves across another. Friction can also describe the disagreement or tension between people or groups of people. Some uses of friction are good. You could not operate a pencil without friction, and you couldn't erase your mistakes without it. However, some uses of friction are not good. For instance, you can get carpet burn from friction!

While friction can be both good and bad, it certainly causes things to heat up. This is the world in which Peter and Jude wrote. The friction between believers and unbelievers in the early church often resulted in the suffering of Christians. It is to this purpose that 1 Peter was written. False prophets were addressed in both 2 Peter and Jude. All three letters were written to strengthen the resistance of the true believers as they encountered false prophecy about the return of Christ.

These Bible studies focus on living for Christ in a world filled with friction. Like the people who lived in Peter and Jude's day, we too face friction when it comes to our faith. People oppose us and oppose the teachings of the Bible. Yet we must show grace under pressure, because we are called to reach the people who are scoffing at our faith. Lashing out and creating more friction will not help us achieve that objective. Neither will pretending the friction is not there. We must live holy and godly lives so that others see the presence of Christ in us.

»» BACKGROUND

Writer—Most scholars with a high view of Scripture agree that 1 Peter was written by Jesus' apostle, Simon Peter. He identified himself as an apostle of Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 1:1) and seemed to have credible eyewitness accounts to the life and teaching of Jesus.

The certainty of Peter writing 2 Peter is much less, as it is probably the most disputed authorship in the entire Bible. Some scholars believe it was a pseudonymous letter written by someone claiming to be Peter. They believe that the theology of the letter and the high view of Paul's letters indicate that it was written after Peter's death. However, conservative scholars maintain that Peter was its writer. The author of both letters plainly identified himself as "Peter" and as an "apostle of Jesus Christ." Second Peter, like the

first epistle, contains credible eyewitness accounts of Jesus' life and ministry (2 Pet. 1:16-18), and 2 Peter 3:1 references an earlier letter, presumably 1 Peter, that he had written to his readers.

The writer of Jude identified himself as a slave of Jesus Christ and a brother of James (Jude 1:1). This could not be James, the brother of John, because he was martyred at an early date (Acts 12:2). If it refers to James, the brother of Jesus, then this would mean that Jude was also a brother of Christ. But Jude humbly referred to himself as the brother of James instead.

Dates—Though a wide variety of dates have been suggested for 1 and 2 Peter and Jude, the best we can do is arrive at a range. If Peter is the writer of both letters that bear his name, then they were both written prior to his death around A.D. 67. First Peter would probably have been written between A.D. 60–62, and 2 Peter would have been written shortly before his death. Jude could have been written any time between A.D. 65 and 80, depending on its relationship with 2 Peter.

»» KEY THEMES

These three books highlight several key themes, and they all relate to the presence of suffering and false teaching in the church.

- Suffering affords Christians opportunities to deepen their hope and their walk with God. Though nobody enjoys suffering, it does press people to grow in maturity. They can use their suffering to propel them into holy living and honoring God with their lives.
- Persecution often follows proclamation of the Word of God. When Christians faithfully proclaim the Word of God and live for Him, they can expect the world to persecute them. Sometimes it may be ridicule or scorn, and at other times it may be physical abuse or death.
- Spiritual growth is a natural outgrowth of genuine conversion. Those who have truly come to Christ will begin to grow in faith. They are not instantly perfect, but they will begin to progress toward godliness in their lives.
- Christians must combat false teaching with the Word of God and holy lives. Our source of authority for doctrine is the Bible, but we must confront false teaching with lives that are in tune with the Lord.



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)



Session

1

A LIVING HOPE

Jesus' resurrection gives believers a living hope.

1 PETER 1:3-9

³ 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 ⁴ and into an inheritance that is imperishable, uncorrupted, and unfading, kept in heaven for you. ⁵ You are being protected by God's power through faith for a salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. ⁶ You rejoice in this, though now for a short time you have had to struggle in various trials ⁷ 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. ⁸ 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, ⁹ because you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

Underline all the phrases in verses 3-5 that describe the living hope. According to verses 6-9, how did this hope fuel Peter's audience in their trials?

FIRST THOUGHTS

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.

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?

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

The writer of 1 Peter left little doubt he was Peter the apostle (1 Pet. 1:1). Simon Peter, the fisherman turned disciple (Matt. 4:18-20), experienced highs and lows during the ministry of Jesus. Then he struggled with the expansion of the gospel to the Gentiles. However, through a heavenly vision, God admonished him not to call unclean what He called clean (Acts 10:9-16). This led Peter to a ministry far beyond Jerusalem, which eventually ended with his death in Rome in the middle 60s. When the apostle wrote 1 Peter, he was most likely writing from Rome, as evidenced by his reference to Babylon in 1 Peter 5:13. This would put his writing toward the end of his life, when local persecution was just beginning to surface toward Christians. Only a few years later, this would shift to an empire-wide persecution during the reign of Nero.

Peter addressed the letter to “temporary residents dispersed in •Pontus, •Galatia, •Cappadocia, •Asia, and •Bithynia” (1 Pet. 1:1; see p. 6). These were Roman provinces located in the northern part of Asia Minor, or modern Turkey. (See map, inside back cover.) Peter listed them in order of how one might visit them if traveling in a circle throughout that region. Though Peter's letter may refer to suffering in general, it is most pointed toward those who were suffering because of localized persecution against Christians. Peter referred to persecution on seven occasions in five chapters. (See 1:6-7; 2:18-20; 3:1,13-17; 4:1-4,12-19; 5:10.)

What would you say to bring hope to people who were facing persecution for their faith? Peter chose to begin his letter by reminding them of their election in Christ. He reminded them that they were chosen through the “foreknowledge of God the



Father” (1:2). That election was not based on their merit but on the Father’s plan for them. Peter said they were “set apart by the Spirit for obedience and for sprinkling with the blood of Jesus Christ” (v. 2). Because of God’s grace, they had a living hope to help them endure the suffering they experienced.

KEY DOCTRINE: *Salvation*

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

EXPLORE THE TEXT

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

VERSE 3

³ 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

To a group of Christians in Asia Minor suffering from persecution, Peter began his letter with *praise*. Praise has a way of taking a person’s eyes off of suffering and putting them on the eternal God. Specifically, Peter praised *God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ* who has *given us a new birth*. The concept of new birth originated with the teachings of Jesus. Jesus had spoken in these terms to Nicodemus in John 3:3, when He told the religious leader that he needed to be born again. But how did new birth provide hope to those who were enduring localized persecution?

The source of the new birth was the reason for hope. Peter emphasized that new birth came *through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead*. Because of His victory over death, Jesus offered *a living hope* to those who were enduring persecution. The worst that 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. Even if their persecutors took their lives, they still had the hope of eternal life in Jesus Christ. This was not some blind or false hope, but a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

How does praising God for the new birth help a Christian who is suffering?

VERSE 4

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

To highlight the temporal nature of their suffering, Peter contrasted the Christians' persecution with the eternal promise of the living hope mentioned in verse 3. One of the present dangers of suffering is a lack of proper perspective. Suffering is real and may seem long, but in light of eternity suffering is not hopeless. Peter pointed to the inheritance given to Christians by their Father. In the Old Testament, the inheritance almost always indicated a land that God had promised the Jews (Num. 32:19; Ps. 105:11). In the New Testament, the term *inheritance* is associated with the hope of believers beyond our own lifetimes (Eph. 1:11; Col. 3:24). Thus, Peter contrasted the temporal nature of suffering with the eternal nature of salvation.

As a reminder of the eternal nature of salvation, Peter described our inheritance in four ways. First, he said it is *imperishable*. Think of an apple that is beautiful and shiny when you first get it but decays as time passes. The inheritance of God will neither perish nor decay. Second, he described the inheritance as *uncorrupted*. It will never lose its luster or beauty. Think of a shiny new car that over the years fades and loses its original luster. The inheritance God gives does not lose its beauty over time. Third, it is *unfading*. Unlike earthly wealth, which can be here today and gone tomorrow, salvation continues for eternity. Finally, Peter described the inheritance as *kept in heaven*. The tense of this verb indicates that it is a past action that has continuing results. Our salvation is secure—not because we are able to hold on to Christ, but because Christ holds on to us.

When we suffer, we do not need to worry that God has forgotten us or that He has neglected to finish His work in us. Because of the nature of the salvation God gives, we can hold on to hope and know that our suffering is temporary.



What does a person's response to suffering reveal about who or what he or she places hope in?

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?

HOPE ASSURED (1 PET. 1:5)

VERSE 5

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

Many of the Christians who suffered in Peter's day probably wondered whether they could remain faithful to Christ in the face of increasing political, economic, and social persecution. The persecution in Asia Minor was only beginning. Though Peter explained the inheritance that Christians had as imperishable, uncorrupted, unfading, and kept in heaven (v. 4), they likely experienced days when they wondered whether they could maintain a strong faith when their suffering was so great.

Peter explained that the only way this could happen was *by God's power*. Their endurance was not human but divine. The word for *protected* was a military word that described the action of a strong military protecting a fort or garrison. Christians would remain with God in their suffering, not because of their strength of character, but because of His strength. God would protect them

through their faith. As always in Scripture, both divine sovereignty and human responsibility meld together into an inseparable union. God produces faith, and the believer expresses it in trials. If everything were entirely dependent on human means, then certainly the believer would fall short when experiencing suffering.

As God produced faith in the believer, the believer yielded in surrender to the **salvation** promised by God—“a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus” (v. 3). In the New Testament, salvation could refer to a present possession or a future inheritance. It could be defined as a rescue from God’s judgment on the last day (1 Pet. 4:17), but it could also be described as a present possession long before the final day (Eph. 2:8-9). Though it is obvious that Peter here used the term to refer to a future event, the point of the passage is that the future event brings encouragement and strength in the present. For those going through difficulties and trials, the hope of eternal life propels them to faithfulness to Christ even in the suffering that they endure at the present time.

Lest those being persecuted felt like giving up, Peter reminded them that the full benefits of God’s salvation may be hidden from them at the moment, but God stood ready to fulfill all of His promises in due time. Peter knew that the suffering of Christians was producing a powerful witness to those who were lost, and God was patiently waiting for all to come to Him, not wanting any to perish (2 Pet. 3:9).

When would the full effects of this salvation take effect and all suffering end? Peter stated that it was **to be revealed in the last time.** Certainly this referred to a future event, most likely the appearance of Christ at His return (1 Pet. 1:7). Jesus Christ will return as He promised, and at that time the wrongs of the world will be righted, and all suffering will cease. Until then, all believers can take comfort in knowing that God protects their faith so they can remain faithful to the Lord even during the most difficult times.

How does the assurance of God’s faithfulness give you the encouragement to endure?



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

VERSE 6

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

When we put suffering in its proper perspective in relationship to eternity, it produces joy. The word for *rejoice* in this passage is not the usual Greek word used by secular writers. Joy is deeper than a giddy feeling of happiness. Facing persecution, the Christians struggled but still had joy in knowing that their suffering was *for a short time*. After that, they would inherit the promises of God.

How is Christian joy different than a sentimental feeling of happiness? In what ways is it more satisfying?

VERSE 7

⁷ 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.

Peter finally answered the question of how a good God could allow suffering in the lives of those who followed Him. Suffering served as a test for faith. A faith that was not genuine would not last, but those who endured suffering with true faith would continue to remain true to the Lord. No amount of persuasion could cause them to renounce their faith in Christ.

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). Faithful believers who endure suffering will have the opportunity to return *praise, glory, and honor* to the Lord *at the revelation of Jesus Christ*. God's purposes may not be completely known in our own lifetime, but they will be revealed when Christ appears in His second coming.

VERSE 8

⁸ 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,

Even though believers in Asia Minor had not seen Jesus in physical form, they still loved Him. Why did they love Him? They loved Him because they believed in Him, and the living hope He provided produced a joy that was beyond explanation. Even in some of the most difficult trials, the persecuted believers were filled with joy. Some might expect believers to be crushed by their circumstances and their hardships, but instead they had a real hope that caused them to look to the future with optimism. Whether they lived or died, they knew that a day was coming when they would overcome. This gave them an *inexpressible and glorious joy*.

VERSE 9

⁹ because you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

The reason for the joy that believers in Asia Minor felt was that they would in time receive *the goal of their faith*. By using the present participle *receiving* here, Peter revealed that not all of the effects of salvation are future-oriented. The Christians certainly had a future hope, but they also had the presence of the Holy Spirit to strengthen them in their trials (1 Pet. 1:12). However, the goal of faith was not merely to give strength in trials but to provide *the salvation of your souls*. By *souls*, Peter did not mean that God cared only about one part of their lives, as opposed to their bodies. The term *soul* was often used interchangeably to represent the whole person.

Why is it important to celebrate hope when we face difficult trials? How can we celebrate hope?



IN MY CONTEXT

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. In Christ, we discover a clear picture of God's grace and salvation.

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?

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.

Spend time in prayer celebrating God's grace and salvation in your life. If you have not committed your life to Jesus, read the information on the inside front cover to discover God's grace found in Jesus.

MEMORY VERSE

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. —1 Peter 1:8



Session 2

BE HOLY

Jesus' resurrection empowers believers for holy living.

1 PETER 1:13-25

¹³ 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. ¹⁴ As obedient children, do not be conformed to the desires of your former ignorance. ¹⁵ But as the One who called you is holy, you also are to be holy in all your conduct; ¹⁶ for it is written, Be holy, because I am holy. ¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ 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,¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish.²⁰ He was chosen before the foundation of the world but was revealed at the end of the times for you²¹ 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.²² By obedience to the truth, having purified yourselves for sincere love of the brothers, love one another earnestly from a pure heart,²³ since you have been born again—not of perishable seed but of imperishable—through the living and enduring word of God.²⁴ For All flesh is like grass, and all its glory like a flower of the grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls,²⁵ but the word of the Lord endures forever. And this is the word that was preached as the gospel to you.

Underline the commands given in this passage. Highlight the reasons for following the commands, looking for how the two are connected. Focus on the motivation for obedience to the commands.

FIRST THOUGHTS

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.

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?

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.

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.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

1 PETER 1:13-25

In 1 Peter 1, the apostle wrote to encourage Christians in Asia Minor who faced difficult persecution. Peter began the chapter by reminding them of their living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Because Jesus is a living Savior, He promised that the persecuted Christians would live forever with Him. This created much hope and encouragement for those who needed an eternal perspective in their lives.

In verses 10-12, Peter reminded his readers that the Old Testament had prophesied Christ would suffer many things.



However, Christ would also be glorified as He obeyed God's will. Peter's hope was that the early Christians suffering in Asia Minor would also remain faithful in their suffering. As God glorified His Son for remaining faithful in His suffering, He also wanted to honor those who followed Christ. However, they needed to remain faithful in living holy lives.

The Christians in Asia Minor had an advantage over people in the Old Testament because the gospel had been preached to them by the Holy Spirit (v. 12). This was a mystery so great Peter said the angels desired to look into the glory of the gospel. The angels had no need to experience the gospel in the sense sinful man did, so they looked upon it as outsiders.

The gospel was so great that not only did the angels desire to look into it, but Christians who had experienced the gospel desired to live holy lives because of it. They were to live lives that were obedient (vv. 13-16), reverent (vv. 17-21), and compassionate (vv. 22-25).

EXPLORE THE TEXT

OBEDIENT (1 PET. 1:13-16)

VERSE 13

¹³ 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.

Peter began his letter to persecuted Christians by reminding them of what they had believed (vv. 3-12). As he proceeded in the letter, he emphasized how belief affects life. First, they were to be *serious*. This word has the general sense of living alert and with sound judgment.

Second, they were to *set their hope completely on the grace* that Jesus would bring at His return. They were to live alert in the present age, but with a hope toward the age to come. Before calling believers to holiness, Peter inserted a brief reminder that only the grace of God can make that possible.

VERSE 14

¹⁴ As obedient children, do not be conformed to the desires of your former ignorance.

Obedience does not produce a believer in Jesus Christ, but true belief does produce obedience. As believers, ungodly desires still beckon and tempt us from following the Lord. Certainly when believers face trying circumstances, as they did in Peter's day, it is important to live alert and obedient lives. *As obedient children* of God, Peter reminds us we are different from the world.

Peter admonished believers to *not be conformed to the desires of their former ignorance*. Holiness is a possibility only because of the new birth. We are now *obedient children* because we have been born again (v. 3). Since we have experienced new birth, we are not to return to the former way of life.

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?

VERSES 15-16

¹⁵ **But as the One who called you is holy, you also are to be holy in all your conduct;** ¹⁶ **for it is written, Be holy, because I am holy.**

In addition to reminding believers of their new birth, Peter reminds us of the reason for holy living: God *is •holy* (see p. 6). Quoting Leviticus 11:44-45, he challenged believers to measure their lives by the Lord, not by some inferior standard of holiness. Peter's injunction to live holy lives came directly from the Hebrew Scriptures. He grounded his instruction not in human opinion, but in Scripture. When it comes to holiness, we have little room to form our own opinions about what is right and what is wrong. In a world of shifting ethical standards, it is important to know the Bible and ground all of our decisions in its teaching.

How would you describe the connection between God's character and a believer's conduct?



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?

REVERENT (1 PET. 1:17-21)

VERSE 17

¹⁷ 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.

Right belief not only results in holy lives but also in reverence for God. Those who truly believe that the Lord is the ultimate Judge live their lives in reverent *fear*. Addressing God as *Father* but refusing to show Him reverence in the way we live is foolish. Because God is our ultimate Judge, we should respect His authority in our lives. He holds us accountable, and we should respond to His authority by showing honor to Him.

VERSES 18-19

¹⁸ 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, ¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish.

God is worthy of our reverence not only because He is our Father and Judge, but also because He is the One who has *redeemed* our *empty way of life*. The word *redeem* was a word used in the

slave trade. Someone could purchase another's freedom by paying a ransom price. Peter reminded his audience that they inherited an *empty way of life* from their own earthly *fathers*. Sin had spread from Adam to his descendants, and is passed down to all like some dreaded disease. It enslaves all who inherit sin, and sinners need a redemption that cannot be bought with *silver or gold*.

Only heightening the level of reverence for God, Peter told how God redeemed believers *not with perishable things ... but with the precious blood of Christ*. God offered His own Son to release those who were enslaved to sin. He has set them free to become His own children. By referring to the *lamb without defect or blemish*, Peter pointed to Christ being the sinless Lamb who was sacrificed for our sins (Lev. 22:19-25).

VERSES 20-21

²⁰ He was chosen before the foundation of the world but was revealed at the end of the times for you ²¹ 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.

The plan of God to redeem humanity was so carefully crafted that it proved God to be worthy of reverence. Peter reminds us Jesus *was chosen before the foundation of the world*. Peter did not mean simply that God knew ahead of time Jesus would die in this way. Rather, the death of Jesus was God's intended way of salvation even before creation. The cross was not an afterthought. God didn't make humans and then wring His hands when they fell into sin. God in His sovereignty knew that Adam and Eve would fall, and He also already had a plan in place. Jesus was not "Plan B." Though people did not always understand His plan, God continually revealed Jesus in the writings of the Hebrew Scriptures and then revealed Him in due time so people would believe in Him.

In verse 21, Peter further unpacked God's work of redemption through Christ. By believing in Jesus' resurrection *from the dead*, Christians express that their *faith and hope are in God*. We must meet Him not on our own terms but on His terms. On our terms, we could never please God because we are all sinners who fall short of His glory (Rom. 3:23). However, it pleased God to crush His own Son as the payment for our sin (Isa. 53:10). By believing in the sacrificial death of Jesus, we are showing the ultimate reverence for God.



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?

COMPASSIONATE (1 PET. 1:22-25)

VERSES 22-23

²² By obedience to the truth, having purified yourselves for sincere love of the brothers, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, ²³ since you have been born again—not of perishable seed but of imperishable—through the living and enduring word of God.

True belief leads to obedience and reverence; it also leads to a compassionate life. Having a passion for holiness without practicing compassion can result in legalism. As we revere the Lord, we will experience both a desire for holiness and a compassion for others.

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. We can show grace because we have been shown grace by God. If our heart is pure, we will reach out to others with that same grace that God lavished on us.

What is the connection between holiness and compassion? What is the connection between humility and a person's love for others?

The command to love others is rooted in the saving work of Christ. We can love because Jesus first loved us. Again referring to new birth (1 Pet. 1:3), Peter reminds us of the importance of loving others. Salvation is forever since it is of *imperishable* seed, and in that sense it mirrors the *word of God*, which is *living and enduring*. The *seed* is yet another reference to the new birth, which comes through the life-giving message of Jesus' death and resurrection.

What did we do to deserve salvation? Nothing. We simply believed the Word of God, from beginning to end, reveals the

gospel of Jesus Christ. God did the work, and we believed in it. Since He did the work, we have reason for humility and grace in the way we relate to others. We show sincere love to others because it has been shown to us.

VERSES 24-25

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

To illustrate the importance of showing compassion toward others, Peter turned to Isaiah 40:6-8. These verses had provided comfort to the exiles in Babylon that God would one day restore them to their land. God would show compassion to them even though in the course of history people and nations are like the grass and flowers of a field. The grass and flowers are good while they last, but they are temporary. ***The grass withers, and the flower falls.*** So also God's people fell as a nation to Babylon after the ministry of the prophet Isaiah. But God's people would endure because God had already spoken on the subject. He had promised Abram that his descendants would be numerous and would bless all other nations through them (Gen. 12:1-3). He had promised David that his reign would endure forever (2 Sam. 7:13). God, who always keeps His promises, showed compassion on His people in Babylon even though they did not deserve it.

The text of Isaiah 40:6-8 is a reminder that even though the grass and flowers are temporary, God's Word is not. It ***endures forever.*** God showed compassion toward His people because He had made promises that He would not revoke. Because God set a pattern of loving people in spite of their failures, we too may show grace toward others, whether they deserve it or not. As a result of our salvation, we can reach out to love others.

How is our love for others rooted in the gospel?



IN MY CONTEXT

Believers are to live in a holy manner because God is holy. They are accountable to God for how they conduct their lives. The Christian life is motivated by a pure love based upon the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus.

Would you say that your life leans more toward a passion for holiness or compassion toward others? Identify actions you need to take to maintain a healthy balance between the two.

Review the motivations for actions presented by Peter in this passage. Which motivation do you need to incorporate the most into your life? What steps do you need to take to instill that motivation for action?

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.

MEMORY VERSE

By obedience to the truth, having purified yourselves for sincere love of the brothers, love one another earnestly from a pure heart.
—1 Peter 1:22



BUILDING OUR FAITH

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

1 PETER 2:1-10

¹ So rid yourselves of all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all slander. ² Like newborn infants, desire the pure spiritual milk, so that you may grow by it for your salvation, ³ since you have tasted that the Lord is good. ⁴ Coming to Him, a living stone—rejected by men but chosen and valuable to God— ⁵ you yourselves, as living stones, are being built into a spiritual house for a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. ⁶ For it is contained in Scripture: Look! I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and honored cornerstone, and the one who believes in Him will never be put to shame! ⁷ So honor will come to you



who believe, but for the unbelieving, The stone that the builders rejected—this One has become the cornerstone,⁸ and A stone to stumble over, and a rock to trip over. They stumble because they disobey the message; they were destined for this.⁹ But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His possession, so that you may proclaim the praises of the One who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Notice how believers are described in this passage. Compare those descriptions with the descriptions used for Jesus. Look for ways the descriptions of believers are tied to the descriptions of Jesus.

FIRST THOUGHTS

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.

What decisions might an owner face when building a house? Which decisions do you think carry the biggest weight?

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.

KEY DOCTRINE: *Sanctification*

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

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

1 PETER 2:1-10

Peter was writing to Christians in Asia Minor facing persecution. He reminded them of the living hope through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead (1 Pet. 1:3). They needed to readdress the foundation of their Christian walk. The apostle also encouraged them to address the structure being built on that foundation. He called them to live holy lives, to live in reverence for God, and to love others with a love like God's (vv. 13-25).

With the foundation in place and the structure ascending, Peter encouraged the believers to press on to maturity in Christ. They had entered a dark period of suffering that would only grow stronger as localized persecution turned to empire-wide persecution. Christianity was not for the weak at heart.

Peter used three images to describe the type of maturity he hoped to witness in these Christians. First, he longed for them to desire pure spiritual milk rather than a substitute formula. The only way they could grow was by receiving proper nourishment. Second, he called on the church to recognize each member was a living stone being built into a spiritual house. One stone by itself



would not make a building, so the Christians needed to learn the power of community. Third, he reminded the Christians of who they were in Christ. They were a spiritual people created to proclaim praise to the Lord. The persecution they faced would not stamp out their faith but rather would highlight the strength of the Lord in them.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

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

VERSE 1

¹ So rid yourselves of all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all slander.

Peter was more concerned with helping believers endure their trials than with explaining their trials. Therefore, he first encouraged the persecuted Christians to *rid* themselves of attitudes and actions unbecoming of believers.

First, they were to rid themselves of *all malice*. Peter had previously encouraged the Christians to be known by their sincere love (1:22), and this could not happen if they held malice in their hearts. Malice is an attitude that resembles hatred and desires to reach out to inflict pain on others. The Christians could have easily developed this attitude toward those who were persecuting them, but maturity demanded a stronger response to their suffering.

Second, Christians were to avoid *deceit*. This refers to deliberate dishonesty. Christians who took a stand for Christ were persecuted, and the temptation probably was strong for them to deceive those who were persecuting them.

Hypocrisy also threatened the Christian community. Originally the word *hypocrisy* referred to an actor who played a part but concealed his real identity. In that day actors would often wear a mask, concealing their true identities. Peter did not want Christians cowering under the threat of persecution. He wanted people who would live honestly and openly for Christ.

Peter also encouraged them to avoid *envy* and *slander*. Perhaps the Christians were tempted to be envious of the power exhibited by their persecutors. *Slander* is cutting down others in speech. Perhaps the believers slandered those who persecuted them.

How do the attitudes and actions listed by Peter get in the way of spiritual growth?

VERSE 2

² Like newborn infants, desire the pure spiritual milk, so that you may grow by it for your salvation,

Some people may think Peter's reference to *newborn infants* indicates the Christians in Asia Minor were immature Christians. This is not necessarily the case. The point of Peter's metaphor was that all Christians need *pure spiritual milk* that allows them to grow. Whether mature or immature, the Christian needs the same food source. The word *desire* is a strong word that could also be translated "crave." It denotes an intense personal desire. Anyone who has ever seen a newborn baby longing for milk knows the intensity of that desire.

People desire many things—some things that are good for them and some that are bad for them. Peter encouraged believers to desire milk, but not just any milk. He described this milk in two ways. First, it is *pure* milk. This is a milk free from impurities. Contaminated milk will not produce maturity in the believer. Watered-down milk falls short of the nourishment needed to grow. The milk also needs to be *spiritual*. Usually in Greek literature this word (*logikos*) meant "what is rational or reasonable." It comes from the same word used for the Word of God and Jesus the living Word (*logos*). This is an indication that the pure milk believers should desire is the Word of God.

VERSE 3

³ since you have tasted that the Lord is good.

Peter alluded to Psalm 34:8 in this verse. He reminded believers that they had *tasted that the Lord is good*. One taste of the Lord will create a yearning for more. The theme of Psalm 34 was the suffering of the righteous, which may indicate why Peter alluded to this particular psalm. Peter used the Word of God to encourage persecuted believers in Asia Minor to long for the pure, unadulterated Word of God.



What may have appeared in verse 1 of this chapter to be mere moralism changes in verses 2-3. The believers were to rid themselves of bad attitudes and actions not simply to fulfill some requirement. They had tasted the goodness of God and were now to live in light of that goodness. They needed to continue nourishing themselves with the Word of God so they could press on to maturity and fulfill their purpose in suffering.

How would you explain the importance of proper spiritual nourishment? What would you include as a balanced spiritual diet for the believer?

SPIRITUAL HOUSE (1 PET. 2:4-8)

VERSES 4-5

⁴ Coming to Him, a living stone—rejected by men but chosen and valuable to God— ⁵ you yourselves, as living stones, are being built into a spiritual house for a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

Shifting metaphors, Peter turned from newborn babes craving spiritual milk to living stones being built into a spiritual building. As Christians, they had come to Christ, who was the *living stone*. Jesus had experienced rejection by the people He came to save, but He was *chosen* by God and *valuable* to Him. The Christians in Asia Minor also had experienced rejection, but God was using them as *living stones* to build *a spiritual house*.

Just as Jesus is *a living stone*, so too are those who follow Him. All those who come to Him for salvation become a part of a building program. As verse 6 will state, Christ is the cornerstone for the building, but the other stones are important in building that spiritual house. We would do well to remember that the Christian life must be lived in community. We are not solitary stones unto ourselves but rather a part of what God is building.

What is the purpose of this spiritual house? God is building a spiritual house where a holy priesthood will offer worship *acceptable to God*. What worship is acceptable to Him? He accepts worship that comes *through Jesus Christ*, the cornerstone. Everything in the church is built upon Jesus and is for Jesus' praise.

What role does a church and its members play in the development of a follower of Christ?

VERSE 6

⁶ For it is contained in Scripture: Look! I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and honored cornerstone, and the one who believes in Him will never be put to shame!

Peter quoted Isaiah 28:16 to reinforce his declaration that Christ is the *cornerstone* of the house that God is building. At great cost, the cornerstone was laid in place *in •Zion* (see p. 6), and it is the foundation on which everything else rests. By citing the prophet Isaiah, Peter demonstrated how this was God's plan from the beginning.

Because Peter's readers experienced rejection and suffering, they may have been tempted to think God was rejecting them. The truth was actually just the opposite. Their rejection was a sign that they, like Jesus, were included in the plan of God as He built a spiritual temple of people who would worship Him. Do not confuse trials with the absence of God's presence.

VERSES 7-8

⁷ So honor will come to you who believe, but for the unbelieving, The stone that the builders rejected—this One has become the cornerstone, ⁸ and A stone to stumble over, and a rock to trip over. They stumble because they disobey the message; they were destined for this.

Since God had not rejected the suffering Christians in Asia Minor, why were they enduring such persecution? Peter affirmed that one day those who believed in Christ would be honored, but those who rejected Him would be punished. He quoted Psalm 118:22 to demonstrate that Christ had suffered, and yet God had honored His faithfulness. *The stone that the builders rejected* became *the cornerstone*. If Christ had suffered and yet received honor, that outcome would also happen for those who followed Him.

Then Peter alluded to Isaiah 8:14, where the disobedient stumbled over the stone that should have saved them. Rather than fearing those who were persecuting them, the Christians



in Asia Minor should have felt a measure of sorrow for their persecutors who were stumbling over the message of Christ.

One difficulty in the passage is interpreting the last part of verse 8. What did it mean that *they were destined for this*? What was destined in this verse? Was it the unbelief of man or the stumbling as a result of unbelief? Either way, it is important to affirm that God never exempts human beings from responsibility for their own sin (see Rom. 9:14-23). For example, Peter indicted those who crucified Christ, even though the crucifixion was ordained by God (Acts 2:23). Both divine sovereignty and human responsibility are found here in this passage as well.

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.

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

VERSE 9

⁹ But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His possession, so that you may proclaim the praises of the One who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.

Peter painted a contrast between Christians and unbelievers. In the previous verses, he described how unbelievers stumble over Jesus, the chief cornerstone. But Christians enjoy an exalted position. Peter described believers in four powerful images. They are part of *a chosen race*. The Israelite understanding that they alone were God's chosen people has now been broadly expanded. Peter used Exodus 19:6 to draw upon the imagery of a *royal priesthood*, another term that originally applied to Israel. Like God had built the nation of Israel, He was rebuilding a new community in the church. Peter also called the Christians *a holy nation*. This expression also came from Exodus 19:6 and originally referred to Israel. The final expression, *a people for His possession*, may be a reference to Malachi 3:17, where it referred to those who respond to the Lord's rebuke and desire to live righteously.

But what is the purpose of these exalted titles for Christians? Are we exalted to bring glory to ourselves? Peter squelched any such thinking by reminding his audience they were created to *proclaim the praises of the One who called* them from *darkness* to *light*. In Isaiah 43:21, the prophet reminded God's people that they were created to recount the praises of God. Peter reminds us that God created us for the same reason. This would include both worship and evangelism. We have been called to testify to the way God has taken us from darkness to light so others might hear the gospel and turn to Christ.

What is the relationship between worship and evangelism?

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.

VERSE 10

¹⁰ **Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.**

Alluding to the words of Hosea 2:23, Peter recounted a time in the lives of the Christians when they *were not a people*. For the most part, Israel had rejected the Savior God sent through them. God had now created a new people, made up of both Jews and Gentiles, who would declare God's praises to the nations. The churches that Peter wrote to were mostly made up of Gentiles who had been living in darkness, but by the mercy of God *now* were *God's people*.

How does the gospel break down walls between people?



IN MY CONTEXT

We are to crave the spiritual food that leads to maturity. As members of God's family, believers are to serve God in a way that pleases Him. Believers are to declare to others what God has done and is doing.

List ways you are feeding on God's Word. What do you need to do to consume God's Word more diligently—reading, studying, and reflecting on its truth?

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.

Discuss with the group why belonging to a church and a Bible study group is important when it comes to declaring the praises of God to others. Determine steps the group can take to encourage each other to be more consistent in sharing with others.

MEMORY VERSE

Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. —1 Peter 2:10



Session 4

LIVING AS STRANGERS

Believers honor God through their good works.

1 PETER 2:11-20

¹¹ Dear friends, I urge you as strangers and temporary residents to abstain from fleshly desires that war against you. ¹² Conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles, so that in a case where they speak against you as those who do what is evil, they will, by observing your good works, glorify God on the day of visitation.

¹³ Submit to every human authority because of the Lord, whether to the Emperor as the supreme authority ¹⁴ or to governors as those sent out by him to punish those who do what is evil and to praise those who do what is good. ¹⁵ For it is God's will that you silence the ignorance of foolish people by doing good. ¹⁶ As God's



slaves, live as free people, but don't use your freedom as a way to conceal evil. ¹⁷ Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the Emperor. ¹⁸ Household slaves, submit with all fear to your masters, not only to the good and gentle but also to the cruel. ¹⁹ For it brings favor if, mindful of God's will, someone endures grief from suffering unjustly. ²⁰ For what credit is there if you sin and are punished, and you endure it? But when you do what is good and suffer, if you endure it, this brings favor with God.

Look for the reasons given by Peter for the course of action he called his readers to take. What are the connections between the reasons given and who the Christians were supposed to influence?

FIRST THOUGHTS

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.

What are some of the ways you have experienced culture shock when traveling to a new location? How did it make you feel?

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.

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.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

1 PETER 2:11-25

The focus of Peter's letter now shifts from the relationship between believers (1:13–2:10) to their relationship with the unbelieving world (2:11–25). The world in Peter's day was suspicious and sometimes hostile toward those who put their faith in Jesus Christ. In the first part of his letter Peter dealt with theological concerns. The Christians who suffered persecution in Asia Minor needed a living hope in a resurrected Savior (1:3). Possessing this hope allowed them to live in obedience, reverence, and love toward others (1:13–25). As the Christians matured in their understanding of who they were in Christ, they would better understand how to deal with persecution. But how should they deal with their persecutors? This is what Peter explains in 1 Peter 2:11–20.



Peter encouraged believers in his day to be good citizens in the culture where they lived, but that did not include compromising their own convictions or embracing worldly values that caused them to lose their distinctiveness in Christ. He called them to a countercultural lifestyle that would display Christ to the culture (2:11-12). This would be reflected in the way they treated officials and leaders (vv. 13-17) and in their work (vv. 18-20).

EXPLORE THE TEXT

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

VERSE 11

¹¹ Dear friends, I urge you as strangers and temporary residents to abstain from fleshly desires that war against you.

Peter encouraged his readers, as citizens of a different world, to ***abstain from fleshly desires***. The word *flesh* in the Scriptures has several different meanings. It can simply mean the physical body. But here the emphasis seems to be the natural desires human beings have apart from the work of the Holy Spirit. The fact that Peter told them to abstain from these desires means they were tempted by them. Becoming a Christian does not completely eradicate fleshly desires. Rather, Satan uses them to wage war against believers. Some people have a problem believing Christians struggle with the same desires as those who do not believe in Jesus, but most people understand that from their own experience.

VERSE 12

¹² Conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles, so that in a case where they speak against you as those who do what is evil, they will, by observing your good works, glorify God on the day of visitation.

Many people in Peter's day viewed Christians with disdain and suspicion. Some accused the church of being disloyal to the state (see Acts 17:7). Some believers were accused of sabotaging business enterprises by their religious beliefs, and in Paul's case, on one occasion, that was actually true (see Acts 16:19).

Peter encouraged believers to ***conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles***. In 1 Peter 1:15, the word translated *conduct*

spoke of holiness in life. In 1:17-18, the same word encouraged believers to turn from the evil way of life from which they had been redeemed. In 3:1-2, it depicts the godly behavior of Christian wives, and in 3:16, it describes the godly lives of suffering believers. Overall, the term indicates the new way of life Christians are to embrace after our new birth.

Verse 12 suggests that those who *speak against* Christians will be convinced by believers' deeds, not by their words. In a world that is hostile to Christianity, it is easy to get into verbal sparring matches with people who have an ungodly worldview. Unbelievers will not be won by arguments about morality but by the quality of our lives.

Unbelievers will *glorify God on the day of visitation*. Two schools of thought exist concerning this phrase. Some believe *the day of visitation* means the return of the Lord, implying that one day unbelievers will see that the Christians were right. The other school of thought interprets this phrase as the time of God's gracious visitation in saving people who currently oppose the gospel. The latter seems to be more likely. It was Peter's desire that the nations come to faith in Christ, and he knew the witness of believers to be an instrument in the gospel's spreading to the nations.

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?

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

VERSES 13-14

¹³ Submit to every human authority because of the Lord, whether to the Emperor as the supreme authority ¹⁴ or to governors as those sent out by him to punish those who do what is evil and to praise those who do what is good.

This is not the only place in the New Testament where Christians are urged to *submit* themselves to the *authority* of the government. (See also Rom. 13:1,5; Titus 3:1.) *Submit* refers to a willing submission, not to coercion. The same word is used in the



New Testament 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). However, the early apostles faced difficult decisions when the law of God and the law of man conflicted. They knew they needed to obey God rather than man (Acts 5:29).

The reason we can willingly submit to human authority is ***because of the Lord***, that is, because of His sovereign goodness in providing mankind with a structure of human authority. God causes kingdoms to rise and fall (Ps. 75:7; Dan. 2:21), and He has ordained political authority in the world (Rom. 13:1). These facts suggest two applications. First, God, in His sovereignty, gives the rulers the permission to rule. This means whether leaders are good or bad, we should see them as established by God to provide order. Second, since God has established government, then citizens should obey it unless it asks them to violate the law of God. The Bible contains several instances of civil disobedience. For instance, the Hebrew midwives allowed the male children to live in violation of Pharaoh's order (Ex. 1:17). Rahab disobeyed her king in not exposing the Jewish spies (Josh. 2:4). Saul's subjects refused to take Jonathan's life for violating Saul's command (1 Sam. 14:45).

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.

VERSE 15

15 For it is God's will that you silence the ignorance of foolish people by doing good.

The good lives of Christians should counter the false claims against them that lead to persecution. By remaining true to God and His ways, Christians *silence* their oppressors. By submitting to government, Christians prove that they are not anarchists who are disloyal to their leaders. They prove they are not anti-business and anti-progressive. They support the government in things that can be supported while still remaining true to the ways of God.

Peter made an important statement about their persecutors. They were ignorant and *foolish*. Because they did not know the Lord, they listened to foolish speculations about Christians and opposed them. Such behavior was not wise but foolish. Sometimes the persecuted need to hear they are on the side of knowledge and wisdom and that the behavior of their persecutors is foolish.

Why doesn't submission to government silence all persecution?

VERSE 16

16 As God's slaves, live as free people, but don't use your freedom as a way to conceal evil.

Peter wanted his readers to know that submission to authority does not automatically diminish *freedom*. In fact, no political force can take away spiritual freedom. The ones being persecuted in Asia Minor were *God's slaves*, and they could live in the freedom He provided. With the freedom God provides, Christian citizens have an obligation to be responsible with that freedom. We do not have a right to do *evil* because we are free. We are free because we are slaves of God.

How have people used their freedom for evil? Why is it important for Christians to avoid this temptation?



VERSE 17

17 Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the Emperor.

This section ends with four rapid-fire commands. When it comes to the Christians' witness in society, they are to show respect to everyone. Everyone may not earn that respect, but Christians know the importance of respecting everyone. Second, Christians should show *love* to everyone who claims the name of Christ. Because they serve the same Father, they are brothers in Christ. The third command is to *fear God*, giving Him the respect that He deserves. The final command is to *honor the Emperor*. As long as honoring political leaders does not usurp fearing God, the Christian should prove to be one of the best citizens in his or her country.

THROUGH YOUR WORK (1 PET. 2:18-20)

VERSE 18

18 Household slaves, submit with all fear to your masters, not only to the good and gentle but also to the cruel.

When Peter turned from the Christian's responsibility toward government to the duty toward workplace authorities, he targeted a specific relationship—*household slaves* and their *masters*. Slavery was a huge institution in the days of Peter. People could be enslaved in a number of ways. They could be captured in war, kidnapped, born into a slave household, or experience economic hardships that required them to sell themselves into slavery. Some slaves held respectable positions in society, such as doctors, teachers, musicians, and secretaries, but many were assigned menial, harsh tasks.

Peter did not address whether slavery was immoral; rather, he offered wisdom for the immediate need. Slaves were to submit to their masters *with all fear*. Such submission was to be based on the workers' respect for God (see 2:17) rather than on a cringing dread of their supervisors. Peter was arguing that workplace obedience does not depend on the character of the master.

Masters ran the gamut, from *good and gentle* to *cruel*. The command to submit to one's master did not apply only to those who were kind, but it also applied to those masters who were unkind.

The word for *cruel* can be variously translated as crooked, dishonest, or morally evil. The name of Jesus was at stake, and Christians were to offer no fuel for further persecution by rebelling against their masters.

How does the way one treats his or her boss dishonor or honor God?

VERSES 19-20

¹⁹ For it brings favor if, mindful of God’s will, someone endures grief from suffering unjustly. ²⁰ For what credit is there if you sin and are punished, and you endure it? But when you do what is good and suffer, if you endure it, this brings favor with God.

Peter further explained the reason a slave should not disrespect a cruel master. The primary motivation for showing respect was that it brought *favor*. This is the usual word translated as “grace.” By modeling grace to those who wronged them, the persecuted in Asia Minor were demonstrating the way God treated them.

Note that Peter spoke of those who were *suffering unjustly*. Some people suffer because of their own mistakes and their own choices. They bring suffering on themselves, so their suffering is not commendable. However, the Christians who suffered in Asia Minor did not bring their suffering upon themselves. Therefore, they had the opportunity to relate to their persecutors with the grace of God. If they had suffered for their own sin, then their treatment would have been punishment, but if they did nothing wrong and suffered, then they brought *favor with God*.

How would you define the line between showing grace and standing up against abuse? Can a person do both at the same time? Explain.



IN MY CONTEXT

Believers are to be exemplary members of their community, having a positive influence. Believers demonstrate trust in God by respecting their local government leaders. Even when abused, believers can demonstrate God's character to those who abuse them.

Identify ways your group can make a difference in your community. As a group, select one action on the list and take steps toward completing that action. Ask God to give you opportunities to share about Jesus through this action.

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.

Reflect on your response to any recent personal injustices you experienced. How did that response reflect the actions and attitudes called for by Peter? How will you respond in similar situations in the future in a way that would reflect Peter's directives?

MEMORY VERSE

Conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles, so that in a case where they speak against you as those who do what is evil, they will, by observing your good works, glorify God on the day of visitation. —1 Peter 2:12



Session 5

LIVING IN RELATIONSHIP

Believers honor God through healthy relationships.

1 PETER 3:1-12

¹ 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 ² when they observe your pure, reverent lives. ³ Your beauty should not consist of outward things like elaborate hairstyles and the wearing of gold ornaments or fine clothes. ⁴ 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. ⁵ For in the past, the holy women who put their hope in God also beautified themselves in this way, submitting to their own husbands,



⁶ 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. ⁷ Husbands, in the same way, live with your wives with an understanding of their weaker nature yet showing them honor as co-heirs of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered. ⁸ Now finally, all of you should be like-minded and sympathetic, should love believers, and be compassionate and humble, ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ 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, ¹¹ and he must turn away from evil and do what is good. He must seek peace and pursue it, ¹² 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.

Highlight the commands in verses 8-12. How are those actions seen in the counsel given in verses 1-7? How are the attitudes seen in a marriage related to the attitudes seen in other relationships?

FIRST THOUGHTS

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 your opinion, what is the biggest challenge Christians face in honoring God through marriage and healthy relationships?

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.

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.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

1 PETER 3:1-12

People reading Peter's letter today may question why he would address slaves but not masters in chapter 2, and why it would take six verses to address wives and only one to address husbands. Peter directed most of his comments in both sections toward those who had less power. In a patriarchal society, the male had dominance over the female. In the economic system of the day, the master had dominance over the slave. Since Christianity spread first among the



lower classes of society, the need to address the weaker party was more necessary.

The point of Peter's exhortation for slaves to be submissive to their masters was that they might demonstrate the attitude of Christ to their masters. This same tenor appears in his discussion of relationships between a husband and wife. He told how a wife should behave toward an unbelieving husband (1 Pet. 3:1-6). He also instructed the believing husband how to behave toward his unbelieving wife (v. 7). Finally, he described how all believers should live differently than those who were not believers (vv. 8-12).

EXPLORE THE TEXT

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

VERSES 1-2

¹ 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 ² when they observe your pure, reverent lives.

The fact that a woman would even adopt a religion contrary to her husband's violated the Greco-Roman ideal in society. That she would worship Jesus exclusively would also cut against the grain of the Greco-Roman world. Because of this potential tension in the home, Peter encouraged Christian wives married to unbelievers to *submit* to their husbands.

A wife's submission to her husband is to be voluntary, not forced by the husband. Submission does not indicate inferiority of the woman; rather, it is a voluntary act for the purpose of evangelizing her husband. Peter said that even when a husband is disobedient to the message of Christ, wives are to submit to their husbands. This does not mean that an abused spouse should remain in life-threatening situations. As much as possible, the wife is to submit to the husband in hopes that he will come to Christ.

What is it about the wife's submission that will speak to her husband? Peter explained that it is through her *pure* and *reverent* life. When the husband sees the purity of his wife, dedicated

completely to him, he will more likely take notice of her faith. As she demonstrates reverence (literally fear) for God, then her husband will be drawn to the source of her strength. The word translated *reverent* in this passage is directed toward God, so it is important to know that this is not the fear of her husband but the fear of God.

How could a Christian wife's submission to her unbelieving husband help win him to Christ?

VERSES 3-4

³ Your beauty should not consist of outward things like elaborate hairstyles and the wearing of gold ornaments or fine clothes.

⁴ 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.

The focus of a wife should not be on outward *beauty* but on inward beauty. Peter was not banning grooming accessories for women. Rather, he was encouraging women not to depend solely on them for their beauty. Braiding hair, golden jewelry, and *fine clothes* were part of society, but those things alone could not make a woman beautiful to her husband. How many times do we find ourselves worrying about how we look on the outside and ignore how we look on the inside?

The outward adornments on a woman cannot produce true beauty. Rather, beauty starts in *the heart*. What she is on the inside provides the platform on which true beauty can rest. The outward adornments cannot cover a poor inner disposition. The first inner quality Peter mentioned was a *gentle* spirit. This was not required merely of women; rather, it should be a characteristic of all believers (Matt. 5:5; 11:29; 1 Pet. 3:16). The *quiet spirit* mentioned in this verse is probably a reference back to the way a wife would win her husband without words (1 Pet. 3:1).

VERSES 5-6

⁵ For in the past, the holy women who put their hope in God also beautified themselves in this way, submitting to their



own husbands, ⁶ 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.

To illustrate how a wife should concentrate on inner beauty, Peter made reference to holy women of the past. They submitted to their husbands and concentrated on inner beauty, and God made them beautiful in their husbands' eyes. Specifically, Peter referenced *Sarah*, the wife of *Abraham*. Sarah submitted to Abraham by *calling him lord*. She allowed him to continue dreaming of a child (Gen. 18:12) instead of merely calling him an old man. Sarah was the mother of all Jewish people under the old covenant, and those who do what is good show themselves to be *her children*. Instead of living in fear, they work for the good of their husbands.

How does Sarah serve as the example of the attitude a wife should have toward her husband?

FOR THE HUSBAND (1 PET. 3:7)

VERSE 7

⁷ 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.

Peter encouraged husbands to *live with* their *wives* in a way that accounts for their *weaker nature*. What did Peter intend by calling them *weaker*? He did not suggest they are intellectually inferior. Neither was this a reference to some type of emotional weakness in women. God created both male and female in His image (Gen. 1:27). Peter was not calling women weaker morally or spiritually. Jesus showed no partiality for male or female spirituality (Gal. 3:28). So what did Peter mean?

The most obvious meaning of the passage is that women are usually physically weaker than men. Certainly it does not hold true that all men are physically stronger than women, but as a general rule it is the case. The husband needs to remember that his wife is likely physically weaker. An understanding of this

should prevent him from taking advantage of her by virtue of his physical strength.

Instead of overpowering their wives, husbands need to show them *honor*. Often, we show greater care to things that are more fragile. We treat a delicate vase much different than a rugged hammer. Rightly so, we do this because of its value to us and because of its function. Peter wanted husbands to value their wives and honor them as fellow believers. They too are *coheirs of the grace* of God. The value God places on wives and on their husbands is the same. This fact alone would have been a radical pronouncement in the culture Peter was addressing. The culture of the day placed more value on men than on women. Yet Peter encouraged husbands to honor and value their wives as equals before God.

In a stunning pronouncement, Peter declared that the husbands' *prayers* are dependent on the way they treat their wives. God will not bless those who use their positions of authority to abuse others. To be right with God, a husband needs to be right with his wife, which includes both *understanding* and *honor*. When husbands do not attempt to understand their wives or do not value them, their prayers will be hindered.

What does a man's treatment of his wife and other women reveal about his view of himself and of God?

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?



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

VERSE 8

⁸ Now finally, all of you should be like-minded and sympathetic, should love believers, and be compassionate and humble,

Peter turned from husband-wife relationships to the relationships of all believers. He encouraged believers to treat each other in a way that showed sympathy and compassion. He first encouraged them to live in harmony, being *like-minded*. A quartet that sings in harmony may all sing different parts, but they blend together as one. So it is with those who serve together in the church.

Peter also encouraged his readers to be *sympathetic*, caring about one another in a way that not only helped them to *be compassionate* toward one another but caused them to be *humble*. A person can feel compassion for another yet refuse to get involved in his or her life. Peter encouraged believers both to feel and act.

VERSE 9

⁹ 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.

Peter now described compassionate and humble behavior. First, it was a behavior that lacked an element of revenge. Christians do not pay back *evil for evil*. Instead, they reciprocate with *blessing*. Proverbs 25:21-22 suggests this behavior toward enemies, as it would heap burning coals on their heads. If we should treat our enemies that way, then certainly we should treat fellow believers in this manner.

Mistreatment is not always in deed; it can also be in word. Peter encouraged Christians not to trade *insult for insult*. Peter had just referred to the example of Christ (2:23), where Jesus was insulted but did not insult in return. Instead, Christians are called to bless others, asking God to show His favor and grace to those who oppose them. Again, Jesus demonstrated this by asking God not to hold the sin of those who nailed Him to the cross to their account (Luke 23:34). A Christian should not insult others or strive for revenge. Rather, believers are called to be a blessing to others.

How could following Peter's directives impact society? How could it impact people in the church?

VERSES 10-12

¹⁰ 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, ¹¹ and he must turn away from evil and do what is good. He must seek peace and pursue it, ¹² 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.

Verses 10-12 are an allusion to Psalm 34:12-16. Peter saw in the psalmist's plight a situation similar to the early Christians who were insulted by unbelievers. Rather than fight back and return insults, he encouraged them to adopt the attitude of Psalm 34.

The psalmist had suggested three responses to persecution that Peter encouraged his readers to follow. First, he encouraged them to guard their *lips*. Rather than speaking evil or deceitful words toward those who opposed them, they were to refrain from using destructive words. How many situations would be diffused if we measured our words and guarded our lips?

Second, he encouraged them to *turn away from evil* and *do what is good*. This is a clear choice that believers can make. Nobody forces them to do evil. They must choose to do those things that bless others.

Third, believers should *seek peace and pursue it*. Conflict usually erupts because someone wants to win. Someone wants to win an argument, win a battle, or win the war of words. Christians have an obligation to pursue peace, not victory at all costs.

Why should we follow these steps? God sees what we do and knows our hearts. He sets His face *against those who do what is evil*. He opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble (Jas. 4:6). If we win a battle with our lost neighbors but lose our witness, we have worked against God's ways rather than for them.



IN MY CONTEXT

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.

How can your group strengthen those who are in a marriage where one of the spouses is an unbeliever? Identify one action the group can take this week toward this end.

If you are married, what one action can you take this week to invest in your marriage? What practical action are you taking or do you need to take in light of this passage?

If you are single, what one action can you take to encourage others who are married? What practical action are you taking or do you need to take in light of this passage?

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.

MEMORY VERSE

Now finally, all of you should be like-minded and sympathetic, should love believers, and be compassionate and humble.
—1 Peter 3:8



Session 6

ALWAYS READY

Believers honor God by sharing His hope with others.

1 PETER 3:13-22

¹³ And who will harm you if you are deeply committed to what is good? ¹⁴ But even if you should suffer for righteousness, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear or be disturbed, ¹⁵ 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. ¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil. ¹⁸ 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.¹⁹ In that state He also went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison²⁰ who in the past were disobedient, when God patiently waited in the days of Noah while an ark was being prepared. In it a few—that is, eight people—were saved through water.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.²² Now that He has gone into heaven, He is at God’s right hand with angels, authorities, and powers subject to Him.

Identify the attitudes encouraged by Peter in this passage. List the ways displaying these attitudes has a positive impact for the cause of Christ.

FIRST THOUGHTS

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.

What actions have you or your family taken to be prepared for the unplanned or unexpected?

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.

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.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

1 PETER 3:13-22

In this section, Peter returned to his overall purpose for the letter. He wrote to encourage believers who were being persecuted for their faith. He had already spoken of persecution in his letter (see 1:6; 2:12,15,19; 3:1,9). However, this is his most direct discussion of the topic to this point. How should Christians respond when others threaten them physically, emotionally, or economically? How can they respond in a way that honors God? How can their plight be used to further the kingdom of God and point others to Jesus?

If Christians are overly defensive or unprepared to offer a ready defense of their faith, they lose an opportunity to witness for Christ. If they get sidetracked by cultural arguments and neglect pointing others to Christ's work on the cross, they again lessen their effectiveness. If they cower to the persecutors and refuse to display their faith, Christians lose a tremendous opportunity for influence, even though it may come with a cost.



EXPLORE THE TEXT

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

VERSE 13

13 And who will harm you if you are deeply committed to what is good?

Peter knew that believers would not be able to avoid dealing with relationships strained by the truth of the gospel. Those who would not embrace Jesus often worked to stamp out faith. He began his discussion with a rhetorical question. He asked who would *harm* them if they were *deeply committed to what is good*. The word translated *deeply committed* is the word from which we get the English word *zealous*. Peter's question was rhetorical. The expected answer would be, "Nobody." Yet as we will see in the next verse, he acknowledged there are exceptions to the predictable answer.

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.

VERSE 14

14 But even if you should suffer for righteousness, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear or be disturbed,

In spite of the fact that people would not expect to be persecuted for doing good, persecution was a reality in Peter's world—and also is in ours. The apostle proclaimed that those who *suffer for righteousness* would be *blessed*. The Christian is blessed in knowing that his or her suffering is righteous and temporary.

Alluding to Isaiah 8:12, Peter reminded his readers to put their trust in God alone. 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 Judah trembled in terror, but Isaiah spoke the Lord's promise that He would protect them against those who threatened them. Peter reminded the Christians that God would also take care of them.

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.

VERSE 15

¹⁵ 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.

Instead of cowering in fear, Peter encouraged Christians to set apart Jesus as Lord in their hearts. This is an acknowledgment that Jesus, not the opponents of Christianity, is sovereign. Jesus will have the final word. Though at the time suffering was difficult and life was uncertain, Jesus was Lord of the situation. To ***honor Christ as Lord*** is to treat Him as holy and to reverence Him.

Honoring Jesus as Lord did not mean that Christians ignored their enemies. Rather, they were to have a ready ***defense*** for ***the hope*** that they had. The word *defense* can refer to a formal response in a court case where the defendant responds to accusations from the prosecution.

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?



VERSE 16

16 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.

Peter encouraged Christians to make a ready defense of their faith, but he did not encourage them to do so with arrogance or callousness. He encouraged them to respond to their accusers with gentleness and respect. By doing this, they could prove their accusers wrong when they accused them of only wanting to stir up trouble. Keeping their conscience clear ensured that their testimony would speak to those who were outside the faith.

The emphasis in this section is on evangelism—reaching those who are outside the faith. The way a Christian responds to suffering and mistreatment speaks volumes to unbelievers.

VERSE 17

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

Sometimes suffering is caused by wrong actions on our part, and sometimes it is caused by us doing the right thing. Peter explained that it *is better to suffer for doing good* than for doing wrong. Sometimes it is within *God's will* for innocent people to suffer (for example, Jesus). God is never surprised by our suffering, and He will see to it that good and not evil will result from suffering for the right reasons (Rom. 8:28).

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)

VERSE 18

18 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.

When we suffer because of cultural conflicts, we may become distracted and forget what is ultimately most important. Fighting cultural wars is extremely complex, but the ultimate goal is to point others to the One who can change hearts from the inside out.

Peter pointed to the example of Christ. Jesus *suffered for sins*, but those sins were not His. He suffered *once for all*. His substitutionary death on the cross paid for the sins of others. The innocent suffered for the guilty. In the Old Testament, sacrifices were repeated daily; Jesus' death was once for all.

Why did Jesus die if He was innocent? He died *that He might bring you to God*. Jesus' death was all that was needed to bring unrighteous people into a relationship with holy God. Nothing needs to be added to Christ's death. It is not a work of man but a work of God. God intended and allowed Jesus to be put to death in the earthly realm, and also made Him alive through resurrection from the dead. The death and resurrection of Jesus is the central component of Christians' faith, and it gives us hope in the midst of suffering.

VERSE 19

¹⁹ In that state He also went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison

Verses 19-20 are among the most obscure in the New Testament. The first dilemma is the identity of *the spirits in prison*. Were these unbelievers who died? Were they Old Testament believers who died and were awaiting the coming of Christ? Were they fallen angels awaiting judgment? The most likely explanation is that they were fallen angels. Peter spoke of sinful angels being imprisoned and punished (2 Pet. 2:4), and Jude 6 provides a similar picture. Those fallen angels were awaiting punishment and were held by God for that end.

A second question centers on Jesus' *proclamation*. What did He proclaim? Fittingly, this word is not the word for evangelism, but the general word for preaching. Jesus was not preaching so that they might be saved. He was proclaiming judgment on them for their fallen nature. Some see in this a reference to Genesis 6:1-4, when the angels had sexual relations with women in Noah's day and were imprisoned for their sin. According to this view, Christ did not descend into hell to preach to Old Testament saints, but He traveled to a place where demonic spirits were held and proclaimed victory and judgment over them.



VERSE 20a

^{20a} **who in the past were disobedient, when God patiently waited in the days of Noah while an ark was being prepared.**

The reference to Noah in this verse strengthens the view that Genesis 6:1-4 is in the background of this passage as it was in Jude 6. The angels were disobedient and fell, initiating a new dimension of wickedness on the earth. Their actions did not leave God without a plan. He *patiently waited* for Noah to build an ark so that he and his family could be saved. God could have ended the world at the time of Noah, and He would have been just in doing so. However, He waited to save Noah, and He likewise waited to bring judgment on the *disobedient* spirits. These verses do not teach that people have another opportunity to be saved after the grave; rather, they teach that the pronouncement against fallen angels was sure even though it awaited its final proclamation.

Rather than getting caught up in the various interpretations of this passage, it would be wise to remember that the point of these verses is to show how Christ's work is to be the focus of those who suffer persecution. As God patiently waited, so those who endure suffering should also wait for God to save them from their distress.

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?

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

VERSE 20b

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

During the days of Noah, eight people *were saved through water*—Noah, his wife, his three sons, and their wives. The flood waters that brought death to the wicked were the same waters that held up the ark. Like Noah, the Christians Peter addressed were a minority that faced persecution from the ungodly around them. Peter reminded them that God had spared Noah's family, and He had not forgotten them.

VERSE 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.

Peter compared the floodwaters in the days of Noah with the baptismal waters that represented death. If Noah had succumbed to the floodwaters, he would have died like all the others in his day. However, he entered safely into the ark. Baptismal waters also represent a death. In fact, many pastors say, “Buried with Christ in baptism.” But like the ark in the flood, the resurrection of Jesus Christ also allows us to rise from the dead.

Peter did not intend to indicate that the physical act of baptism saves a person. In fact, he said as much. Baptism does not remove *the filth of the flesh*. What baptism does is to provide *the pledge of a good conscience*. What has happened inside a person (cleansing from sin) is represented outwardly by the washing of baptism. Baptism functions as a sign or symbol of the faith in Christ that one confesses at the time of baptism. If baptism removed sin, then a person would have no need for faith. But this was not Peter’s intention when he said that baptism saves. Baptism, like the floodwaters of Noah’s day, represents death. But the resurrection of Jesus, like the ark, causes the believer to rise to new life.

VERSE 22

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

While believers are enduring suffering on earth, Jesus has gone into heaven, where He sits *at God’s right hand*. Everything is subject to Him and His authority. Because Jesus is at God’s right hand in heaven, those enduring suffering should set apart Christ as Lord in their hearts. The world is not spinning out of control but is pushing toward His purposes. A day will come when all suffering for believers will end and where everything will be made right.

How does the authority of Jesus bring you comfort and courage to faithfully stand for Christ?



IN MY CONTEXT

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.

Discuss actions your group can take to support and encourage each other to share Jesus with others. How can your group support other Christians who are enduring unjust suffering around the world?

What steps are you taking to better defend your faith against those who do not believe in Jesus? List goals and actions for accomplishing those goals.

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.

MEMORY VERSE

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. —1 Peter 3:15



Session 7

EQUIPPED TO LIVE

Believers honor God by loving others in all circumstances.

1 PETER 4:1-11

¹ 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—² in order to live the remaining time in the flesh, no longer for human desires, but for God’s will. ³ 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. ⁴ So they are surprised that you don’t plunge with them into the same flood of wild living—and they slander you. ⁵ They will give an account to the One who stands ready to judge the living and the dead.



6 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. 7 Now the end of all things is near; therefore, be serious and disciplined for prayer. 8 Above all, maintain an intense love for each other, since love covers a multitude of sins. 9 Be hospitable to one another without complaining. 10 Based on the gift each one has received, use it to serve others, as good managers of the varied grace of God. 11 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.

As you read the passage, look for contrasts between the believer and the unbeliever. Identify the standards for the Christian life commanded by Peter. How does each action commanded relate to the other actions commanded?

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.

What do you look forward to the most when thinking about a vacation? How does a vacation provide sanity in a crazy world?

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.

KEY DOCTRINE: *Last Things*

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

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

1 PETER 4:1-11

Persecution of the church began with localized opposition from the Jews who did not want to be associated with the teachings of Christianity. It then spread to include economic and political persecution in specific cities and regions. By the time 1 Peter was written, persecution was beginning to be an empire-wide practice.

Peter the apostle had witnessed firsthand the sufferings of Jesus. He saw how Jesus continued to live for God and fulfill His will even when others opposed Him. He saw the humility of Jesus as He allowed others to treat Him badly even when He possessed the power to defeat them. He watched as Jesus put others' needs ahead of His own. As the apostle addressed Christians who suffered, he did so as one who had the experience and understanding to address their need.



Suffering has a way of wearing a person down spiritually, physically, and emotionally. Perhaps Peter's readers were at that point, since he addressed it so much in his letter to them. Peter knew they needed a hope that could sustain them. He addressed the hope believers have in the return of Jesus Christ. His readers could remain faithful in the present, knowing that Christ's return would make everything right.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

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

VERSES 1-2

¹ 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— ² in order to live the remaining time in the flesh, no longer for human desires, but for God's will.

Those who followed Jesus could expect the same suffering Jesus experienced. *Christ suffered*, and so also they would suffer. Like their Savior, they needed to *equip* themselves with *the same resolve* that Jesus exhibited in His suffering. Like a military building up supplies for battle, those who were suffering needed to prepare themselves for what they would face. Believers need the right kind of resources to meet the challenge of persecution. Jesus' attitude or mind-set is exactly what is needed. We are to love truth and righteousness just like Jesus did, to the point of suffering for it if necessary, just like Jesus did.

The phrase *finished with sin* in verse 1 certainly does not suggest that those who suffer in the flesh never sin anymore. Rather, Peter was saying that sins which once seemed powerful or attractive become insignificant when we choose righteousness over convenience. Sin's power over the believer has been severed. When Jesus suffered, He dealt a fatal blow to sin. Because Jesus endured the suffering of the cross, He opened a way where we could resist the flesh. We have victory over sin in our suffering because Christ won victory for us in His suffering. As a result of Christ's death, we can say no to human desires. We can reject those things that are ungodly. We are free to live according to *God's will*.

How does suffering motivate believers to live for Christ rather than for their own will?

VERSE 3

³ 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.

All Christians have a past experience with sin and already spent *enough time* on its pursuits. Now that we have trusted Christ, we should spend our energy in productive ways. Peter created a list of vices the pagan world embraced. Among those was *unrestrained behavior*. Pagans did what felt good or what their flesh told them to do. They did not live their lives with restraint based on what was good and godly. Specifically, the first two terms (*unrestrained behavior* and *evil desires*) indicate sexual immorality. *Drunkenness, orgies, and carousing* describe a party spirit bent on fulfilling the desires of the flesh. Peter also described *lawless idolatry* as a way that the pagans lived. Even in pagan worship, the desires of the flesh dominated those who participated in the rituals.

How much energy does our world spend on ungodly pursuits? Enough time has been spent living in ungodliness. For Christians, it is time to eliminate our unrestrained pursuits.

VERSE 4

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

Why do people persecute believers? Peter suggested it was because Christians would not join the world in its selfish, ungodly pursuits. The unbelievers in Peter's day were *surprised* Christians did not join them, and their surprise led them to hurl insults or *slander* Christians. The expression *flood of wild living* is graphic, suggesting that unbelievers believe wild living is inevitable, like flood waters raging out of control. However, Christians know that Christ dealt with sin through His death.



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.

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

VERSE 5

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

One motivating factor for living for Christ rather than giving in to the flood of immorality is that we will one day *give an account* to God. God stands ready *to judge the living and the dead*. No person can escape His judgment. God sees the “flood of wild living” (v. 4). He sees the persecution of Christians by unbelievers. Though people may think that both go unchecked, God *stands ready* to judge. Only His patient desire that others might be saved is delaying the time of judgment (2 Pet. 3:9). He is waiting on people to come to repentance, but make no mistake, God will judge the living and the dead.

Certainly the judgment of believers and unbelievers will be different. Believers will stand before the judgment seat of Christ and will give account of their work and ministry after they came to know Christ (1 Cor. 3:11-15). What they built on the foundation of Jesus Christ will last like gold, silver, and precious stones. What they built on a faulty foundation will burn like wood, hay, and stubble. They will be saved, but their work will disappear.

Unbelievers will stand before the great white throne of judgment (Rev. 20:11-15). Those who have never trusted in Jesus to save them will be judged according to their works. Every sin they committed will cry out against them and consign them to an eternity separated from God. Both believers and unbelievers will give account to God, but their outcome will be dramatically different.

VERSE 6

⁶ 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.

God desires all people live for His glory, and for that reason Peter and others *preached* the gospel to those who did not know Christ. The good news is that the return of Christ will not only bring sinners to account, but it will also reverse the judgments of men. *In the fleshly realm* (what can be seen with the eyes), people pronounce judgments on Christians. They insult and scorn them for not joining in their ungodly pursuits. These unbelievers think they have the final word. However, *in the spiritual realm*, God has empowered His followers to live by His power. He has given them the desire to live by His standards and to reject the selfish pursuits of the world. Though outwardly it may appear the persecutors are winning, the truth is that the sufferers have more power and authority than the ones mistreating them.

While on the earth, we may experience persecution and trials because we are being judged by men. However, we now live for God in the spiritual realm. Death cannot separate us from God. We live by His power in suffering, and after death we continue to live by His power in the spiritual realm.

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?

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

VERSE 7

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

Peter reminded his readers that *the end of all things is near*. He was thinking redemptively about the world's end rather than chronologically. God created. Man fell. Jesus came. The next big event on the calendar is the return of Christ to put all things as they should be. Peter took hope that the next major event on God's agenda is the return of Jesus.

The first duty of end-time living is prayer. Because the return of Jesus is near, we are to *be serious and disciplined for prayer*. The word *serious* means to be alert to one's surroundings. Our minds



need to be clear, not clouded by any suffering or persecution. We are to remain disciplined in prayer, knowing that God is in control.

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 you emphasized them?

VERSE 8

⁸ Above all, maintain an intense love for each other, since love covers a multitude of sins.

The second duty of end-time living is love. Those who suffer can grow bitter. They can stop trusting, an important part of love. Peter challenged persecuted Christians to maintain *an intense love for each other*. He quoted a proverb also found in James 5:20: *love covers a multitude of sins*. What does this mean? Does love atone for sin, or does it merely make one’s weaknesses less visible? Obviously it does not mean love atones for sins. Only Jesus’ death can cover sins in that sense. However, when we sincerely love others, we are less likely to focus on their faults.

VERSE 9

⁹ Be hospitable to one another without complaining.

Peter also encouraged Christians to redeem the time by being *hospitable to one another*. This is the third duty of end-time living. Hospitality was one of the hallmarks of the early church.

(See Rom. 12:13; 1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:8; Heb. 13:2.) Those who had experienced the grace of God wanted to lavish it on others. This was especially important in the spread of the gospel as believers provided food and shelter to those who were taking the gospel around the world. As persecution grew, the need for hospitality would only deepen.

However, providing hospitality alone is not enough. Peter encouraged believers to do so *without complaining*. Certainly providing hospitality toward others could cause inconveniences, but they were furthering the gospel by opening their homes to those who traveled for the sake of the gospel.

VERSES 10-11

¹⁰ Based on the gift each one has received, use it to serve others, as good managers of the varied grace of God. ¹¹ 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.

The fourth duty of end-time living is the use of spiritual gifts. When we serve others with the gifts God has given us, we prove to be *good managers of the varied grace of God*. We are not held accountable for gifts not given to us, but we are expected to use the gifts God has given us.

Peter divided the many gifts of grace into two categories—speaking and serving. *If anyone speaks*, he should do so as one who speaks the Word of God. *If anyone serves*, he should do so in the power of God's strength. Why? So that God would be the one *glorified*, not the messenger or servant. When we use our gifts in this way, we draw attention to God and glorify Him. When we speak our own words or serve in our own strength, we are attempting to bring glory to ourselves.

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?



IN MY CONTEXT

Believers are to look to Christ when facing persecution for their faith, knowing that He has a greater plan. Following our own wills leads to destruction and judgment. Believers honor God by loving each other and serving others out of love.

Review times in your life when you were forced to take a stand for your faith in Jesus. How did He use you for a greater purpose? What did you learn about yourself and God as a result? How does taking a stand for Christ encourage you in your faith?

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?

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?

MEMORY VERSE

Be hospitable to one another without complaining. —1 Peter 4:9



Session 8

WHEN RIDICULED

Believers honor God by faithfulness through persecution.

1 PETER 4:12-19

¹² Dear friends, don't be surprised when the fiery ordeal comes among you to test you as if something unusual were happening to you. ¹³ 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. ¹⁴ If you are ridiculed for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. ¹⁵ None of you, however, should suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or a meddler. ¹⁶ But if anyone suffers as a "Christian," he should not be ashamed but should glorify God in having that name. ¹⁷ 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? ¹⁸ And if a righteous person is saved with difficulty, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner? ¹⁹ So those who suffer according to God's will should, while doing what is good, entrust themselves to a faithful Creator.

Notice the word "surprised" in verse 12. Why do you think Peter encouraged his readers not to be surprised by the suffering they faced?

FIRST THOUGHTS

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.

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?

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

Peter addressed the subject of suffering in at least 20 verses of his first letter. This is an average of four verses per chapter that he devoted to suffering. He never referred to suffering in a general sense, but always to the type of suffering that resulted from opposition to faith in Christ.

Peter wrote his first letter during the persecution of Christians in the reign of Nero (A.D. 54–68). The defining event of Nero's reign was the fire of Rome, which destroyed half the city. The cause of the fire is uncertain, but the people of the city blamed the emperor. In order to shift the blame from himself, Nero blamed the Christians. The Roman historian Tacitus reported that Christians were thrown to dogs; others were crucified and burned. Whether this vicious persecution had yet extended to the Roman provinces where Peter's first epistle was sent is unknown. Certainly those believers knew about it. Whatever suffering they were experiencing, their faith was bolstered by Peter's counsel to them about finding joy and honoring God whenever they suffered unjustly for Christ's name.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

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

VERSE 12

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



Peter addressed his readers as *dear friends*. After his reminder that the end of all things was near (1 Pet. 4:7), he brought his readers back to the present. Focusing on the future may have helped those who were suffering, but they also needed strength in the present for the opposition that they were enduring.

For the second time in this chapter, Peter used the word *surprised* (see v. 4). The previous time he spoke of the pagans' surprise that Christians did not delve into the same behavior they did. But this time Peter encouraged Christians not to be surprised when they faced opposition for their faith. Suffering did not indicate they were outside the will of God or that God had abandoned them. By referring to their suffering as a *fiery ordeal* and a *test*, Peter was explaining how God used suffering to refine believers, such as in Psalm 66:10; Zechariah 13:9; and Malachi 3:1-4.

VERSE 13

¹³ 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.

Instead of being shocked at the experience of suffering, Christians should *rejoice* when suffering for Christ. This echoes the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 5:12, when He told His followers to be glad and rejoice. Though this is not the normal reaction to suffering, it is possible because the person who suffers is sharing in the sufferings of Jesus. (See also Rom. 8:17; 2 Cor. 1:5-7; Phil. 3:10.)

Christians who face suffering for Christ with joy not only have evidence they are following the Savior, but they also have assurance that they will have *great joy* at the return of Jesus Christ. When Christ appears at the end, He will bring judgment on those who do not believe and fulfill the promise of heaven to those who do. Heaven is a place where all tears, death, grief, crying, and pain are in the past (Rev. 21:4). All suffering on this earth is temporary.

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?

VERSE 14

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

In Matthew 5:11-12, Jesus said, “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. For that is how they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” When people spoke against His followers, He promised they would receive a reward for their faithfulness to Him. This was also the message of verse 13. Peter also reminded his readers they had a present reward as well—the presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives. No matter how difficult the persecution seemed to Christians, they had both the promise of heaven in the future and the presence of the Holy Spirit in the present.

How does the presence of the Holy Spirit help those enduring insults and ridicule?

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.

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

VERSE 15

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

Peter did not want his readers to think those who suffered as a result of their own poor choices would receive the same promises mentioned in verses 13-14. Though Christians had done nothing to bring persecution upon themselves, some people suffered because of their own actions and decisions.



The *murderer* and the *thief* were both in clear violation of both moral law and God's law (Ex. 20:13,15). Nobody would question that those who suffered because they committed these crimes deserved their punishment.

The word *evildoer* comes from a Greek word literally meaning to do bad things. Peter used the word twice prior to this passage (2:12,14). In neither case did it refer to one engaged in criminal actions but rather stood in contrast to those who do the right things. Those who suffered for doing evil had no promise that their suffering would identify them with Christ.

The *meddler* was a term possibly coined by Peter, since it appears nowhere else in the New Testament or other Greek literature prior to this. If believers involved themselves in other peoples' affairs with an intention to make trouble, they would have deserved the insults people hurled against them. Peter wanted the church to know that those who suffered for their own lapses in morality were not blessed but were receiving the outcome of their moral lapses.

How do you counsel people who protest as unfair the suffering that results from their own moral lapses?

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.

FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS' SAKE

BECAUSE OF WRONGDOING

VERSE 16

16 But if anyone suffers as a “Christian,” he should not be ashamed but should glorify God in having that name.

Peter again shifted the discussion in favor of those who suffered as a result of their commitment to Christ. The name *Christian* was not the most common designation of those who followed Jesus. At first they were called disciples, believers, and those who belonged to the Way (Acts 1:15; 2:44; 6:1; 9:1-2). The name *Christian* did not appear until Acts 11:26, and even then it was not given to them as a badge of honor but as a term of derision from those outside the faith. The term was not meant as a criticism. The original implication of the term was “follower of the Christ.” (This is parallel to “Herodian” as a “follower of the Herods” in Mark 3:6.) But that which was meant for ridicule became an encouragement to those who believed in Jesus. They wanted to follow Him and be like Him, and the term of derision proved that they were being effective in both.

Anyone who suffers as a “Christian” has no reason to be *ashamed*. Peter certainly understood shame caused by one’s own actions. He had denied Jesus three times the night of His arrest (Mark 14:66-72). Luke included a choice bit of information about that event—Jesus turned and made eye contact with Peter immediately after the denial (Luke 22:61). This was the moment that Peter experienced shame. By enduring suffering with joy, believers who suffer unjustly do not have to experience the same shame as Peter did.

When Christians suffer because of their faith in Jesus, they wear His *name* well. Many global Christians today suffer for Him. The suffering they face goes beyond being ridiculed or socially shunned. Their suffering is acute and life threatening. By displaying the attitude of Christ in their suffering, they are privileged to wear His name as a testimony to those who do not believe in Him.

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?



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

VERSE 17

17 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?

Verses 17-19 hearken back to verse 12. Peter had begun the discussion by explaining that believers should not be surprised by suffering because it was testing their faith. He explained that this must be suffering for Jesus rather than for poor moral decisions (vv. 14-15). Now he returned to show the positive effect of suffering in purifying the people of God. The purpose of suffering in the church was to differentiate those who genuinely believed in Jesus and stood firm from those who falsely professed faith in Him and fell away.

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. The idea of judgment coming first to the people of God was common in the Old Testament. (See Ezek. 9:6; Zech. 13:7-9; Mal. 3:1-5.) If God was already allowing His children to suffer, Peter argued that those outside the faith could be sure that they would face judgment as well. Though the outcome for believers would be good at the return of Christ, the outcome for those who did not obey the gospel would be unspeakable.

How would you define the difference in the purpose of judgment for believers and unbelievers? Why would this be important to remember for believers?

VERSE 18

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

To reinforce his statement in verse 17, Peter turned to the Old Testament as confirmation. He referenced Proverbs 11:31: "If the righteous will be repaid on earth, how much more the wicked

and sinful.” What did Peter mean when he wrote that the righteous are *saved with difficulty*? The difficulty here likely refers to the persecution they suffer. The term Peter used does not mean that the righteous just barely receive salvation; rather, there is no such thing as easy salvation.

If God allows suffering for His children, then imagine the wrath of God that will be poured out on those who have rejected His Son. Sadly, many will suffer for eternity because they did not receive the salvation God offered. Their plight is found in Revelation 20:11-15, where they are thrown into the lake of fire to experience eternal suffering.

VERSE 19

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

Peter brought an end to this section on Christian suffering with an exhortation. Those who have shared in Christ’s sufferings (1 Pet. 4:13), who have been ridiculed for the sake of Christ (v. 14), and who have suffered as Christians (vv. 15-16) should recognize the hand of the Father in their suffering (v. 17). They should respond in two ways to their suffering. First, they should commit themselves to *doing what is good*. If we do not respond properly to suffering, we may end up doing what is evil rather than what is good. We want to avoid making poor choices in an effort to relieve suffering.

Second, those who are suffering should *entrust themselves to a faithful Creator*. This is what Jesus did, according to 1 Peter 2:23—“When He was reviled, He did not revile in return; when He was suffering, He did not threaten but entrusted Himself to the One who judges justly.” If God is our *faithful Creator*, then certainly we can count upon Him to care and provide for us even when things are difficult in our lives.

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?



IN MY CONTEXT

We can trust the Holy Spirit to provide strength if we face persecution as believers. Believers can faithfully represent God by carrying His name regardless of our circumstances. Believers can face opposition, ridicule, and even persecution with confidence, knowing God will use our tested faith for His kingdom purposes.

When you face ridicule as a believer, how do you usually respond? What truth in this passage might help you the most in responding to that ridicule? Pray that the Holy Spirit will remind you of the truth you identified.

Share with the Bible study group how they can help you carry Jesus' name well. What can be done as a group to help each other more consistently stand for Christ?

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.

MEMORY VERSE

I have told you these things so that in Me you may have peace. You will have suffering in this world. Be courageous! I have conquered the world. —John 16:33



Session 9

ALERT LIVING

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

1 PETER 5:1-11

¹ 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: ² Shepherd God's flock among you, not overseeing out of compulsion but freely, according to God's will; not for the money but eagerly; ³ not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. ⁴ And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. ⁵ 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.



6 Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, so that He may exalt you at the proper time, 7 casting all your care on Him, because He cares about you. 8 Be serious! Be alert! Your adversary the Devil is prowling around like a roaring lion, looking for anyone he can devour. 9 Resist him and be firm in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are being experienced by your fellow believers throughout the world. 10 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. 11 The dominion belongs to Him forever. Amen.

Underline the words that follow the word "be" in this passage. How does each word give you a clearer understanding of what God expects of His followers?

Underline promises made by God in this passage. Notice how the promises are connected to the admonitions presented.

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.

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

Peter concluded his letter with an exhortation for his readers to remain alert (1 Pet. 5:8). The temptation to wander in thought or action often is strongest during times of suffering. As churches faced persecution, Peter wanted to make sure both the leaders and the followers were alert to the workings of the enemy.

The apostle Paul listed some stringent demands for church leadership (1 Tim. 3:1-13). Leaders must have character and integrity. They need to be strong in leading their own families. They need to be disciplined and yet humble. They should not be new converts who have not proven they can lead people. When a church or community faces suffering, it needs strong leaders who will guide them through the hardships.

Sometimes strong leaders suffer from trying to lead those not humble enough to follow. Peter wanted to insure this did not happen by encouraging humility in the people.

The reason that both leaders and followers need to be working together is they have an enemy who is real and is engaged in an attack against them. Paul listed spiritual weapons a Christian could use when engaged in warfare (Eph. 6:10-18). Paul encouraged believers to engage in battle with the enemy through prayer. Peter likewise helped his audience realize the need for alertness.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

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

VERSE 1

¹ 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:



The leaders of the church may be the first that persecutors target. Peter began by exhorting *the elders*. The term was used of those who had leadership positions in the church. These leaders had the responsibility of shepherding the church (see v. 2), a role that Peter himself embraced. This word seemed to be used interchangeably with shepherds and pastors.

Peter wrote to his fellow pastors as one who had witnessed Jesus' *sufferings*, and, like them, he looked forward to a time when God's *glory* would be *revealed*.

VERSE 2

² Shepherd God's flock among you, not overseeing out of compulsion but freely, according to God's will; not for the money but eagerly;

Peter exhorted the leaders to *shepherd God's flock* for noble reasons rather than selfish reasons. Ezekiel 34:4 prophesied about those who would shepherd the flock harshly and brutally. Ezekiel 34:8 mentioned those who cared only for themselves as they tended to God's flock. Peter encouraged pastors to shepherd the flock *freely* and *eagerly, according to God's will*. He did not want them serving only out of a sense of duty but also out of a sense of calling. He did not want them serving out of *compulsion* or in order to get *money*. He was not saying pastors should not be paid, but that money should not be their motivation for serving.

Leaders shepherd the flock in many ways. One of the primary responsibilities of shepherding the flock was preaching the gospel. By using the term *overseeing*, Peter probably included caring for the spiritual needs of the flock and administrating the church, though God had provided other leaders to do some of these responsibilities (Acts 6:1-7).

Why is it important for spiritual leaders to carefully examine their motives? How does motive impact how one leads?

VERSE 3

³ not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.

Peter encouraged church leaders not to see their position as a way to exercise authority over people. Jesus encouraged leaders to lead from humility rather than from pride in their authority (Matt. 20:25-26; Mark 10:42-43). Those who attempt to lead from their authority without humility often create resistance in their followers.

Church leaders do not build the church on their own. God is the One who builds *the flock* and has *entrusted* followers to the leaders. Therefore, leaders need to set an example by displaying humility toward the followers.

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?

VERSE 4

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

Peter reminded the church leaders of two important truths. First, *the chief Shepherd* would come back again. Jesus had referred to Himself as the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep (John 10:11). The One who displayed perfect humility would one day return, and this should motivate the shepherds under him to take good care of His flock.

Also, Jesus will reward those who have taken good care of His flock. Peter revealed that every faithful leader would receive the *unfading crown of glory*. In many cases, the Bible equates



the crown with entrance into heaven itself (1 Cor. 9:25; 2 Tim. 4:8; Jas. 1:12; Rev. 2:10; 3:11). However, in this case it may refer to a special reward for those who faithfully serve the church in leadership.

Which do you believe to be a stronger motivator—accountability to God or reward? Explain.

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

VERSE 5

⁵ 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.

Peter shifted his discussion from elders to *younger men*. This term should not be restricted only to men of a certain age; it is probably is a reference to the younger in faith who were following the leaders of the church. Peter had addressed church leaders in the previous passage, so now he addressed those who made up the church. He encouraged them with several exhortations in verses 5-7.

First, Peter encouraged the younger Christians to ***be subject to the elders***. This is not blind submission to leaders. Remember the exhortations to the leaders in verses 1-4. These are genuine, godly leaders who are leading for the right reasons.

The second exhortation is to ***clothe yourselves with humility***. To be humble is to have an accurate estimate of your own worth. It is neither thinking too highly of yourself nor thinking too lowly of yourself. It is recognizing who God is and who you are and not getting the two confused.

Peter cited Proverbs 3:34 at the end of verse 5. God acts on behalf of those who are humble. In suffering, people need the help of God. As we humble ourselves, God will come to our aid, sometimes using church leaders to minister to us.

How have you seen God resist the proud? How have you seen Him give grace to the humble?

VERSE 6

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

Peter continued with the theme of humility. A person who is already humble cannot be humbled by his or her circumstances. It is better to *humble* oneself than it is to be humbled by suffering, other circumstances, or others. The phrase *mighty hand of God* was used often in the Old Testament to describe God's deliverance of Israel in times of trouble. (See, for example, Ex. 3:19; 32:11; Deut. 5:15.)

Humbling oneself does not mean necessarily that God will act immediately. Peter said God would exalt them *at the proper time*. The Greek language had different ways of expressing time. Sometimes it was chronological (*chronos*), and sometimes it was an appointed time (*kairos*). This verse indicates the latter. God did not promise to deliver them on a certain chronological timetable but in due time. That might occur in their lifetime, but it might occur in eternity. Either way, God has promised to vindicate all who suffer if they humble themselves under His mighty hand.

VERSE 7

⁷ casting all your care on Him, because He cares about you.

God's mighty hand can rescue us from any situation in which we find ourselves, but sometimes He chooses to delay His assistance. In the meantime, we should cast *all our care on Him*. The word used for *care* is the same as the one translated "worry" in Philippians 4:6. In that passage, Paul said that we should not worry about anything, but instead pray.

Using a different Greek word, Peter explained that God *cares about* the anxieties His children experience. God is not detached and distant. Perhaps Peter had in mind Psalm 55:22: "Cast your burden on the LORD, and He will sustain you; He will never allow the righteous to be shaken."



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?

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.

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

VERSE 8

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

Peter exhorted both leaders and church members to be *serious* and *alert*. The word *alert* often occurred in the context of discussions about the end times. (See, for example, Matt. 24:42-43; 25:13; Mark 13:35,37; Luke 12:37; 1 Thess. 5:6.) It describes a watchman guarding a wall against the approach of an enemy.

Indeed, Peter noted who that enemy is. *The Devil* is on the prowl *like a roaring lion, looking* for prey. The contrast is striking. God cares for His children, while the Devil seeks to devour them.

VERSE 9

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

Believers are encouraged to *resist* the Devil. The word *resist* cannot be something passive but rather active. Peter also encouraged believers to be *firm in the faith*. Since in Greek there is no verb in this phrase, it could mean the way believers resist the Devil is by standing firm in the faith. They could take comfort in knowing that other believers *throughout the world* were suffering in the

same way as Peter's readers. They could bind together with other suffering believers and resist the work of the enemy.

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?

VERSE 10

¹⁰ 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.

In a doxology that wraps up this section and the entire letter, Peter praised the One who both calls people to Himself and enables them to persevere to the end. Salvation is completely a work of God. He has called us ***to His eternal glory***. No matter how difficult the times, there is a better day coming.

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 as they ***suffered a little***. No matter how long suffering is in this lifetime, it is brief in comparison to eternity.

VERSE 11

¹¹ The dominion belongs to Him forever. Amen.

As a final word of praise, Peter declared ***dominion belongs to*** God forever. The same God that allows the Devil to roar and seek someone to devour is the God that deeply cares for and establishes believers. Some people refuse to follow God because they cannot reconcile the suffering of man with an all-powerful God. In the short run, it might look as though God is uncaring. However, God's vantage point is eternity and His kingdom is eternal.



IN MY CONTEXT

Leaders in the church are to humbly fulfill their duties, demonstrating Christian character in their leadership. All believers are to display humility, realizing that God provides for their needs. Believers are to resist the Devil with humility lest they fall prey to him.

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.

What burdens or anxieties are you trying to carry on your own? What steps do you need to take to humbly trust God to provide for your needs?

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?

MEMORY VERSE

Casting all your care on Him, because He cares about you.
—1 Peter 5:7



Session 10

BEING USEFUL

God's power shapes character as believers grow in their faith.

2 PETER 1:3-11

³ 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. ⁴ 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. ⁵ For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with goodness, goodness with knowledge, ⁶ knowledge with self-control, self-control with endurance, endurance with godliness, ⁷ godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. ⁸ 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. ⁹ The person who lacks these things is blind and shortsighted and has forgotten the cleansing from his past sins.

¹⁰ Therefore, brothers, make every effort to confirm your calling and election, because if you do these things you will never stumble.

¹¹ For in this way, entry into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be richly supplied to you.

Note the progression of the virtues listed in verses 5-7. How does each virtue listed make the next one possible?

FIRST THOUGHTS

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!"

How would you respond if you were in the stands? What if you were a member of the home team?

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

In his first letter, Peter emphasized suffering and the role it was playing in the lives of believers. In his second letter, Peter emphasized practical Christian living. Second Peter emphasizes faith and godly living and warns against tolerating false teachers who are leading people away from the truth. The letter ends with the certainty of Christ's return and the impact it has on believers in creating a desire for holy living.

The writer of 2 Peter identified himself as the apostle Peter (2 Pet. 1:1), using the Semitic version of Simeon used elsewhere only in Acts 15:14. In the letter he referred to events that were personal to Simon Peter the apostle. The writer was an eyewitness of the transfiguration (2 Pet. 1:16-18), which would only have been true of Peter, James, and John. He even quoted the words spoken at that event (1:17).

Writing toward the end of his life, Peter reminded his readers of the return of Christ and urged them to combat false teaching that may have grown even stronger after his death. He wrote pastorally to his recipients out of concern for the church.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

STAND ON GOD'S COMPLETE PROVISION (2 PET. 1:3-4)

VERSE 3

³ 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.

We have tremendous resources based on our *knowledge* of Christ. This *knowledge* of Him is relationship knowledge rather than merely knowledge about Him. We know Him not because of any inherent abilities but because Jesus *called us* to Himself. We are saved not by our own abilities but by divine power. However, because of that salvation, God *has given us everything required for life and godliness*. By *life*, Peter meant eternal life, which is a gift of God. By *godliness*, he meant the transformation



believers experience as they are changed from sinful beings into godly people.

If we are going to be used by God, we must realize God has provided everything we need to be successful in our spiritual walk with Christ. He has secured our future and changed our present. When people fail to honor God in their walk with Him, they cannot say it was because God did not give them what they needed to be successful.

Peter emphasized three particular aspects of the Christ who called us. First, He **called us**. Salvation did not originate with us but rather is based on God's initiative. Second, He called us **by His own glory**. Christ is characterized by glory. The glory of the Father and the Son is the splendor of God's identity: who He is. Third, He is characterized by **goodness**. This refers to God's virtue or excellence in everything that He does.

VERSE 4

⁴ 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.

By His glory and goodness Christ has given us some **very great and precious promises**. These promises, among other things, involve sharing **in the divine nature**. This does not mean we become gods, as some other religions may teach. However, we do have Christ within us (John 14:23), which enables us to become increasingly like Christ in our thoughts and actions.

To share in the divine nature is also to escape **the corruption that is in the world**. This involves progressive sanctification, whereby a believer grows in his or her relationship to God, shedding sinful attitudes and actions while embracing godly thoughts and deeds. Certainly this does not happen ultimately until we are changed by seeing Jesus face-to-face (1 John 3:2-3). Trusting in Christ does not make a person instantly perfect, but it does begin a process where He begins to transform us into His own likeness.

How does knowing that God has provided everything we need give us confidence in serving Him?

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?

CULTIVATE YOUR CHARACTER (2 PET. 1:5-9)

VERSE 5

⁵ For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with goodness, goodness with knowledge,

God initiated salvation and has provided everything necessary for godliness, though this does not absolve us from our responsibility in relation to spiritual growth. Peter encouraged Christians to ***make every effort to supplement*** our faith. This is not to indicate our faith is somehow inadequate in itself or needs human effort to complete it. This is not referring to salvation but rather to spiritual growth. Faith in Christ is fully adequate for godliness, but we have a responsibility to live in light of that salvation. Peter was not creating some legalistic form of works righteousness, but rather was showing how gospel transformation works.

Peter listed a chain of virtues that promote spiritual growth. The chain starts with ***faith***. By faith we are born again. Until faith is present, good works mean nothing. It’s impossible to please God without faith (Heb. 11:6).

Peter encourages us to add ***goodness*** to our faith. This word could be translated as moral excellence. This is the same quality



that Peter attributed to God Himself in 1:3. Because God is characterized by excellence and virtue, He expects those in His family to become like Him in this regard. As we encounter Christ in faith, we should then pursue moral excellence in a world that is counter to the ways of Jesus.

Also, Peter encourages us to supplement *goodness with knowledge*. We come to Christ as newborn babies needing milk, but we must move on to solid foods (1 Cor. 3:2; Heb. 5:12). Factual knowledge of truth is an important facet of the Christian life.

VERSE 6

⁶ knowledge with self-control, self-control with endurance, endurance with godliness,

Next on the chain of virtues, Peter suggested supplementing *knowledge with self-control*. Self-control was one of the most prized virtues in the Greek world. What good is knowledge if it has no self-restraint? This may have been a jab at the false teachers who claimed to be filled with knowledge but were living sensual lives (2 Pet. 2:2) and were inflamed by sinful desires (2:10).

In addition to self-control, believers need to add *endurance*. Perseverance is a strong virtue for believers because it demonstrates God's power to keep them (1:3-8). A faulty faith cannot finish the race.

The next item on the chain of virtues is *godliness*. Even though believers have received everything we need for godliness (1:3), we still need to appropriate it in our lives. We must pursue godliness in our character.

VERSE 7

⁷ godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love.

The two final qualities on the chain of virtues are *brotherly affection* and *love*. Both of these words describe love, but the first one describes the kind of love between two brothers. Elsewhere, it is used to describe the way we should treat others (Rom. 12:10; 1 Thess. 4:9; Heb. 13:1; 1 Pet. 1:22). The way we treat others says something about our faith, goodness, knowledge, self-control, and godliness.

The word *love* translates the Greek word *agape*, which describes the kind of love God has for us. It is an unconditional love that

keeps loving even when we do not deserve it. Paul taught that love surpassed other virtues such as faith and hope (1 Cor. 13:13).

VERSE 8

⁸ 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.

Peter explained the point of listing the virtues. He said that if we are growing in *these qualities*, then we will not be *useless or unfruitful* in the *knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ*. The word for *useless* was used to describe idle workers who wasted their time in the marketplace instead of working (see Matt. 20:3,6). James used the same word to explain faith without works is useless (Jas. 2:20).

Peter also described those who do not grow in faith as *unfruitful*. Like seed planted on thorny ground, they cannot produce desirable fruit (Matt. 13:22). Working for the Lord when we haven't grown in godliness is like casting seed into the ground that has no hope of bearing fruit.

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?

VERSE 9

⁹ The person who lacks these things is blind and shortsighted and has forgotten the cleansing from his past sins.

Those who do not grow in faith have two vision problems. They are *blind* and nearsighted. They cannot see far enough down the road to navigate. By not growing in their faith, they have *forgotten* the first virtue—faith. They have forgotten that they have been cleansed from their past sins. They are not living as forgiven sinners but as unconverted people who are still in their sins.

Even though God has provided everything needed for us to live godly lives, it is possible for us to become *shortsighted* and live like those who do not believe. When that happens, it is important



that we go back and re-examine our “calling and election” (v. 10). Continuing to live in a state of carnality is dangerous. God calls true believers out of that state of life.

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.

LIVE WITH ASSURANCE (2 PET. 1:10-11)

VERSE 10

¹⁰ Therefore, brothers, make every effort to confirm your calling and election, because if you do these things you will never stumble.

Therefore, that is, in light of what was written in verses 3-9, Peter challenged his audience. 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) to examine their *calling and election*. This endeavor would result in a personal confirmation—that is, making something firm in their personal experience. The word *confirm* was legal terminology for validating a will. If indeed God has called and elected us to be His children, then we should progress over time in our growth in godliness. We should not expect instant perfection when we come to Christ, but we should expect spiritual growth as we progress in our faith.

Peter 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 chose us before we were born, and in the course of time He called us to a relationship with Him. (See Rom. 8:28-30; 1 Pet. 2:9; and 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 to Christ and to do these things that Peter had just exhorted.

Peter explained the reasoning for examining our faith. Believers who examine their faith and determine they have a walk with Christ *will never stumble*. Peter did not mean they

will be sinless. He meant those believers will not experience spiritual disaster.

Those who lack assurance of their faith continue to stumble, usually over the same roadblocks. Because they have not settled the fundamental issue in their lives, whether or not they know the Lord, they lack the power and confidence to be useful to God. They bumble their way through life tripping over obstacles which God could remove from their lives.

Temptations will come, and sometimes we yield to temptation, but the emphasis here is not on the individual event but the progression of our spiritual lives. We will never be left behind or fall off the course toward heaven. Having assurance of salvation will help us not to be blind and shortsighted, even when we fall into sin or face problems. We will keep our eyes on the Author and Finisher of our faith (Heb. 12:1-2).

VERSE 11

¹¹ For in this way, entry into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be richly supplied to you.

Those of us who know the Lord have a high calling and a secure future. Because we know we have entry into God's *eternal kingdom* in heaven, we can have more confidence to live here on earth. Peter reminds us this is not accomplished by our spiritual growth; it is richly supplied to us. Salvation was a gift of grace, and spiritual growth is the outcome of that gift.

As assured Christians, we have no worries of being left behind because we might fall. God has given us salvation as a gift, and He holds on to us by His mighty power (1 Pet. 1:3-5). He will finish what He has started in us (Phil. 1:6). Nobody can pluck us out of His hand (John 10:28). That is why it is so important to confirm our calling and election by God. If we are not truly saved, we have none of His promises. If we are truly saved, He has given us everything we need for faith and godliness so we will be useful in His hands.

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?



IN MY CONTEXT

Believers can be thankful that God provides complete salvation through faith in Christ. Believers can cooperate with God in the building of godly character. Believers can live with confidence in the promise of salvation.

Quietly reflect on the truth that God provides complete salvation through faith in Christ. Record your thoughts, including a prayer thanking God for His complete provision.

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.

Examine your own faith. What evidence can be pointed to that indicates you are a follower of Christ? If you have doubts, visit with your Bible study group leader or a mature Christian.

MEMORY VERSE

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 1:3



Session 11

WITH TRUST

God's Word is trustworthy in all ways.

2 PETER 1:12-21

¹² Therefore I will always remind you about these things, even though you know them and are established in the truth you have.

¹³ I consider it right, as long as I am in this bodily tent, to wake you up with a reminder, ¹⁴ knowing that I will soon lay aside my tent, as our Lord Jesus Christ has also shown me. ¹⁵ And I will also make every effort that you may be able to recall these things at any time after my departure. ¹⁶ 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.

¹⁷ 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! ¹⁸ And we heard this voice when it came from heaven while we were with Him on the holy mountain. ¹⁹ 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. ²⁰ First of all, you should know this: No prophecy of Scripture comes from one's own interpretation, ²¹ because no prophecy ever came by the will of man; instead, men spoke from God as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.

Notice the different types or sources of revelation identified by Peter. How does each type or source compare to the others? What makes one more reliable than the other?

FIRST THOUGHTS

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?

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.

KEY DOCTRINE: *The Scriptures*

The Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired and is God's revelation of Himself to man.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

2 PETER 1:12-21

Peter wrote this letter to Christians who were living in a society with competing claims concerning the source of religious truth. Furthermore, Peter was about to warn his readers of false teachers who would come into the church to spread teachings destructive to their faith (2 Pet. 2:1-22). The apostle knew that his readers' faith and experience needed to be grounded in the trustworthy and inspired Word of God. These original readers of 2 Peter likely came from a Gentile background. They had not been taught the Scriptures as those with a Jewish background would have been. Thus, Peter thought it essential to provide an understanding of what the Scriptures really are.

In 1:12-15, Peter explained that he wanted his original readers to be able to recall God's truth after his death, which was at hand. 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 evangelists recorded (1:16-18). At last, Peter got to the main point: God's written Word is the result of God speaking through humans. Therefore, it is reliable and true, and we can depend on its truthfulness (1:19-21).



EXPLORE THE TEXT

NEEDED REMINDERS (2 PET. 1:12-15)

VERSE 12

12 Therefore I will always remind you about these things, even though you know them and are established in the truth you have.

Peter had previously encouraged his readers to examine their calling and election to make sure that they were indeed followers of Christ (2 Pet. 1:10). He told them that true believers would never stumble and would inherit an eternal kingdom with God (vv. 10-11). This is the connection he made in verse 12 with the word *therefore*. Peter reminded them *about these things*, probably a reference to the entire truth of verses 3-11: that God had provided everything they needed for faith and godliness.

Peter admitted they knew the truth, but he had no qualms about reminding them of it. Three times in the next four verses he spoke of reminding them about spiritual truths. Even mature believers need reminding of spiritual truth. The apostle expressed confidence they were *established in the truth*.

VERSE 13

13 I consider it right, as long as I am in this bodily tent, to wake you up with a reminder,

As long as Peter was alive, he intended to keep reminding them of spiritual truths they had already learned. Peter described his life as a *tent* that was only temporary or transitory. Paul also used this imagery (2 Cor. 5:1-4). Peter seemed to have an awareness his death was imminent, and he desired to *wake* up the believers who may have grown complacent. The word for *wake* is a strong one, and could also be translated as “arouse.”

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?

VERSE 14

¹⁴ knowing that I will soon lay aside my tent, as our Lord Jesus Christ has also shown me.

Peter's awareness of his impending death did not come merely by an internal feeling but by a revelation of Jesus Christ. Using the imagery from the previous verse, he said he would soon *lay aside* his earthly *tent*. This is a refreshing way to look at death, especially since Peter's death would end violently with martyrdom. Others might note the cruelty or the injustice in his death. Peter looked at it as dropping his tent and moving on to a better dwelling place.

The question of when Jesus revealed to Peter the details of Peter's death are uncertain. Some have suggested this was a reference to John 13:36. Others have suggested it referred to John 21:18-19, where Jesus seemed to be clear about the details of his death. It could also refer to a revelation Jesus gave to Peter after the events of John 21. Knowing his time was limited, Peter concentrated on strengthening other Christians.

VERSE 15

¹⁵ And I will also make every effort that you may be able to recall these things at any time after my departure.

By continually reminding his readers of the truths they should embrace, Peter was making every effort to implant these truths in their minds and hearts. He wanted them to *be able to recall* them at any moment because he understood that he would not be with them much longer. Some have seen in this verse a reference to the Gospel of Mark as the *effort* that was being made to write something that would be remembered by people after Peter's death. (According to Christian tradition, Mark's gospel was based on Peter's eyewitness accounts.) Others believe it was the letter itself that was Peter's effort. Though we do not know for certain the nature of the effort, we know Peter spent his remaining time on earth strengthening believers.

What are practical ways we could strengthen others in their faith?



EYEWITNESS ACCOUNTS (2 PET. 1:16-18)

VERSE 16

¹⁶ 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.

Some claimed that the stories of Christ's power and majesty were nothing more than *cleverly contrived myths*. Both Greek and Roman religions were filled with such myths about their gods. A myth was a story that had no historical basis. It was a legend, such as the story of Paul Bunyan and his blue ox. Though the stories are interesting and sometimes even heart-warming, they are not tied to history. Peter made sure that when it came to Christ's ministry, death, and resurrection, he clearly tied it to historical fact.

The two areas that were under attack by the false teachers were *the power and coming* of Jesus. Some people believe that these two words describe the same event, which would be rendered "the powerful coming" of Jesus. It is possible the false teachers had set their sights on discrediting the possibility of the second coming of Jesus.

Peter countered the claims of the false teachers by claiming he and others *were eyewitnesses of His majesty*. Lest some thought that Jesus could not come powerfully, in the next two verses Peter reminded them of a time when Christ's power was displayed in great majesty. That occurred at the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt. 17:1-13).

VERSE 17

¹⁷ 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!

One of the most significant events validating the life and ministry of Jesus as the Son of God was the transfiguration. Jesus went to the top of a mountain with Peter, James, and John. As He was on the mountain, He was transfigured in front of their eyes, with His face shining like the sun (Matt. 17:2). His clothes even became white. After he was transfigured, Moses and Elijah appeared and talked with Him. After seeing the glory of Christ, the disciples heard *a voice* from heaven saying, *This is My beloved Son*.

I take delight in Him! (See Matt. 17:5.) God validated His Son by displaying His power and authority. Moses, the receiver of the law, and Elijah, the first of the prophets, left. Jesus alone remained (Matt. 17:8). He rose above the law and the prophets as the minister of a new covenant.

VERSE 18

18 And we heard this voice when it came from heaven while we were with Him on the holy mountain.

Peter emphatically stated all three of the disciples who were on the mountain **heard** the heavenly voice speak from the mountain. The exact **mountain** where this took place is debated. Some have identified the traditional site as Mount Tabor in the Plain of Jezreel, but that is a modest mountain. Others have thought it to be Mount Hermon near Caesarea Philippi, which was a much bigger mountain. The important point is that the mountain was an ordinary mountain made **holy** by the presence of Jesus and the glory of the transfiguration.

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?

WRITTEN BY GOD (2 PET. 1:19-21)

VERSE 19

19 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.

Peter turned from eyewitness accounts to the **prophetic word** of the Old Testament Scriptures. If the false teachers and Christian readers would not believe Peter's eyewitness accounts about Jesus, he could point to the Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah. He had eyewitnesses and prophecy on his side.

The apostle encouraged his readers to **pay attention** to the prophetic word about Jesus, because the day was going to dawn.



Peter may have been referring to the day of Jesus' coming mentioned in 2 Peter 1:16. At the dawn of the day, *the •morning star* (see p. 6) would rise. This is the only occurrence of this word in the New Testament, but the same idea appears in Revelation 22:16, as Jesus identifies Himself as the Bright Morning Star. Old Testament prophecies had connected the Messiah with a star. Numbers 24:17 spoke of a star that would rise from Jacob.

What did Peter mean when he said that the morning star would rise *in your hearts*? Did he spiritualize the second coming of Christ and believe it would only happen in a spiritual sense, or was there another meaning? If he did spiritualize it, it would be counter to the teaching of the remainder of the book, because Peter was looking for a bodily return of Jesus Christ. Peter was displaying the effect of Christ's return. When the morning star (Christ) rises, it will shine the full light of Christ's presence into our hearts, and believers will be transformed by it.

VERSE 20

²⁰ First of all, you should know this: No prophecy of Scripture comes from one's own interpretation,

Verse 20 has two different interpretations based on the translation and meaning of the word *interpretation*. It could mean "interpretation," but it could also mean "origin." Translated as "interpretation," the meaning of the verse is that no person is able to interpret Scripture without the assistance of the Holy Spirit. Private interpretations devoid of the Spirit's teaching are not acceptable. If the word is translated "origin," it means that people cannot make up their own meaning of Scripture. The meaning does not originate with them but with the biblical writers and the Holy Spirit.

Both of these interpretations are similar. The principle Peter put forth first of all is that *prophecy* originates with the Holy Spirit and is neither man-made nor freely interpreted by man. The false teachers were distorting Scripture for their own interpretations and usages. However, Peter called them to follow the leading of the Spirit.

VERSE 21

²¹ because no prophecy ever came by the will of man; instead, men spoke from God as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.

This verse provides the clearest example of how inspiration worked as fallible people wrote infallible Scripture. Peter first stated that *no prophecy ever came by the will of man*. Biblical writers did not sit down one day and say, “I’m going to write the Bible.” They wrote in their natural abilities, and yet God overshadowed the process to produce the inerrant Word of God. Even though many of them were writing letters, histories, or biographies, God intended them for more. Though humans wrote, their words came from God. In a union of humanity and divinity, the Word of God came into being just as Christ had entered the world in His incarnation—divinity wrapped in humanity.

The finished product appeared only as men were *moved by the Holy Spirit* to record the words God desired for them to write. The verb *moved* is a nautical metaphor taken from sailing a boat. (Peter had been a fisherman on the Sea of Galilee.) *Moved* can be translated “carried along,” like a boat whose sails have been hoisted to the breeze. This same verb occurs in Acts 27:15,17, describing Paul’s ship as it was driven along by the wind. The Holy Spirit acted to reveal the words, record the words, and preserve the truth of what should be contained in Scripture. God used imperfect men to write a book that is perfect in every way. We can trust the Bible because while men were the writers, God is the Author.

How would you explain the inspiration of the Scriptures to someone who wonders why they should believe a book written by humans?

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 MY CONTEXT

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.

What can your Bible study group do to help others struggling to believe the Bible? List actions that can be taken within the group and beyond the group that demonstrate trust in the Bible.

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?

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.

MEMORY VERSE

Because no prophecy ever came by the will of man; instead, men spoke from God as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.
—2 Peter 1:21



Session 12

ON GUARD

God's Word is the only standard of truth in our world.

2 PETER 2:1-3; JUDE 16-25

² Peter 2:1 **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. ² Many will follow their unrestrained ways, and the way of truth will be blasphemed because of them. ³ They will exploit you in their greed with deceptive words. Their condemnation, pronounced long ago, is not idle, and their destruction does not sleep.**

Jude ¹⁶ **These people are discontented grumblers, walking according to their desires; their mouths utter arrogant words, flattering**



people for their own advantage.¹⁷ But you, dear friends, remember what was predicted by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ;¹⁸ they told you, “In the end time there will be scoffers walking according to their own ungodly desires.”¹⁹ These people create divisions and are unbelievers, not having the Spirit.²⁰ But you, dear friends, as you build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit,²¹ keep yourselves in the love of God, expecting the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ for eternal life.²² Have mercy on those who doubt;²³ save others by snatching them from the fire; have mercy on others but with fear, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh.²⁴ 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,²⁵ to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, power, and authority before all time, now and forever. Amen.

Underline words or phrases that point to the threat posed by false teachers and their teachings. Circle words or phrases that identify potential motives behind the false teachers. How do those motives compare to the motives of the teachers of truth?

FIRST THOUGHTS

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.

What is your reaction to John's words as he fled the bathhouse? How should we respond to false teachers and their teachings today?

Both Peter and Jude took great pains to help 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, the 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

The lesson today comes from two different books of the Bible with similar contexts. Both Peter and Jude faced false teaching. What made the false teaching dangerous was the church had begun to experience persecution. It would have been easy to adopt the false teaching because it did not contrast so starkly with the world.

Peter's first letter emphasized suffering and how a Christian should approach it. Peter started his second letter with an encouragement for Christians to grow in their faith. He told them God had given them everything necessary for them to grow (2 Pet. 1:3-11). Then he encouraged them to search the Scriptures and see that the message of the false teachers was not accurate. The true gospel was based on eyewitness accounts and Old Testament prophecies (2 Pet. 1:12-21). After setting this foundation, he was ready to counter the false teachers (2 Peter 2) and teach the truth about the second coming of Christ (2 Peter 3).

Jude is a brief letter (25 verses) written by the brother of James (Jude 1), presumably the brother of Jesus. Jude addressed his letter



to those who were called, loved by God, and kept by Jesus Christ (Jude 1). To these true believers, Jude sought to expose those who taught false doctrine. Despite the teaching of the false teachers, Jude wanted believers to know God would sustain them.

KEY DOCTRINE: *The Scriptures*

The Scriptures are the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and religious opinions should be tried.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

EXPOSED (2 PET. 2:1-3; JUDE 16)

2 PETER 2:1

¹ 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.

Peter exposed the false prophets in his day. He said they *secretly* brought *destructive heresies* to the people. They didn't announce loudly that they were bringing in false teaching. They brought their teaching in under the guise of being orthodox, but really it was heresy.

The subject of their heresies was Jesus. Peter explained that they denied *the Master who bought them*. Peter was probably indicating the false prophets considered themselves part of the church. Whether they were or not is a subject that Peter did not debate. They considered themselves as members of the church, so Peter approached the situation from that vantage point. Only God knew if they had genuine faith but misdirected theology.

Peter's statement that the false prophets would end in *swift destruction* is ironic. The false prophets had apparently questioned the return of Christ, the very event that would bring this destruction to them if they did not repent.

VERSE 2

² Many will follow their unrestrained ways, and the way of truth will be blasphemed because of them.

Why was the teaching of the false prophets so dangerous? Peter declared that many would *follow their unrestrained ways*. The word for *unrestrained* is most often used of reckless and hardened immorality. It usually referred to some type of sexual deviancy (1 Pet. 4:3; 2 Pet. 2:7). What may have attracted people to the false prophets was that their denial of the possibility of Christ's return encouraged Christians to forget accountability and live immoral lifestyles.

Because people embraced the teachings of the false prophets, *the way of truth* would *be blasphemed* (see p. 6). As others saw Christians engaging in immoral behavior, it would profane the gospel of Jesus Christ as if it had no power to cleanse and purify them. People would malign the gospel because it was hypocritical to claim to be a follower of Jesus and yet live in open immorality.

VERSE 3

³ They will exploit you in their greed with deceptive words. Their condemnation, pronounced long ago, is not idle, and their destruction does not sleep.

Peter exposed the motive of the false prophets. They led people astray because they were greedy. Christian teachers had a right to financial support (1 Cor. 9:1-14; Gal. 6:6; 1 Tim. 5:17-18). But the false prophets preached only because they wanted their followers to give them money. They twisted their message to build greater support. Their tactics were to use *deceptive words*. They made up their own doctrine rather than taking the word of eyewitnesses (2 Pet. 1:16) and prophetic Scripture (1:20). However, the prosperity and popularity of the false prophets could not abate the judgment already against them.

JUDE 16

¹⁶ These people are discontented grumblers, walking according to their desires; their mouths utter arrogant words, flattering people for their own advantage.

Jude suggested some other false motives he observed in the false teachers. He said the teachers were not happy in themselves, so they sought to take others down with them. They were



discontented grumblers. They erred because of two primary reasons—evil actions and errant words. First, they walked **according to their desires.** They did not live by God’s standards but made up their own. Second, they had loose tongues. They uttered **arrogant words** and said only what others wanted to hear.

Is it easier to spot false prophets by their actions or their words? Explain.

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.

FALSE TEACHERS AND TEACHINGS

GENUINE TEACHERS AND TEACHINGS

PREDICTED (JUDE 17-19)

VERSES 17-18

17 But you, dear friends, remember what was predicted by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ; 18 they told you, “In the end time there will be scoffers walking according to their own ungodly desires.”

Jude said to **remember** the teachings of apostles which **predicted** people would come mocking Christianity and living by **their own ungodly desires.** To what teaching of **the apostles** was Jude referring? Warnings were mentioned in early Christian preaching (Acts 20:29-30) and in the letters of Paul (1 Tim. 4:1-5; 2 Tim. 3:1-5). The imperfect tense of the word **told** at the beginning of verse 18 would suggest that the apostles repeated this message over and over again.

VERSE 19

¹⁹ These people create divisions and are unbelievers, not having the Spirit.

Jude unveiled the destructive tendencies of the false prophets. He wrote three accusations against them. First, the false prophets created *divisions* within the church. People were lining up to side either with the apostles or the false prophets. Jesus had prayed for unity in His church (John 17:20-26), but the false teachers were splitting people into groups. Second, Jude accused the false prophets of being *unbelievers*. The Greek word could be translated “natural ones.” They operated not out of the power of the Holy Spirit but from the power of the flesh. Third, and related to the second accusation, Jude said that they did not have the Holy *Spirit*. Paul had made a similar statement when he said those who did not welcome the things of the Spirit did so because they lacked the Holy Spirit in their own lives (1 Cor. 2:14).

The false prophets divided the church because they taught from their own wisdom, since as unbelievers they did not have access to the wisdom of the Holy Spirit. Perhaps they were sincere in what they taught, but they were sincerely wrong. They needed access to the Holy Spirit so that they could teach the truth.

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?

COUNTERED (JUDE 20-25)

VERSE 20

²⁰ But you, dear friends, as you build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit,

Jude suggested two actions to combat false teaching. First, he suggested that believers *build* themselves *up* in their faith. In order to counter false teachings, we need spiritual maturity to combat the immaturity of those who embrace the message of false teachers.



Second, Jude encouraged Christians to *pray in the Holy Spirit*. Since we have access to the Spirit, we can pray in His power. (See Rom. 8:26-27; Gal. 4:6; Eph. 6:18.) The Spirit guides powerful prayer that combats the work of the enemy through the false teachers.

VERSE 21

²¹ keep yourselves in the love of God, expecting the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ for eternal life.

A third strategy to counter false teaching was for genuine believers to *keep* themselves *in the love of God*. The teaching of the false prophets threatened the gospel, and in this verse Jude encouraged true believers to focus on the gospel so that they would not be led astray. Paul said nothing can separate us from the love of God, not even false teaching (Rom. 8:35-39).

VERSE 22

²² Have mercy on those who doubt;

Another strategy for combating false teaching was to *have mercy on those who doubt*. When people embrace false teaching, causing them to doubt the truth of the gospel, they need the mercy of genuine believers. We have an obligation not to react with fear, hatred, or ridicule. Through their doubt we can help those who waffle back and forth between the truth and the false teaching.

Which of these preventative actions do you think would be the most effective? Explain.

VERSE 23

²³ save others by snatching them from the fire; have mercy on others but with fear, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh.

Concerning unbelievers already captured by false teaching, Jude encouraged true believers to *save others by snatching them from the fire*. Obviously we have no power to save people on our own, but we have the gospel which has the power to save (Rom. 1:16-17).

The fact that these unbelievers were in the fire meant they were already under God's judgment as unbelievers (John 3:18).

Christians are to approach those who are in error with caution, because they may attempt to lead us astray as well. Showing *mercy* to them does not mean turning a blind eye to their ways. In fact, we are encouraged to hate *the garment defiled by the flesh*. This means we are to hate the sin and all that is connected with it, while at the same time showing mercy to the person trapped in sin.

VERSES 24-25

²⁴ 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, ²⁵ to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, power, and authority before all time, now and forever. Amen.

Jude ended with a shout of praise, remembering God was greater than any enemy they faced. How would they be able to stand against such false teaching? Jude reminded them God was *able* to keep them *from stumbling* and would deliver them safely to His *presence*. As influential as the false prophets were, Jude's confidence was in the power of God. God is committed to keeping us from falling into the kind of immorality or error that would cut us off from Him (2 Pet. 1:10).

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. All of this comes to us *through Jesus Christ our Lord*.

Jude ascribed to *God our Savior* several wonderful attributes—*glory, majesty, power, and authority*, along the way noting that God exists beyond the limits of time. He was before all time, He is *now*, and 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.”

What is our role and God's role in countering false prophets? How do the two roles complement each other?



IN MY CONTEXT

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.

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.

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?

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.

MEMORY VERSE

Keep yourselves in the love of God, expecting the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ for eternal life. —Jude 21



Session 13

WITH ANTICIPATION

A believer's hope is in the return of Jesus.

2 PETER 3:3-13,17-18

³ First, be aware of this: Scoffers will come in the last days to scoff, living according to their own desires, ⁴ 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.”

⁵ They willfully ignore this: Long ago the heavens and the earth were brought about from water and through water by the word of God. ⁶ Through these waters the world of that time perished when it was flooded. ⁷ 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. ⁸ 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.⁹ 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.¹⁰ 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.¹¹ 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 godliness¹² 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.¹³ But based on His promise, we wait for the new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness will dwell. [...] ¹⁷ 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.¹⁸ 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.

Notice the actions believers are to take in anticipation of Jesus' return. How do those actions demonstrate faith in Jesus?

FIRST THOUGHTS

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.

What are your favorite things to do when you have to wait for something? Why do you enjoy doing those things as you wait?

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

Peter started his second letter by encouraging his readers to grow in their faith. God had gifted them with everything they needed for life and godliness (2 Pet. 1:3). Peter also encouraged those who saw no growth in their lives to examine themselves to make sure they really knew the Lord (1:10). Because the churches faced suffering and were infiltrated by false teachers who were distorting the Word of God, he wanted them to be strong to combat these forces.

Part of that spiritual growth was to establish Christians strongly in the Word of God. Peter let them know they could trust in the authority of Scripture. He taught that they could trust the writings of the apostles because they were based on eyewitness accounts of the life and ministry of Jesus. He retold the highlights of the transfiguration of Jesus to demonstrate the accuracy of the eyewitness accounts (1:16-18). He also pointed out the Old Testament prophecies that were fulfilled as examples of why they could trust Scripture (1:19).

In chapter 2, Peter exposed the false teachers. He assured his readers that the false teachers would not escape punishment for



their arrogant opposition to the truth. In the final chapter of his letter, Peter turned to the topic perverted by the false teachers—the return of Jesus Christ. He wrote the final section to explain the truth about Christ’s coming, the reason for the delay, and to warn unbelievers to be ready and Christians to live holy.

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.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

A SURE RETURN (2 PET. 3:3-7)

VERSES 3-4

³ **First, be aware of this: Scoffers will come in the last days to scoff, living according to their own desires,** ⁴ **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.”**

Peter called the false teachers *scoffers*. They made fun of those who expected a literal return of Jesus Christ. Since the false teachers did not believe in the coming of Christ, they had no incentive to live a holy life, so they were *living according to their own desires*.

The false prophets questioned why Jesus had not yet returned. As many as 30 years had passed since the ascension of Jesus, and still they saw no sign of His return. The world went on just like it did every day without the return of Christ. The sun always rose. The rains always came. The earth was in a cycle that they believed would not be broken by Christ’s return.

VERSE 5

⁵ **They willfully ignore this: Long ago the heavens and the earth were brought about from water and through water by the word of God.**

The scoffers overlooked some great events that interrupted the world’s cycle. First, Peter mentioned creation itself. By God’s

spoken word He created the heavens and the earth. The universe didn't exist and then it did. This was a huge interruption in the way things were. Peter took a jab at the false prophets with the words *willfully ignore*. This was not an oversight but a rejection of the obvious.

VERSE 6

⁶ Through these waters the world of that time perished when it was flooded.

Peter mentioned a second event that demonstrated how God could intervene in the order of the world. The flood waters came and all the people of the world perished except those inside the ark. The false teachers taught Christ would not return because God would never interrupt the world. Noah and his family knew different.

VERSE 7

⁷ 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.

Since God proved once He could judge the world by His spoken word, Peter said that He could also hold back judgment until the proper time. Peter revealed that instead of using water, God would use fire as judgment. The fire of a literal hell will provide judgment for those who refuse to repent and who reject Christ. His delay put off two events: *the day of judgment* and the *destruction of ungodly men*. This would happen eventually, but it was not yet time.

What are some reasons people doubt the second coming of Christ today?

THE PATIENT FATHER (2 PET. 3:8-9)

VERSE 8

⁸ 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.



Peter revealed the reason for the delay of Christ's return. God is patient. In verse 8, Peter explained that length of time was irrelevant to God. To begin this line of thought, he reached back to Psalm 90:4: "For in Your sight a thousand years are like yesterday that passes by, like a few hours of the night." Time is precious to those who only live 70 years. But to God, who always has been and always will be, time is not a factor. He transcends time.

The psalmist contrasted the eternity of God with the brevity of humanity, but Peter contrasted the eternity of God with the impatient expectations of the false prophets. In the psalmist's way of counting years, it has only been two days since the ascension of Christ. That puts Peter's argument in perspective. The Father is not worried about the delay.

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?

VERSE 9

⁹ 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.

This verse is the crux of Peter's argument. The false prophets said Jesus would never return because the delay had been too long. Peter reinterpreted the delay with the word *patient*. God was not delaying; He was patiently waiting for something.

God does not want *any to perish*. Rather, He wants *all to come to repentance*. As long as He delays, unbelievers still have an

opportunity to repent and turn to Jesus. This does not mean that all will be saved. Rather, it means God grants every opportunity for people to repent. One day the wait will be complete and Jesus will return to judge the living and the dead.

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?

THE WARNING ISSUED (2 PET. 3:10)

VERSE 10

¹⁰ **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.**

Using an image he heard from Jesus, Peter revealed that the coming **•Day of the Lord** (see p. 6) **will come like a thief** (Matt. 24:43-44). The thief appears unexpectedly, and those he comes to rob have a false assurance of safety. For those who are unprepared for Christ's return, it will certainly be like a thief coming to them. They will be caught unaware and unprepared.

Three things will happen when Jesus returns that will signal the end of the world as we know it. First, **the heavens will pass away with a loud noise**. Second, Peter declared that the **elements** would **burn and be dissolved**. Some question exists over whether this refers to the basic building blocks of the world or the heavenly bodies such as the sun and the moon. It could refer to either. Either way, it describes the total destruction of the world order. Third, the **earth** and all that is in it **will be disclosed**. Not only will the earth itself be exposed, so will the **works** that people have done. The return of Christ will usher in a day of judgment that unbelievers will be unprepared to face.

What illustrations other than a thief could be used to describe the Day of the Lord?



WHILE WAITING (2 PET. 3:11-13,17-18)

VERSES 11-12

¹¹ **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**
¹² **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.**

Peter did not defend the doctrine of the second coming of Jesus merely for theological discussion. He revealed how people should live in light of the imminent return of Christ. Holiness involves two sides—separation from evil and dedication to God. We need to separate from the evil of the world and live in such a way that we accomplish God’s purposes and bring glory to His name. We will one day give account of our lives to God.

Peter encouraged his readers to *earnestly desire* Christ’s coming. The coming of Christ is not something believers should fear but something we eagerly anticipate. The expression *earnestly desire* can also be translated “hasten the coming,” indicating that by living holy lives believers can speed up the coming of the Lord. Certainly Jesus taught that the gospel would spread to all ethnicities before the end would come (Matt. 24:14), and perhaps Peter had this in mind as he spoke of hastening the day.

VERSE 13

¹³ **But based on His promise, we wait for the new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness will dwell.**

Lest people worry about the dissolution of the earth, God promised to bring *new heavens and a new earth*. Some Bible students understand 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 (see 3:5). Others believe Peter was talking about a transformation of the elements of the existing universe. There are indications in Scripture that the final home of the resurrected, redeemed saints will be the New Jerusalem that has come down to the recreated earth (Rev. 21–22). Whatever the case, the main point is that our final destination will be *where righteousness will dwell*.

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?

VERSE 17

17 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.

This verse summarizes why Peter has spent the better part of two chapters refuting the teaching of the false prophets. He did not want believers to be ***led away by the error of lawless people***. The false teachers did not believe that they would face judgment or have to give account of themselves, so they felt free to live in ungodliness. However, we know better. We know that one day Christ will return and bring judgment on the ungodly. Therefore, believers need to remain strong.

VERSE 18

18 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.

Peter ended his letter where he started it—with a call to spiritual growth. He encouraged his readers to ***grow in the grace and knowledge*** of Jesus Christ. We do not have perfect knowledge or perfect understanding of God's grace. We still need to grow into all the things God has given us for life and godliness (2 Pet. 1:3). This growth is not merely theological knowledge or understanding. It is the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ. Our relationship with Him needs to deepen.

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.



IN MY CONTEXT

Believers can be confident in the return of Christ. We can urgently show God's grace by sharing Christ with all people. Believers demonstrate assurance of the return of Christ by building godly character in anticipation of that return.

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?

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.

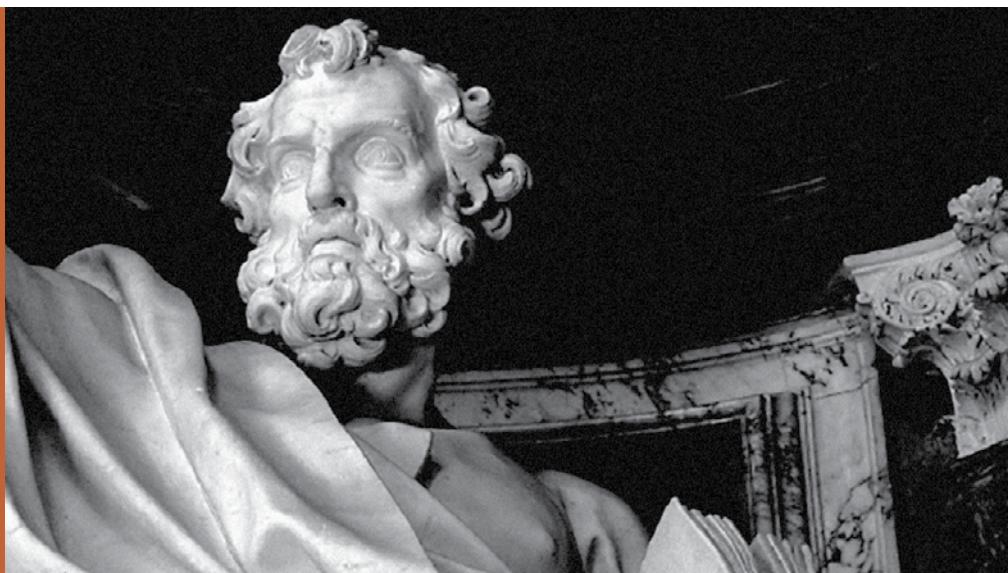
Quickly review the previous sessions in the study, looking for insights you highlighted and actions you identified. How have these insights been turned into action in the course of this study? Share with the Bible study group how you have grown, encouraging each other in your spiritual walks.

MEMORY VERSE

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 3:9

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.

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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?

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! Before things got any worse, I worked to get as much Scripture in me as possible. In a week I had memorized Philippians and Philemon.

How do you memorize text?

For the person just starting, 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?

Review is essential to retention. I keep a list 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. I begin by reviewing the corrections of the mistakes I made the last time I recited the text. 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. 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.

Read the full article at Blog.LifeWay.com/ExploreTheBible/?s=meet+david.

GB Howell Jr. is the content editor of *Biblical Illustrator*.



COMING NEXT QUARTER

JOSHUA; JUDGES; RUTH

- Session 1** **Commissioned** > *Joshua 1:1-9*
- Session 2** **Conquest** > *Joshua 6:12-25*
- Session 3** **Commitment Kept** > *Joshua 10:6-14*
- Session 4** **Savior Announced** > *Luke 1:26-38*
- Session 5** **Settled** > *Joshua 22:1-8*
- Session 6** **Challenged** > *Joshua 24:14-28*
- Session 7** **Value All** > *Proverbs 24:11-12; Mark 10:46-49*
- Session 8** **Rebellion's Cycle** > *Judges 2:11-19*
- Session 9** **Willing Servants** > *Judges 4:4-10,12-16*
- Session 10** **Timid Warrior** > *Judges 6:11-16,25-32*
- Session 11** **Compromised Potential** > *Judges 16:4-6,13-20*
- Session 12** **Faith Through Trials** > *Ruth 1:6-18*
- Session 13** **Redeemed and Secure** > *Ruth 3:8-13; 4:13-17*

Pentecost and the Jewish Diaspora



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1,2 Peter; Jude

For many followers of Christ, living in America today is like living in a strange land. We feel like aliens who have awakened in a hostile environment toxic to our faith. We need a sure word to help us understand how to survive—or, more than that—how to thrive in the new circumstances confronting us. The problems seem overwhelming—racism, terrorism, family breakdowns, abortion, same-sex marriage, pornography, prostitution, sex trafficking, and on and on. It's easy to think we are facing a situation Christians have never before encountered. But that's not the case. The first Christians faced many of the same issues we are dealing with today. And yet, they found strength to endure and the insight they needed to thrive from various resources—including letters from their leaders. We too can learn much from the Letters of Peter and Jude about living for Christ in a threatening world.



Let the Word dwell in you.

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