1717 BIBLE STUDIES

"Your Word Is Truth" (John 17:17)

OVERVIEW

Study: 1 Peter
Theme: Really Living

Overview: Peter wrote to Christian exiles scattered across Asia Minor who were facing threats and mistreatment because of their faith. In this unit, students will learn what it means to really live as Christians: living in hope, living as God's living stones, living in submission to the authorities over them, and living through suffering by doing what is right.

HOW TO USE

Each week has a **lesson aim**, **lesson text**, and **supplemental text**.



Tabs indicate the week of each lesson.

Each week features three sections: **Study**, **Application**, and **Discovery.**



Use the **Discovery** questions to study, discuss, and apply the Scripture passages in a group or class.

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INTRODUCTION

Author

The apostle Peter identifies himself as the author (1 Peter 1:1), writing "with the help of Silas" (5:12). He calls himself "a fellow elder and a witness of Christ's sufferings" (5:1).

Audience

First Peter is a general epistle addressed "to God's elect, exiles scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia" (1 Peter 1:1). The readers included both Jewish and Gentile believers living as foreigners in a culture that misunderstood and opposed them.

Date

Peter likely wrote this letter in the early to mid-60s AD, from Rome (which he calls "Babylon," 1 Peter 5:13), shortly before the persecution under Nero in which, according to tradition, Peter was martyred.

Setting

Full-scale persecution was still limited, but believers were suffering slander, insults, and threats because of their faith. Peter urged them not to be surprised at "the fiery ordeal" (1 Peter 4:12), to submit to human authorities, and to "stand fast" in the true grace of God (5:12).

Theme

Really living. God "has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Peter 1:3). Believers are "living stones" being built into a spiritual house (2:5), called to live good lives among unbelievers (2:12), and ready to suffer for doing good, since "it is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil" (3:17).

Why Study 1 Peter?

First Peter shows believers how to really live in a world that is not their home. This study calls Christians to let their eternal hope guide their daily lives, to build up the church by offering their lives to God, to submit to the authorities over them by doing good, and to do what is right even when it leads to suffering.

STUDY CONTENT

WEEK 1: 1 Peter 1:3-12

WEEK 2: 1 Peter 2:1-10

WEEK 3: 1 Peter 2:11–3:7

WEEK 4: 1 Peter 3:8-17; 4:12-16

WEEK ONE

LESSON AIM: **Let your eternal hope guide your daily life.**

STUDY: 1 Peter

THEME: Really Living

LESSON TEXT: 1 Peter 1:3-12

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: 1 Peter 1:13-23

LIVING HOPE

BY MARK SCOTT

Back in the day youth groups sang, "I'm really livin' since I met my Lord." Ongoing verses would substitute other words for "livin" (e.g., lovin', servin', prayin', etc.). If sung with smugness it is the height of religious arrogance, but if sung with humility it highlights that the Christian life is life lived at the highest level (see John 10:10). And that living is always "living in hope."

First Peter was a "general epistle" (not written to a singular church) addressed to Christian exiles dispersed throughout the regions of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia (1:1). Full-scale persecution was limited at this time, but the churches were suffering under verbal threats of bigotry. Peter reminded the believers that they should not be surprised at these trials, that they should be willing to endure them as Christians, and that they should stand fast in God's grace (4:12; 5:12).

Living Hope Is Generated by God

1 Peter 1:3-5

In an opening burst of *praise* (to speak well of), Peter acknowledged that God is the one responsible for living hope. This happened *in* (according to) *his great mercy*. God gave us *new birth* (allowed us to be born again, see John 3:3, 5; Titus 3:5). It was given to us by means of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

Once born into God's family believers share in the *inheritance* of the God of the universe. In the Old Testament this inheritance was often viewed as the promised land, but it is not so limited in the New Testament. This inheritance goes beyond this world. It is *kept in heaven*, and it therefore cannot *perish* (incorruptible), *spoil* (unpolluted), or *fade* (like a flower does). These three verbal adjectives indicate that this inheritance is "untouched by death, unstained by evil, and unimpaired by time" (Fritz Rienecker and Cleon Rogers, *Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament*, 744). Faith appropriates this living hope, and when appropriated, believers are *shielded* (guarded) by God's power until the time of our ultimate *salvation* (mentioned three times in our text) in the last time.

Living Hope Is Tested by Fire

1 Peter 1:6-9

A faith that cannot be tested is a faith that cannot be trusted. Peter admitted that the trials were real and came in all kinds of ways. But he also reminded the believers of three great truths to help them when they felt their living hope was about to go on the skids. First, these trials can cause joy. Later in the epistle Peter told the believers that facing these trials joyfully can create a solidarity with Jesus (4:13). Second, these trials are not eternal. They are *for a little while*. Third, proven faith in these trials results in praise for God. This is not to say that proven faith does not have to be confirmed. It goes through testing like gold going through fire. But when Jesus is *revealed* (repeated three times in the text) "it will be worth it all."

The word *hope* does not appear in verse 8, but the concept is all over the verse. Believers live now as if their hope has already been realized. God's glorious future has invaded their present. Christians walk by faith in the present since they cannot yet see Christ. But they love and believe in Jesus now (see John 20:29).

Living Hope Is Perfect in Timing

1 Peter 1:10-12

The story of the Bible is said to "progress." Salvation history unfolds—sometimes slowly. Peter reminded the believers of the great age in which they were living. At times we may think we'd like to trade places with people in the Bible—particularly in the Old Testament. Peter wrote about the opposite. The Old Testament saints would have traded places with New Testament exiles in a heartbeat.

This living hope message of salvation was revealed at the perfect time. Prophets, preachers, and angels all spoke of this living hope from afar. The prophets *searched intently* (thoroughly inquired) and *tried to find out* (search out; examine closely; investigate; explore) about the passion and glorification of Jesus. Something unseen was pointing them in a Christ-centered direction.

The Old Testament prophets realized that they were serving others. The New Testament preachers realized they were giving away the gospel by the power of the Holy Spirit. The heavenly angels *long to look* (lust, covet, desire) into these things. The present joy is rooted in the past revelation. Hope that is not living is just a wish. Living hope ends with *the salvation of your souls*.

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THE HOUR GLASS

BY DAVID FAUST

I keep an hour glass on the shelf in my office. It was a gift from a friend. About a foot tall, my hour glass has a brass frame surrounding a clear glass bottle that's narrow in the middle with a couple inches of white sand inside. Turn the contraption over, and the sand flows down from the top to the bottom.

My hour glass is a decoration, not a time piece. Technically the one in my office is misnamed, because it only takes 44 minutes for all of the sand to flow to the bottom. A "44-minute glass" doesn't have the same ring to it as an "hour glass."

We're time-conscious, aren't we? Maybe even time-enslaved. Clocks determine when we eat, go to class, meet with friends, and go to bed. Many laborers get paid by the hour. Young or old, rich or poor, we all have 24 hours in a day, 168 hours in a week.

Time is precious. It's said that "time is money." What if someone gave you $1,440 every day—over a half million dollars a year? God gives us 1,440 minutes every day—over half a million minutes every year.

Time is non-renewable. It's actually not possible to save time. If you waste time, it's gone. If you are 20 years old, you already have spent more than 10 million minutes, and the clock is ticking.

Time moves slowly . . . and quickly. A lot can happen in the last two minutes of a close football game. Time flies when you're on vacation, but it drags when you endure a boring business meeting. Like the grains of sand in an hour glass, the moments of our lives sometimes seem to pass slowly and sometimes they pass quickly, but either way, time keeps moving.

Time is a gift. That's why we call it "the present," as somebody observed. Among the most grateful people I know are those who have endured a life-changing accident or who face a terminal illness and realize they don't have long to live. Moses prayed, "Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom" (Psalm 90:12).

According to Ecclesiastes 3:1, "There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens." Then the writer lists activities that are likely to happen in the course of our lives (3:2-8). There are happy times when we laugh, dance, plant, embrace, and build; and there are hard times when we weep, mourn, uproot, throw things away—and eventually we die. Some activities we choose (when to speak or keep silent), and some we don't choose (like the day we're born). Whatever happens, the resurrected Christ can fill our days with "living hope" (1 Peter 1:3).

Do you ever think the sand in the hour glass is dropping too quickly? Actually, when you receive God's gift of eternal life through his Son, it's as if he flips the hour glass over and time is being extended, not used up. Yes, your earthly life is slipping away, but each passing moment draws you closer to seeing the Lord face to face. Ahead is "an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade" (1 Peter 1:4). God's eternal hour glass contains an endless amount of sand.

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QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

Use one or both of these questions to introduce the lesson.

- Who or what guides your decision making?
- Do you have a "big picture" view for your life or are you caught up in the details of the everyday grind?

Read 1 Peter 1:3-5

1. Peter describes our inheritance (a legacy, a birthright, a possession, trait, or condition from past generations) as a spiritual, God-given gift. Describe the Christian's inheritance; where it's located, how you are qualified for it, and what it means to you.

2. What can you do now to prepare for your heavenly inheritance? Read 1 Peter 1:3-23 and list the things you can put into practice this week.

3. The word *holy* in 1 Peter 1:16 comes from the Greek word *hagios* and means to be set apart by or for God, to be sacred. Forms of the word are elsewhere translated *sanctify* and *saint*. Practically speaking, what does it mean to be holy and how does our saintliness manifest itself and help us make wise decisions in life?

Read 1 Peter 1:6-9

4. Based on this passage of Scripture, what is faith? In your daily life (especially in trials), do you exhibit the inexpressible and glorious joy described here? Discuss this in light of your answers to question 2.

5. Consider the last time you or someone you know had a trial or suffered grief or difficulty. Discuss how faith impacts a person's response to trials. How do hardships refine faith?

Read 1 Peter 1:10-12

6. How does your hope in Jesus Christ and your heavenly inheritance change your everyday circumstances and how you view your life?

7. The prophets of old, in communicating God's words to his people, were filled with God's Spirit and predicted the sufferings and glories of Christ. Even though they spoke long ago, they continue to serve God's people, paving the way for a personal relationship with the Messiah. Discuss the importance of serving future generations. What is our role to pay it forward and how should this affect our daily lives?

Conclude your group time with prayer, using the following as a guide. Father, we praise you for your great mercy on us and for the incredible inheritance we have as your saints. Thank you for setting us apart and giving us hope for an eternity with you in Heaven. In the meantime, Holy Spirit, please guide us daily to do the work you have appointed for us in reaching future generations for Jesus Christ. Amen.

WEEK TWO

LESSON AIM: **Build up your church by offering your life to God.**

STUDY: 1 Peter

THEME: Really Living

LESSON TEXT: 1 Peter 2:1-10

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Ephesians 4:11-16

LIVING STONES

BY MARK SCOTT

Metaphors motivate. Metaphors are memorable. Metaphors help us talk and live (George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*). The Bible is full of metaphors, and many metaphors are used to describe God's people. Years ago Paul Minear traced the many images of the church in the New Testament (*Images of the Church in the New Testament*). He found over 90.

In chapter one Peter called Christian exiles to live in hope (1:3-12), live in holiness (vv. 13-21), and live in love (vv. 22-25). In chapter two Peter moved from mandate to metaphor. He called the exiles to live like newborn babies, to live like living stones, and to be God's special possession.

Babies

1 Peter 2:1-3

The word for *babies* in this passage is the normal word for infant. That metaphor is not always used positively in the New Testament. Remaining on milk means that Christians are not maturing (Hebrews 5:11–6:8). Remaining in spiritual infancy means that Christians are susceptible to false doctrine (Ephesians 4:14). But this passage used the metaphor positively by likening our growth in Christ to a *craving for* (longing for; desiring earnestly) *spiritual* (logical; reasonable) milk.

The purity of this picture is retained by putting away five sins. Believers are more likely to crave pure spiritual milk if they rid themselves of *malice* (badness), *deceit* (guile), *hypocrisy* (play acting), *envy* (jealousy; pain when good is viewed), and *slander* (bad speech). When believers crave spiritual milk they will *grow up in their salvation* (i.e., mature in Christ) and they will *experience* (taste) that the Lord is *good* (kind). This last phrase draws upon Psalm 34:8 and is used to describe what coming into Christ is like in Hebrews 6:4.

Stones

1 Peter 2:4-8

This is the largest section of our text (and thus the emphasis for the lesson title). "Stones" has to be plural because there are two stones described here. One is Jesus, and one is collectively spoken of as God's people (i.e., the church).

Jesus is called a *living stone*. Stones do not live, but by virtue of his indestructible life, this stone does. Believers are told to come to him. His rejection by men, his election by God, and his preciousness and significance for the Father's purposes are all underlined here. God *laid* (placed) this living stone down in Zion (a word with many nuances meaning everything from God's people to the temple to Jerusalem, etc.) as a *cornerstone* (foundation stone, verse 6) and a *capstone* (the normal word for head is used in the reference in verse 7). In other words, this stone is the top and bottom of it all. So profound is Jesus the living stone that people will *stumble* over him (i.e., his exclusivity will cause people to decide against him) and be a *rock* (huge boulder) that makes people *fall* (feel scandalized because they do not accept the power of the cross, 1 Corinthians 1:21). The reason that these people fall over the rock is because they do not believe and they disobey his *message* (word).

If Jesus is the rock, the church is little stones. But because Jesus lives, the church also lives as living stones. Peter says three things about these "little Christs" (Martin Luther's phrase to describe Christians). First, they are being built into a *spiritual house* (i.e., firmly planted in the church). Second, they are a *holy priesthood* offering spiritual sacrifices (i.e., they officiate for God in the world). Third, they are *never put to shame* (i.e., they are honored by the one whose voice really matters). To underline these truths Peter drew upon rich Old Testament passages (e.g., Isaiah 28:16; 8:14; Psalm 118:22).

Property

1 Peter 2:9, 10

Babies crave milk. Stones are used in buildings. But property remains a possession. That's what Peter emphasized in this last metaphor. Drawing upon images from Isaiah and Exodus (particularly chapter 19), Peter reminded these Christian exiles "whose" they were. As God's property, they were a *chosen people* (race), a *royal* (kingly) *priesthood*, a *holy nation* (a set apart ethnicity). These were their name tags, their identity, their labels, and their handles.

But with privilege comes purpose. As God's special possession they had the privilege of declaring the *praises* (excellencies or surpassing greatness—only appearing here and in Philippians 4:8 and 2 Peter 1:3, 5) of the one who called them (i.e., God). They shifted from darkness to light. They shifted from being wandering nomads into being the people of God. They shifted from not having received mercy to having received it. Hopefully these metaphors will motivate us to build up the church by offering our lives to God.

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THE G.M.

BY DAVID FAUST

What do the initials G.M. bring to your mind? The automaker General Motors? A key in my pocket has G.M. engraved on it. It's a Grand Master that will open most doors in the building.

In the realms of industry and professional sports, G.M. stands for General Manager.

An article in the *Harvard Business Review* identifies several responsibilities of a General Manager. The G.M. shapes the work environment, crafts a strategic vision, marshals resources, builds up the organization, and supervises operations. Effective leaders, including those who lead churches, understand the importance of management principles like these. However, in the church we have only one General Manager: Jesus Christ. He is the Head of the body, the Master of the ministers, the Author and Finisher of our faith, the King of kings and Lord of lords. He sets the vision, directs our work, and makes the final call about policies and procedures. "For the Lord's sake" we respect and pray for the leaders who guide our nation (1 Peter 2:13), for by doing so we submit to our G.M.—"the Shepherd and Overseer" of our souls (v. 25).

The Final Say-So

When you negotiate to buy a car, the salesperson might say, "I need to discuss your offer with my manager." The sales rep disappears into a backroom and leaves you squirming, wondering if your offer will be accepted. Although I dislike that experience, I understand the chain of command. If a customer makes an unreasonably low offer, the salesperson can't say, "Sure, I'm okay with that," without checking with the boss. The G.M. has the final say-so.

In a similar way, when the Scriptures have clearly spoken, you and I can't bend the rules just because someone doesn't like them. Our job is to comply with the Lord's will. Followers of Christ have the privilege of consulting with the G.M. We surrender to his direction because we trust his judgment, even when his standards go against our personal inclinations. Jesus calls us to deny ourselves, so we can't make self-indulgence our main goal in life. We can't say it's okay to harbor hypocrisy, greed, ingratitude, lust, envy, and self-righteousness in our hearts, for the G.M. considers such attitudes unacceptable.

Christians must respect the G.M.'s instructions. Don't ask us to bless sexual intimacy between same-gender partners, or to pretend it's okay for unmarried heterosexuals to engage in sexual relations. How can we affirm behaviors the Bible unambiguously disapproves? We aren't trying to be judgmental. We simply can't say something is okay if the Lord says it's wrong. Yes, the God of grace forgives sin; but who determines what is a sin? God does. It's not our job to redefine standards ordained by the Creator and pretend that disobeying the Lord is no big deal. Getting drunk is forgivable, but that doesn't mean it's advisable. Cheating on your spouse—even in your heart? The G.M. says "no."

It's not legalistic, intolerant, or unloving to obey the Lord. It's wise. God knows us better than we know ourselves. Jesus said, "If you love me, keep my commands" (John 14:15). When we decide to follow Jesus, that means we trust him with the final say-so about the rest of our decisions.

Are you looking for wise counsel? Open your Bible and talk things over with the G.M.

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QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

Use one or both of these questions to introduce the lesson.

- What does it mean to be mature?
- Describe the phases of life from infant to adult. How do they differ?

Read 1 Peter 2:1-3

1. First Peter was written for Jewish and Gentile believers early in the life of the church. In chapter 1 Peter wrote about being holy and having sincere love for one another. How do the attitudes and actions Peter listed in verse 1 of chapter 2 prevent us from pursuing holiness and loving one another?

2. Milk is the first food and source of sustenance for infants. The word *spiritual* in verse 2 (rendered *milk of the word* in other translations) provides a mental picture of newborn believers. Why is this a powerful image for Christians who want to grow up in their faith and salvation, and what practical steps can be taken to mature in this way?

3. Read Ephesians 4:11-16. In addition to God's Word, we have support from others. What does spiritual maturity look like and what happens to the church when this happens within the body of believers?

Read 1 Peter 2:4-8

4. The Christian's role model is our Savior. Talk about what spiritual sacrifices look like in everyday life. What does it mean to live our lives as if we are part of a holy priesthood?

5. In verse 5, what do you think Peter ("the Rock") meant when he called believers "living stones"?

6. How can Jesus Christ, the living Stone, cause people to stumble? Discuss who is at fault in the stumbling and why.

Read 1 Peter 2:9, 10

7. Consider the phrases "chosen people," "royal priesthood," "holy nation," and "special possession." How do they relate to us as individuals working together within the church?

8. According to Peter, what is the purpose of being the people of God? Talk about what you will do this week to build up your church as you offer your life to Christ.

Conclude your group time with prayer, using the following as a guide. Father, thank you for the privilege of serving you as part of the church, Christ's body. Jesus, you are the cornerstone of our faith and salvation. Use us as living stones to provide a foundation for future believers. Holy Spirit, enable us to build up our churches by offering our lives as spiritual sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God. Amen.

WEEK THREE

LESSON AIM: **Submit to the human authorities over you by doing what is good for them and for God.**

STUDY: 1 Peter

THEME: Really Living

LESSON TEXT: 1 Peter 2:11–3:7

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Romans 13:1-7

LIVING IN SUBMISSION

BY MARK SCOTT

Submission is not a dirty word. The Son of God submitted and will submit again in the future (Philippians 2:5-8; 1 Corinthians 15:28). When believers submit to human authorities it catches the eye of the watching world. In many ways 1 Peter is about how to live out the grace of God in "Babylon" (1 Peter 5:12, 13).

Our large text is extremely practical. Even the doctrinal excursus about Jesus and his death on the cross (2:21-25) is illustrative of how believers suffer for doing good. (This is similar to how the great doctrinal Christ hymn in Philippians 2:5-11 illustrates unselfish living.) Verses 11 and 12 serve as a heading over the whole "submission" section in 2:13–3:7. Peter acknowledged the Christian exiles as *dear friends* (beloved). He urged them to refrain from the passions that war against their souls. In fact, the goal would be to live in such a way as to cause the *pagans* (*ethnos* here means unbelievers) to witness the good deeds and actually glorify God when he returns in Christ (see Matthew 5:16). Peter then used the vocative to call out how believers, slaves, wives, and husbands all gain a hearing for the gospel by submitting to human authorities.

Submission in the Culture

1 Peter 2:13-17

The imperatives in this section are generically given to all Christians. *Submit* appears in each of the sections of the text (2:13, 18; 3:1, 7—implied). The word is a military word which means to "line up behind" or "yield." Obviously there are times when Christians cannot submit to *human authority* (creation) as Acts 4:19, 20 demonstrates. But most of the time the better witness—even if it leads to suffering—is to submit. This would include the *emperor* (king), *governors* (leaders), and lesser officials who punish wrong and commend right.

Verse 15 states the reason that believers are to submit, namely that by doing the good work of submission it will shut up the foolish people. Verses 16 and 17 drill down further into what submission looks like in several other contexts. Live free by being God's slaves. Show honor to everyone. Love the brotherhood (fellow Christians), fear God, and honor the emperor (mentioned a second time).

Submission in the Workplace

1 Peter 2:18-25

The workplace is not exactly an accurate label. Since slaves were part of the household in the ancient world, the "house rules" section starts in verse 2:18—not 3:1. But for applicational purposes we will separate it out. *Slaves* (dare we say employees?) are to submit to their masters. If they are good and *considerate* (gentle) that is great. But submission is most noticed when it is done to those who are *harsh*. Peter then applied this principle in verses 19 and 20. If slaves who are Christians suffer unjustly under a harsh master, it provides the best witness and is *commendable* (gracious) before God.

Jesus became the greatest *example* (writing pattern) of this unjust suffering. [Side bar: slavery of other human beings is deplorable, but notice whom the Son of God identifies with in this text.] Jesus blazed this trail, and we are to follow in his steps (see Charles Sheldon's *In His Steps*). Peter camped out on this idea of Christ's submission. He quoted from Isaiah 53:9 which declared Jesus' innocence. Jesus just kept giving himself up to God so that he could endure his flogging without retaliation. While yielding to human authorities he redeemed the universe by bearing the world's sins in his body. This was all done so that people could live for righteousness. The great Shepherd of the sheep and the Overseer of the universe submitted to human authorities. Therefore, Christian slaves (and believers would later help this institution of slavery to die) can submit in the workplace.

Submission in the Marriage

1 Peter 3:1-7

Mutual submission is a thing among believers (Ephesians 5:21), and marriages do not work well without it. It may not be expressed in identical ways between husbands and wives, but its presence makes the home richer, deeper, fuller, and sweeter. We could assume—from the space devoted to them—that many of these Christian exiles to whom Peter wrote were slaves or wives whose husbands were not believers.

As was the case in the earlier part of the text, lifestyle is what catches the eye. Behavior, purity, reverence, and a gentle and quiet spirit gain the attention of the unbelieving husbands. Believing wives who put more emphasis on the inner self than the outer decoration, and who look to Sarah as a godly example, are more likely to convert their husbands. Likewise, husbands who learn to be *considerate* (live according to knowledge) with their wives, all the while recognizing their emotional and physical vulnerabilities, will share this life as an heir in Christ while experiencing a dynamic prayer life. Love may make the world go 'round, but submission makes for a more respectful world.

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WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?

BY DAVID FAUST

Who are you, really? It's an important question. Your self-image is a lump of clay molded by many factors.

When you're a child, your parents shape how you view yourself. In school, other students brand you popular or unpopular, cool or uncool, a nerd or a jock. In the workplace, it's tempting to measure your worth by the slot you occupy on an organizational chart, whether you wear a blue collar or a white collar, and whether you're the leader who makes the plans or the follower who executes them.

Politicians analyze your voting preferences and try to define you by placing a D or an R next to your name. News commentators toss around labels like independent, liberal, conservative, and progressive. The fog grows thicker with the increase of identity politics, categorizing people according to age, generation, gender, social class, and sexual preferences. Marketers see you as a consumer. Government bureaucrats consider you a source of tax revenue. Advertisers use computer analytics to understand and exploit your spending habits.

Atheism reduces your existence to insignificance, stripping away any ultimate purpose from your life. If you're little more than the product of mindless evolution —if you're here merely because of the impersonal plus time plus chance—you're kidding yourself to believe your life has any special significance at all. Without God, what is the ultimate reference point for human dignity, human worth, and human rights? The question, "Who do you think you are?" leads to depressing conclusions if there is no God.

God's View of You

Fortunately, the Bible tells us who we really are.

Read Genesis. You are made in the image of God. Read the Psalms. God wove you together in your mother's womb. Even more, read the Gospels and see how Jesus defines your worth. The heavenly Father counts the number of hairs on your head. You're a one-of-a-kind individual gifted with unique fingerprints, personality traits, opportunities, and relationships with others. Yes, like the rest of us, you're a prodigal child who has sinned and strayed away, but the Father hasn't given up on you. To restore you to his family, the eternal God entered time and space in the person of his Son. He endured the same temptations, hurts, labels, and sorrows you and I face, but after suffering the ultimate indignity on the cross, he emerged victorious. Christ values you enough to die for you.

Read Peter's first epistle and you'll discover your true identity. God wants you on his team. Christian, you are a living stone in God's holy temple. You're a light-bearer, not a darkness dweller. You're a member of the King's royal family, a citizen of a special-purpose nation, a minister with a high calling, a priest privileged to serve God and his people. The creator of the universe treasures you. "Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God" (1 Peter 2:10).

Who are you, really? Don't let your pushy peers, your harshest critics, your flattering admirers, or the loudest cultural voices answer that question for you. Don't listen to the darker contemplations and judgments of your own heart. Let God's Word define your identity. "See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!" (1 John 3:1).

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QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

Use one or both of these questions to introduce the lesson.

- What different types of authority figures do we live under today (think familial, educational, spiritual, financial, political, work, and other areas of our lives)? Why or how do they have dominion over us?
- How do you respond to the various "superiors" in your life?

Read 1 Peter 2:11-17

1. On a piece of paper, draw three columns and make a list of people who have jurisdiction over various parts of your life, using *Name/Position* as the first two headings. Continue to add to the list throughout today's study. For example, write *God/King Over My Entire Life*, and *Employer's Name/Boss*. (We'll come back to column three later.)

2. How can we live godly lives in an ungodly world? How do we demonstrate to the people around us our Christian character, pointing the way to God through our good deeds and blameless lives? List and discuss practical, actionable ways Peter suggests and select a verse you think sums up this passage.

Read 1 Peter 2:18-25

3. Have you ever suffered unjustly at the hands of someone in charge? Consider a specific event and, without dishonoring the person, discuss only your response to the mistreatment. Does it follow Jesus' example in verse 23? Explain.

4. Talk about how verses 20-23 provide confidence, comfort, and healing to those who have been hurt in this way. (We'll learn more in next week's study.)

Read 1 Peter 3:1-7

5. This passage is about wives and husbands, yet it is a great example of ways women can win anyone to Christ. Examine characteristics that are of great worth to God, noting the word *submission* means to voluntarily yield to or relinquish control.

6. How can a man's prayers be hindered? Concentrate on verse 7, listing and discussing the two command phrases you find there.

7. Read Romans 13:1-7. Zero in on verse 7 and read it aloud. In all the relationships discussed throughout these study questions, what debts do you "owe" the people on your list from question 1? Write *What I Owe* at the top of column three in your list and indicate how you will serve and honor those people in the coming week.

Conclude your group time with prayer, using the following as a guide. Lord, thank you for helping us understand our role in living blameless lives as we submit to those in authority over us and work to do what is good for them. Jesus, thank you for your submission at the cross that shows us what it means to serve one another and fully submit to authority. Holy Spirit, reveal the debts we owe others and help us fulfill the command to love one another. Amen.

WEEK FOUR

LESSON AIM: **Do what is right as a Christian even if it leads to suffering.**

STUDY: 1 Peter

THEME: Really Living

LESSON TEXT: 1 Peter 3:8-17; 4:12-16

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: 1 Peter 4:1-11, 17-19

LIVING THROUGH SUFFERING

BY MARK SCOTT

Be honest—much of what we call suffering in the western world is inconvenience. But there is such a thing as genuine suffering. Believers who go through it, because of the gospel, learn to leverage it for the world's good and for God's glory. Ultimately the devil is to blame for suffering (Job 1:11). Sometimes we cause our own suffering (Genesis 3:16-19). And sometimes other people cause our suffering (Joshua 7:10-26). When God brings suffering, he internalizes it on himself (Isaiah 53:10).

Our text begins where we left off in the last lesson. We move from the subject of submission to the subject of suffering. Suffering seems to be the backdrop of this general epistle. Because people love darkness rather than the light (John 3:19), doing right can bring about suffering to the people who are doing right. Sometimes it comes because of what Christians do, and sometimes it comes because of who Christians are.

Suffering Because of What We Do

1 Peter 3:8-17

Christians *do good*. This phrase appears twice in this passage (11, 13, but "what is right" and "good behavior" are similar phrases and they appear in 14 and 16). People who do good can get thrown in jail (Acts 4:3) or even put on a cross (Acts 10:38-40). Peter called the Christian exiles to do good even if they were the recipients of evil because this would ensure that they would inherit the *blessing* of God (a concept that appears in this passage three times).

There are at least five virtues (framed up as verbs) that contribute to returning good for evil to experience the blessing of God. They are *like-mindedness*, *sympathy*, *love*, *compassion*, and *humility*. When these are embraced, doing good becomes the default setting. To underscore this truth Peter drew upon a lengthy citation from Psalm 34:12-16. The value of this Old Testament text for Peter's argument is that it deals with King David living in the midst of Abimelech (a believer living in the midst of an unbeliever). When Christians live in non-Christian environments it is important for them to *love life* and *keep their tongue from evil* and *seek peace and pursue it*. After all, God will hear their prayers while turning his face against the evil ones.

One thing for sure that followers of Jesus do not want to do is suffer for the wrong thing. When they suffer for right things then they do not need to be frightened. The best posture is that famous Scripture 1 Peter 3:15. Often used as a verse to justify the study of apologetics (and it fits in application) it probably more accurately is an apologetic for Christian living without a spirit of retaliation—and for the hope that is in believers. This is done by reverence to Christ and gentleness and respect for others. The best way to handle slander is to give adversaries a *clear* (good) *conscience* and *good behavior*. Verse 17 provides the thesis of the entire lesson: suffer for doing good.

Suffering Because of Who We Are

1 Peter 4:12-16

The word *Christian* appears only three times in the New Testament (Acts 11:26; 26:28; and here). It describes one who is a Christ follower. We do not just act Christianly; we are Christians. It describes "who" we are. So if suffering comes to Christians, and it will (2 Timothy 3:12), make sure that God is glorified through that name.

Peter again addressed them as *dear friends* (beloved). The term is one of endearment. But he called for them not to be surprised at suffering (described as the *fiery ordeal*). As ugly as suffering is, it can be leveraged as a way to test (and thereby mature) believers. The idea of suffering not seeming like something strange reminds one of what Jesus promised (John 15:18, 19). In fact, when we are "*participating*" (having fellowship) in the sufferings of Christ there is a solidarity that exists between the teacher and his disciples. The joy of this solidarity will only be surpassed when his glory is revealed (when Jesus returns).

Then Peter returned to a theme developed earlier in chapter three (the blessing). Two words for blessing are used in this lesson. One word means "to speak well of" (3:9—twice), and the other word means "congratulations" (3:14; 4:14). When we take our licks for Jesus, Heaven congratulates us since that gives evidence of God's Spirit resting on us. Peter reminded us that if we are to suffer at all, it should not be for the four-fold of evil (murderer, thief, criminal, or meddler). Rather it should be as a Christian—a name under which God can be praised.

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MINISTERING IN THE NIGHT

BY DAVID FAUST

Are you a morning person or a night owl? Are you more productive during the daylight hours, or after the sun goes down? A college roommate of mine liked to get up early to study, while I preferred staying up into the wee hours of the night. Sometimes I went to bed about the same time my roommate got up!

Certain jobs require working at night. Schoolteachers grade papers late into the evening. Counselors, ministers, and public safety workers respond to calls in the middle of the night when there's been an accident or a death. Moms and dads sit up through the night rocking a sick child.

Working the Night Shift

What was it like for the Old Testament priests who served in the temple long after the noisy crowds went home, the rabbis' voices fell silent, the singing faded into quietness, and the merchants and moneychangers stopped hawking their wares? A few temple servants worked the night shift, kept the fire going on the altar, cleaned up the ashes from the previous day's sacrifice, and made sure things were ready for tomorrow. Someone had to serve through the night. The psalmist wrote, "Praise the Lord, all you servants of the Lord, who minister by night in the house of the Lord" (Psalm 134:1).

In a spiritual sense, there are times when you and I must "minister by night" and serve God when darkness closes in. The same letter that says God has "called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" says Christians should expect to face dark nights of the soul when suffering proves unavoidable (1 Peter 2:9; 4:12-19).

Perhaps you will experience *the night of loneliness*. Elijah crawled into a cave and spent the night there, feeling like he was the only faithful servant of God left. Daniel spent the night in a lions' den because he refused to pray to anyone but God. In the darkness of night, Jesus prayed with his face to the ground in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Perhaps you will go through *the darkness of disappointment*. Moses spent 40 years leading the Israelites to the promised land, then upon their arrival, he himself wasn't allowed to enter it.

Will you keep serving the Lord during *the dark night of doubt* when your burdens seem unbearable, your problems appear unsolvable, and your critics' voices grow loud? David loved God, but at one point he confessed, "I sink in the miry depths, where there is no foothold. . . . I am worn out calling for help; my throat is parched. My eyes fail, looking for my God" (Psalm 69:2, 3).

Night Lights

Here are three ways to brighten things up.

1. Listen for God's voice. Even when it's hard to see what God is doing, we can hear what he's saying in his Word.

2. Help others. Our job is to "minister by night," not just curse the darkness. Despite their bruises and chains, Paul and Silas prayed, sang, and preached during a long night in prison, and before the night was over, they baptized the jailer and his family into Christ. Your own days will be brighter if you bring encouragement and light to a friend's dark moments.

3. Remember, the darkness won't last forever. "Weeping may stay for the night, but rejoicing comes in the morning" (Psalm 30:5).

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QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

Use one or both of these questions to introduce the lesson.

- When have you or someone you know been out of favor with others because of choosing the harder, ethical right over the easier, sinful wrong?
- Have you or someone you know experienced suffering, or been passed over or left out simply because of faith in Jesus?

Read 1 Peter 3:8-17

1. Discuss ways you or someone you know responded to evil or insult from another Christian in the past. Did a blessing come from the situation, or only collateral damage? In light of the Scripture passage, why do you suppose the result ended one way or the other?

2. Based on verses 9-12, talk about various practical ways to respond to difficult challenges and strive toward peace with other believers. (Most of these come from King David in Psalm 34!)

3. Others notice when conflict happens, especially when it's within a church community, and want to know more about it. Based on verses 15, 16, come up with a solid, godly template for replying to others in these often complex and difficult times.

4. When we've been wounded, we're often tempted to respond in a worldly way if we don't know the tenets of Christian conflict resolution. Read 1 Peter 4:1-11, concentrating on 7-11. Delve deeply into how individual actions through prayer, love, and serving one another can bring about praise for Christ even in the midst of strife among believers.

Read 1 Peter 4:12-16

5. What place of suffering are you or someone you know in right now? Examine the passage to explain why we should not be surprised by trials and hardships.

6. Based on verses 13, 14, explain why Christians should rejoice in persecution for our faith.

7. Peter understood suffering and persecution. Read 1 Peter 4:17-19 and imagine the apostle writing, knowing his acknowledgement of Christ as Messiah started his leadership path and ultimately resulted in his martyrdom. Discuss how verse 19 holds the key to staying the course of right behavior in times of suffering and resolve to use it as your pattern for suffering in the future.

Conclude your group time with prayer, using the following as a guide. Father, thank you for this good teaching that helps Christians do what is right even in the face of suffering and trials. Jesus, thank you for being our ultimate role model by making peace for us through the cross. Holy Spirit, enable us to be self-controlled and alert, always in prayer, and standing firm in faith in the face of suffering. Amen.

For Next Week: This week's lesson brings this unit of study to a conclusion. Look for additional "1717: Your Word Is Truth" studies, for use with your Sunday School classes, small groups, or personal studies, at ChristianStandard.com.