



2022 Bible Study Series

Living in Challenging Times

1 Peter: A letter of hope and encouragement

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Study 1 — 1 Peter 1

Peter stood confidently amongst the disciples as Jesus asked them some very direct questions. Jesus had just asked them who other people thought He was.

Matthew 16:14-27

¹⁴ *They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets."*

¹⁵ *"But what about you?" He asked. "Who do you say I am?"*

¹⁶ *Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."*

If Peter had been doing an exam at Moore College he probably would have been given a high distinction for that answer. Jesus praised him but also told Peter how he knew this.

¹⁷ *Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven."*

I wonder what thoughts were going through Peter's mind. "Wow! I am the one that got that right!" "I knew the answer before all of the others". "I'm a terrific disciple!". We don't know but we do know what happened perhaps just minutes later.

²¹ *From that time on Jesus began to explain to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that He must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.*

²² *Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him. "Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!"*

²³ *Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns."*

²⁴ Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ²⁵ For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. ²⁶ What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? ²⁷ For the Son of Man is going to come in His Father's glory with His angels, and then He will reward each person according to what they have done.

This is very sobering, isn't it? After one statement Jesus affirmed that the Father had revealed this truth to Peter. But after another statement Jesus told Peter that he was being used by satan to tempt Jesus. Then Jesus talked about the fact that if people want to be His disciples they must be prepared for a life that will feel like they are taking up a cross, that their beliefs must be lived out in their lives and that their relationship with God (the soul) is worth everything in the world.

This passage is very challenging. It is easy to think that we know some facts about Jesus and that is all we need to know. This passage tells us that we must constantly follow Jesus in understanding His word and applying that to our lives by His power. It warns us that satan can be on the lookout to use us for his purposes and we need to keep focused on Jesus.

Many years later, as a mature Christian, Peter was writing to a group of Christians that he described in 1 Peter 1.

1 Peter 1:1-2

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ,

To God's elect, exiles scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, ² who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with His blood:

Grace and peace be yours in abundance.

Peter was writing to Christians who were living near the area of modern day Turkey. Whatever their background (perhaps some from Jewish backgrounds, perhaps some Gentiles who had been 'God fearers', perhaps some pagans), Peter wanted to ground them in who they were once they had turned to Jesus and become Christians. Notice the security they had was not based on where they lived or their life's circumstances. It is highly likely that their life circumstances were difficult even before they became Christians. Their security was based on the fact that they:

- Belonged to God and had been chosen by God — God drew them to Himself.
- The Holy Spirit had sanctified them — made them holy

- They had a life purpose to be true disciples of Jesus which means they were seeking to live with Jesus as their Lord and their saviour. He directed their lives and they belonged to God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) because of Jesus' death for them and the ongoing benefits of that.

These people may have come from difficult backgrounds but they were then secure as the people of God.

REFLECTION

- ▶ Is this the basis of your identity? What do you struggle with?
- ▶ All those years before Peter wrote his letter, he had to realise that Jesus' death and resurrection were absolutely central to following Jesus. Whatever life is like for you at the moment, do you know that you belong to God and that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit have worked in you, are working in you and will continue to work in you?
- ▶ Do you realise that you have a life purpose which is all about following Jesus? What does this mean for you?
- ▶ If someone was observing your life how would they see this clearly in you?

Peter, the mature disciple, now understood the full extent of what God had done and was going to do. This was to be the basis of a secure life even in troubled times.

1 Peter 1:3-9

³ Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In His great mercy He has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. ⁶ In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. ⁷ These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed. ⁸ Though

*you have not seen Him, you love Him; and even though you do not see Him now, you believe in Him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy,
9 for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.*

What honestly goes through your mind when you read this passage? Here are some possibilities. With which ones do you identify?

- This is a wonderful truth and it warms my soul!
- What on earth is Peter talking about?
- I don't feel '*filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy*'!
- How come there is so much suffering when we are supposed to be '*shielded by God's power*'?
- Do I really need to prove '*that my faith is genuine to God*'?

One of the great lessons that we learn from Peter is that he had an incredibly honest relationship with Jesus. It would be wonderful to go through the Gospels and find all the passages that speak about Peter and get a feel for what he was like. He has much to teach us — especially through his failures. Before Peter wrote these words to these early Christians, he would have had to grapple with these things himself. He wrote 1 Peter after coming to an understanding of the realities of the Christian life.

REFLECTION

- ▶ What do you notice is the reality of belonging to God's Kingdom now? V3-6. Notice that all these things have been given to us! They are true for us now if we have put our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.
- ▶ What do you notice about living in a broken world even though we are God's people? V6-9.
- ▶ How do we handle those difficult feelings that we might have about this passage?

Often our feelings act as signposts for us to examine what is going on in our lives. They shouldn't be ignored, nor should they rule our lives. Whatever we feel does not stop the truth of what God has done, is doing and will do. That's reassuring.

We can also be encouraged that even in those times when we are struggling and suffering, God is not 'down' on us but rather is using these situations to build our faith into a strong faith. The reality is that the best is yet to come for us as Christians! We are 'saved now' and have the gift of forgiveness, a relationship with God, the Holy Spirit, but the Day is coming when our salvation will be experienced in all its fullness. Peter wants God's people to be grounded in the historical truth of the Gospel.

1 Peter 1:10-12

¹⁰ Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, ¹¹ trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when He predicted the sufferings of the Messiah and the glories that would follow. ¹² It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things.

The Old Testament prophets didn't have all the information about salvation. God gradually revealed more and more throughout history. These prophets realised that this was something that God was going to do beyond their time. Peter reminded them that the fulfilment had now come. Jesus Christ was the Messiah! The Holy Spirit had revealed this truth to them and now he has revealed it to us!

REFLECTION

- ▶ How do you think Peter's readers would have reacted when they heard this section of his letter?

- ▶ How is it an encouragement for us?

When the Bible gives us encouraging, historical assurances of what God has done it is challenging us to apply this information to our lives. You can usually pick this up by the word 'therefore' So how does Peter challenge his readers and us to apply what he has just reminded them about?

1 Peter 1:13-25

¹³ Therefore, with minds that are alert and fully sober, set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at His coming. ¹⁴ As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. ¹⁵ But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; ¹⁶ for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."

¹⁷ Since you call on a Father who judges each person's work impartially, live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear. ¹⁸ For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, ¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. ²⁰ He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. ²¹ Through Him you believe in God, who raised Him from the dead and glorified Him, and so your faith and hope are in God.

²² Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart. ²³ For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. ²⁴ For,

"All people are like grass,
and all their glory is like the flowers of the field;
the grass withers and the flowers fall,
²⁵ but the word of the Lord endures forever."

And this is the word that was preached to you.

Let's explore what that might look like for us. Remember when we are challenged to live differently it is not so that we can be saved. Instead it is showing us how to live as a result of being saved already through Jesus' death and resurrection. It shows us how we are to live now as God's redeemed people. Let's look at each of the verses in this section. Notice what the verse says about what has changed in us when we became Christians and what we are to continue to do.

¹³ Therefore,
with minds that are alert and fully sober,
set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed
at His coming.

This is a very determined action. The focus that should impact our daily life is to be Jesus' return. We are to have a loose grip on this life and a firm focus on the world to come.

REFLECTION

- ▶ Is the future reality of Jesus' return and the full experience of our salvation something that you focus on? How can you do that more?

¹⁴ *As obedient children,
do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance.*
¹⁵ *But just as He who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; ¹⁶ for it is written:
"Be holy, because I am holy."*

REFLECTION

We are to realise that we are now God's children! We have been brought into God's family!

- ▶ How is the family likeness showing in our lives?
- ▶ Can we see growth in our behaviour and attitudes over the past year? Notice we will still be tempted to behave as unbelievers, but we can choose not to go down that path. It may be a huge struggle, but we are helped by focusing on what God is like and asking His Holy Spirit to make us like Him.
- ▶ What is a change in your life that would bring great delight to God?

¹⁷ *Since you call on a Father who judges each person's work impartially,
live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear.*

¹⁸ *For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, ¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. ²⁰ He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. ²¹ Through Him you believe in God, who raised Him from the dead and glorified Him, and so your faith and hope are in God.*

There is to be a healthy fear and respect for God that should be very real in our lives. Becoming a Christian means that we have truly come to see that we cannot stand before a holy God. We have nothing to offer Him that can make up for our failure to put Him first in our lives. When we have accepted His forgiveness and by the power of the Holy Spirit become a child of His, we need to realise that we must take seriously the fact that He is not only our loving God but also our Lord. This world is not the ultimate reality. When we die or Jesus returns, we will give an account of our lives.

Peter understood how much he had failed Jesus. He knew what it was like to be a fragile follower of Jesus. He knew that his motives could be right, but he could still get things horribly wrong. He had to cling to Jesus' death for him. That's why it is so ironic that Peter originally tried to stop Jesus going to the cross. But now Peter reminded his readers that Jesus' death and resurrection is everything. This is God's plan to enable us to be saved and to face the future judgement.

REFLECTION

- ▶ What is it like for you to know that Jesus has taken your sin and fully dealt with it?

- ▶ What does it mean for you to live out your life here in this temporary world with reverent fear?

²² Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart. ²³ For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. ²⁴ For,

*"All people are like grass,
and all their glory is like the flowers of the field;
the grass withers and the flowers fall,
²⁵ but the word of the Lord endures forever." And this is the word that was
preached to you.*

To respond to the Gospel message and become a Christian immediately puts us into relationship with one another. We are to love one another deeply from the core of our being! This is God's enduring word to us. This is what we will be doing for eternity. This world will pass away, our lives here on earth will quickly pass away, but God's hope and certainty for the future will come to pass. Learning how to love one another is to be a priority in our life now.

It is again interesting to reflect on Peter's life. He had really seen himself as better than the other disciples. Remember he said that even if they all denied Jesus he wouldn't. How wrong he had been. It would have been a very humbling experience for him. As he wrote to these Christians, he emphasised the importance of love.

REFLECTION

- ▶ How do we need to grow in our love for others?

- ▶ Do we need to be humbled in our attitude to others?

- ▶ What are two things that you are taking away from this study that with God's help you are going to work on in your life?



Study 2 — 1 Peter 2

Peter finished chapter one by reminding his readers that God's word endures forever, and this word had been preached to them. They were saved because they had believed the Gospel message which was all about Jesus. They were then to live a life of gratitude to God and love to one another.

Peter knew only too well that God's Spirit needed to do a deep work in every person that turned to Christ. I wonder whether Peter had Jesus' words ringing in his ears from Matthew 15. The teachers of the law were criticizing Jesus because He didn't insist that his disciples keep the traditions of the law like washing their hands before they ate. Jesus replied in Matthew 15:10 *"Jesus called the crowd to him and said 'Listen and understand. What goes into someone's mouth does not defile them, but what comes out of their mouth, that is what defiles them.'*

In v15 of Matthew 15, Peter asked Jesus to explain the parable. Jesus responded ¹⁶ *"Are you still so dull?" Jesus asked them.* ¹⁷ *"Don't you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body?"* ¹⁸ *But the things that come out of a person's mouth come from the heart, and these defile them.* ¹⁹ *For out of the heart come evil thoughts—murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander.* ²⁰ *These are what defile a person; but eating with unwashed hands does not defile them."*

With this in mind, let's turn to Peter's words at the beginning of chapter 2.

1 Peter 2:1-3

¹ *Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind.* ² *Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation,* ³ *now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.*

The list of issues Peter named in v1 impact how we love others, but they all originate from within a person. These sinful behaviours must be dealt with because they destroy us and others. Many a church or Christian group has been destroyed by people who did not deal with these things in their lives.

This is also a beautiful motherly image. How are we to get rid of these things? We are to drink in the spiritual nourishment that the Lord provides, just like a newborn baby craves its mother's milk. We tasted the Lord's goodness when we became Christians.

What goodness was that? Jesus gave His life so that we would not be condemned. He took our place. He has given us forgiveness and new life and a relationship with the living God. As we learn more about Him and want to be like Him, we will discover that He remains good and kind. That means we can come to Him honestly when we are trying to deal with the things that are wrong in our lives. They are serious things but we will discover a God who is delighted that we want to change and will help us do that.

It's helpful to think about Peter's experience as we reflect on dealing with wrong in our lives. Remember how he boasted that he would never deny Jesus even if all the other disciples did? (Mark 14:27-31). Jesus told Peter that he would deny Him three times and that is exactly what happened.

Peter was devastated at his failure (Mark 14:66-72). What is fascinating is that one of Jesus' resurrection appearances was to the disciples on the beach and Jesus dealt with Peter's failure in front of the other disciples. You can read about it in John 21. It is the story that John used at the end of his gospel.

Jesus asked Peter three times 'Do you love me?' That must have been very painful for Peter. He had denied Jesus three times. Jesus was forcing Peter to look at his failure. We meet a very humble Peter now. In response to Jesus' questions 'Peter do you love me?' he simply said, 'You know that I do Lord.' Then Jesus publicly commissioned Peter for ministry. 'Feed my sheep. Feed my Lambs'. By doing this Jesus was demonstrating to all the disciples that Peter's failure was forgiven and was not final. Jesus was commissioning Peter again to be a leader and pastor of God's people. Peter had to confront what was wrong in his life in order to be able to grow and become more like Jesus. It is possible that Peter had this scene in his mind when he wrote the words we have just read in 1 Peter.

REFLECTION

- ▶ How does Peter's story and restoration help you look at issues in your life — particularly *"malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind."*?
- ▶ How might Jesus confront us and comfort us about the seriousness of our failures but also about the forgiveness and cleansing of His Holy Spirit?

- ▶ Are you someone who has brushed aside your sin and need to realise the impact of it on others?
- ▶ Are you someone who believes that Jesus could never forgive you, so you are staying with an identity of a 'terrible sinner' rather than a redeemed person in God's family?
- ▶ What might the Lord be challenging you about at the moment? How will you respond?

Peter had come to realise that the central work that Jesus had come to do was to die and rise again. This had been a big shock for him. But now he understood that God was doing something else that was amazing. Here is how he described it.

1 Peter 2:4-10

⁴ As you come to Him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to Him— ⁵ you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. ⁶ For in Scripture it says:

*"See, I lay a stone in Zion,
a chosen and precious cornerstone,
and the one who trusts in Him
will never be put to shame."*

⁷ Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe,

*"The stone the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone,"*

⁸ and,

*"A stone that causes people to stumble
and a rock that makes them fall."*

They stumble because they disobey the message—which is also what they were destined for.

⁹ But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness

into His wonderful light.¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

The beginning of this section is a quote from Isaiah 28:16. Israel as a nation had failed to be who God wanted them to be. Now God was doing something new and Jesus was the foundation of that. He is the living stone — the cornerstone — like the stone that goes first into a building so that the building is built around it.

It is interesting that Peter chose this quote about stones (do you remember that Peter's name means 'rock?') but God's new work is not based on Peter but on Jesus. Jesus is the true Rock and this spiritual building is the Church. It is not a building of stones but a building of people — living people who are following the Living Christ.

REFLECTION

- ▶ From verses 4-8 what do you learn about Jesus and who He is and what He does?
- ▶ What happens when people believe in Jesus? What happens when people reject Jesus?

The conclusion of this section in v9&10 is life-changing for us when we understand it and live it out.

Peter used the language that was used of Israel in the Old Testament (Exodus 19:6; Deuteronomy 7:6, Deuteronomy 10:15). We, of course, need to remember that God's plan of salvation was for all the world, but that Israel was to be key in that plan (Genesis 12:1-3). Of course, they failed to be the people God called them to be. Now we see this language is used of Christians. The Church is to fulfill this calling. This is not primarily about individuals although it is true of each Christian, but this is the mission of the Church. This is the identity of the Church. This is where you belong. You are a part of this mission.

REFLECTION

- ▶ The challenging question is — will we be different from the Old Israel? Unlike them, will we respond to what God is doing in and through His Church?

From 1 Peter 2:9&10

- ▶ What is your identity now? How is that a new identity?

- ▶ What is the job description for your life? How are you going with that?

- ▶ From this whole section that we have just looked at in 1 Peter 2:4-10, what do you need to apply in your life? How does this passage inform you about what God's priorities are?

One of the things that we need to realise as Christians is that the world (including some of our friends and relatives) are not excited that we are Christians. They are not interested in the mission of the Church. We live in the same world as them, but we also live in a different world.

We, as God's people, may long for these people to join us in God's Kingdom yet we also need to be aware that the world that they are so at home in tugs at us as well. Peter wanted to address both of these issues. Remember, he was passionate about following Jesus but he quickly lost his commitment when he was tempted and challenged by a servant girl at Jesus' trial. Listen to his advice in the next section.

1 Peter 2:11-12

¹¹ Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul. ¹² Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day He visits us.

REFLECTION

- ▶ Do you identify with Peter's statement about being foreigners and exiles? How does it impact you?

- ▶ What do you think wages war against your soul? Do you remember the story of the frog in the kettle? The water just got slowly hotter and hotter and the frog didn't realise he was being cooked. How might this apply as we try to live for God in a world that is against him?

- What advice does Peter give us as we live amongst people who reject the living God (pagans)?

Have you noticed how much advertising tells us that we should look after 'No. 1' first in life? For example the media tells us that we deserve that new house or we should put our feet up and enjoy some luxury. Perhaps we listen to people's reactions to government decisions and we see that so many people are only interested in how something will affect them. We have seen this clearly during this pandemic as the demand for 'our rights' has been loud and clear.

As Peter leads us into this next section I wonder if he was remembering that night before Jesus was arrested, the night that Peter was horrified as Jesus started to wash his feet (John 13). I wonder if he was thinking about the arrest of Jesus when Peter so bravely took out his sword and defended Jesus. Jesus told him, to put it away, healed the slave's cut off ear and submitted to being arrested. (Luke 22:47-53)

Yet through all of this, Jesus was actually in complete control. This was the plan to save human beings, a plan that involved Jesus submitting even to death. Christianity is a revolution that turns people and nations upside down but it is a revolution of the heart and not one of force or inappropriate use of power. Sometimes living like Jesus did will lead to suffering. That suffering should be because we are living for Jesus not because we are doing something wrong. Let's read this next section through Peter's eyes.

1 Peter 2:13-17

¹³ Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human authority: whether to the emperor, as the supreme authority, ¹⁴ or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. ¹⁵ For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people. ¹⁶ Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as God's slaves. ¹⁷ Show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, honour the emperor.

Although Peter had made some very encouraging statements about who Christians are, he wanted them to choose for 'the Lord's sake' to submit to human authority. This takes the focus away from what are my rights and freedoms and it being 'all about me'. Rather the Christian mindset is how can we please the Lord? How can we be a good witness in the world that is opposed to God? Our focus is to be on what sort of people God wants us to be. Notice v15. '*For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people.*' We are to demonstrate by our willingness to live by honouring authority, that Christianity is not a threat to society in one sense but wants the good order of society. Always our free choices are to be what brings honour to God not in using our freedom to satisfy our own evil desires. That is living the world's way.

How this is worked out may be different in each society, but it has some boundaries. For example, if the government said, '*All Christians are to pay more tax*' then some Christians may say that for the sake of honouring God they will obey that unfair law, but if the government said, '*You are to stop worshipping God and you must never read your Bibles again*' then hopefully all Christians would say, 'No, we cannot do that' and accept the consequences.

As a general principle, Peter saw that governments are there to keep good order. Peter didn't want people to think that Christians are trying to antagonize the surrounding society. He wanted to make Jesus the issue. Peter, himself, in Acts 4, when he and John were brought before the Sanhedrin (a ruling Jewish group) because they healed a lame man, was very strong in saying they would not obey one of their commands. The Sanhedrin had commanded them not to teach at all in the name of Jesus. Peter and John replied '*Which is right in God's eyes: to listen to you, or to Him? You be the judges! As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.*' (Acts 4:18-19) Peter is wanting Christians to think carefully about their relationships. Commitment to God shapes everything else but also leads to respectful and loving relationships.

REFLECTION

For us today in Australia, we have ways that we can express our views and even complain about unfair things.

- ▶ Do we do that in a God-honouring way and for the good of others?
- ▶ Let's also be aware of millions of our brothers and sisters around the world who are faced with life threatening choices each day because they follow Jesus. You might like to pause now and pray for them.

Peter moved on to encourage Christians who were slaves, Christian wives (particularly those married to non-Christian husbands) and he also had a word to Christian husbands. How were these people to honour Jesus in the environment in which they lived?

Let's finish this study by looking at slaves. Here Peter was addressing Christian slaves who had non-Christian masters.

1 Peter 2:18-25

¹⁸ Slaves, in reverent fear of God submit yourselves to your masters, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh. ¹⁹ For it is commendable if someone bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because they are conscious of God. ²⁰ But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is

commendable before God. ²¹ *To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in His steps.*

²² *"He committed no sin,
and no deceit was found in His mouth."*

²³ *When they hurled their insults at Him, He did not retaliate; when He suffered, He made no threats. Instead, He entrusted Himself to Him who judges justly.* ²⁴ *"He Himself bore our sins" in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; "by His wounds you have been healed."* ²⁵ *For "you were like sheep going astray," but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.*

We need to be very careful with this passage. It is tragic that many Christians used to defend slavery based on passages like this. They believed that because Peter and Paul did not speak directly against slavery then it must be right. Instead, we should see this passage as an historical record showing that slavery was a reality for these Christians. They were powerless to change this at that time. Peter was encouraging them to see that situation that they could not change, as an opportunity to be effective witnesses to their faith in Jesus. It honoured Jesus when those people took mistreatment like Jesus did. Peter also warned them that to suffer if they were doing the wrong thing brought dishonour to Jesus.

REFLECTION

- ▶ How might Peter's words about Jesus' suffering have encouraged a Christian slave who was being mistreated by their master?
- ▶ What has challenged you in these passages about your attitude to those in authority?
- ▶ What are you still grappling with in terms of applying this passage?
- ▶ As we look at the whole of Scripture, we cannot justify slavery. There are still many people who are enslaved today in one way or another. Many of them are Christians. They may well take heed of Peter's encouragement to live honourably for Jesus even when mistreated. However, we who are not slaves must not use this passage to turn a blind eye to what is going on in the world. How can you be involved in the true abolition of slavery?
- ▶ From the whole of our study today what have you been motivated to pray about and to act on in your own life?



Study 3 — 1 Peter 3:1-4:6

The Christians to whom Peter was writing were seeking to live for Jesus in very difficult circumstances. They lived in a society that rejected Jesus. Some of them were in powerless situations yet they were called to follow Jesus' example of humility and suffering. Slaves were certainly powerless, on the whole, yet we have seen that Peter called them to be people of integrity as they served Jesus through their attitude to their masters.

Women were also, on the whole, relatively powerless in their culture. They were usually seen as the property of their husbands. They would follow the religion of their husband and really had no rights. We can see then that women who had become Christians were in a particularly difficult situation. They had already moved away from their husband's religion to turn to Christ. They had two particular issues to deal with. The first was to live with the consequences of having become a Christian and the second was to have wisdom to help their husbands turn to Christ as well. What did Peter say to these women? Remember he was addressing Christian women married to non-Christian husbands.

1 Peter 3:1-6

Wives, in the same way submit yourselves to your own husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behaviour of their wives, ² when they see the purity and reverence of your lives. ³ Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as elaborate hairstyles and the wearing of gold jewellery or fine clothes. ⁴ Rather, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight. ⁵ For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to adorn themselves. They submitted themselves to their own husbands, ⁶ like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her lord. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear.

This is a controversial passage and you may have different understandings of how to apply it. But let's look at some broad principles here. Peter's focus was addressing the issue of how they might 'win over their husbands to Christ.' His answer was to do with their inner life. It was not about trying to be beautiful on the outside. It was about being changed on the inside. Look at what Peter pointed to.

- v1 was their behaviour,
- v2 was the purity and reverence of their lives
- v4 was their inner, gentle and quiet spirit.

This is actually an expression of the fruit of the Spirit which applies to all Christians but here it particularly applied to these women. This is the wisdom that they needed to deal with the situation that they were in.

So when we apply this passage to our situations it is not saying that we can't wear jewelry or fine clothes. Rather we need to see that these are not the things that we should rely on to impress others or God. God brings us back to our character and our inner life.

Peter now gave the example of Sarah and this is the passage that many people react to! Do you need to start calling your husband 'Lord'?

Now Sarah was a pretty feisty woman. She was certainly not backward in telling Abraham what to do. For example Sarah was the one who told Abraham to go and sleep with her servant Hagar (Genesis 16:1-2) and it was Sarah who demanded that Abraham get rid of Hagar and her son Ishmael. (Genesis 21:9-13). In this passage God told Abraham to listen to his wife. Calling Abraham Lord could simply have been a sign of respect.

Notice what Peter said in 1 Peter 3:5-6 The 'holy women' of the past, like Sarah show us how to put our trust in God. From that focus they showed respect and did not have to live in fear. God was in control. They did not need to try to use outward adornment to impress. They were to choose honour and respect and their inner character that was important.

So Peter's point is not that women just do what their husbands tell them to do. Today we need to be aware that abuse of any kind does not honour God and we cannot use a passage like this to justify it.

Peter now turned to speak to Christian husbands and he seemed to be assuming that they had Christian wives.

1 Peter 3:7

⁷ Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.

Notice that husbands were being called to apply Peter's call to be other person centred. This would have been radical in the culture of the day. The weaker partner here could be referring to the fact that on the whole women are physically weaker than men. Or it could be referring to the powerlessness of women in that society. For the Christian though their wife is not inferior but has been given the gift of salvation (gift of life) in the same way as they have. It is interesting how seriously God takes the way a husband treats his wife. To fail to treat her properly has an impact on his relationship with God through prayer.

REFLECTION

So Peter challenged slaves, wives and husbands to be intentional about having respectful and other person-centred relationships as they lived in a society that was against Christianity.

- ▶ What are some challenges that this passage gives to you? How might you apply Peter's principles to your life?

- ▶ Perhaps you could specifically pray for women who are married to non-Christian husbands that might be given great wisdom in their relationship.

Remember that day on the beach, when Jesus helped Peter work through his failures and called him into leadership in His church. Peter was told to 'feed Jesus' sheep'. That involved caring for them as well as teaching and exhorting them to follow Jesus. Jesus also warned Peter about the suffering he would experience.

We read in John 21:17b-19

¹⁷ Jesus said 'Feed my sheep. ¹⁸ Very truly I tell you, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.' ¹⁹ Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then He said to him, "Follow me!"

We see Peter doing these things in the book of Acts as he proclaimed the Gospel and cared for the believers. As the accounts in the book Acts unfolded we see that Peter certainly experienced suffering because of his commitment to Jesus. The humble Peter had come to understand that suffering was what often glorified God so he was keen for these Christians, in their circumstances, to understand how important it was to 'suffer well'. This was to be one of the characteristics of God's people as they lived in a society opposed to Jesus. He also knew that the greatest witness to a hostile world was how the Christians treated one another.

Jesus had said in John 13:34-35

³⁴ "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. ³⁵ By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

Peter addressed these issues with these Christians who were now listening to or reading his letter.

1 Peter 3:8-12

⁸ Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble. ⁹ Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. ¹⁰ For,

*"Whoever would love life
and see good days
must keep their tongue from evil
and their lips from deceitful speech.*

*¹¹ They must turn from evil and do good;
they must seek peace and pursue it.*

*¹² For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous
and His ears are attentive to their prayer,
but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil."*

REFLECTION

- What is Peter's challenge about the sort of relationships that Christians are to have with one another?

Note that being like-minded doesn't mean that everyone agrees on everything but that God's people are united around the Gospel message and the unity we have in Christ. There are some situations and relationships where these verses are very difficult to apply.

- When Christians experience opposition and suffering what is their behaviour to be like and what is the basis of their security during those hard times? (The quote is from Psalm 34)

Peter brings this all together again and points us to what will steady us in difficult times. How are we to deal with fear as we live in a world that is opposed to Jesus? Peter gives some really practical advice.

1 Peter 3:13-17

¹³ Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? ¹⁴ But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. "Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened." ¹⁵ But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, ¹⁶ keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. ¹⁷ For it is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.

REFLECTION

- ▶ What's the first principle in v13? This is a general principle. How do you understand that it works?

- ▶ If people do react against us, even if we have been 'eager to do good', what are we to do?
 - v14
 - v15
 - v16
 - v17

Peter was very practical here. We steady ourselves by reminding ourselves that Jesus is the Lord. No-one else controls the world. If God wills that we should suffer then there is blessing in that. We may not be able to see it at the time. In the long run, at the judgement day, we will be vindicated if we have been faithful to Jesus and lived life His way.

I wonder if Peter was remembering at this point how Jesus had warned the disciples generally and Peter specifically that they would deny Him. If Peter had have known then what he knew when he was writing his letter, would Peter have answered differently when the girl challenged him at Jesus' trial? We never know when we will get an opportunity to share our faith. One of the blessings may be that someone who has given us a hard time actually becomes a Christian because God has used our behaviour and our words to bring them to Jesus.

REFLECTION

We are also to prepare for the opportunities we may get to share our faith. We are not only to prepare in terms of what to say but also how to say it.

- ▶ If someone ridiculed you for being a Christian and asked you ‘Why would you believe in all that stupid stuff?’ how would you answer? How could you do it in a respectful and sensitive way?

 - ▶ How could you prepare for any opportunity to share your faith?

 - ▶ How are you going with your behaviour at the moment? Is there anything that God may be asking you to work on in your life with His help to be a better witness in the way you live?
-

Now we come to a really difficult section in Peter’s letter.

1 Peter 3:18-22

¹⁸ For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit. ¹⁹ After being made alive, He went and made proclamation to the imprisoned spirits—²⁰ to those who were disobedient long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, ²¹ and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, ²² who has gone into heaven and is at God’s right hand—with angels, authorities and powers in submission to Him.

What is crystal clear in this passage is in v18 and v21b and v22.

- Jesus models for us how to suffer even when we have done nothing wrong.
- Jesus dealt with our sin by suffering in our place. This is what enables us to have a relationship with God. Jesus’ suffering was in our place. He was the righteous one who died for us who were not righteous. His endurance of unjust suffering actually won our salvation!

- Jesus came alive again and this is the proof that we have been saved by his death. If Jesus was still dead, it would have been a lovely gesture for Him to die for us but it would have achieved nothing. Jesus' resurrection proves that He has dealt with sin and has conquered death.
- His work is finished and He rules. Everything is under His rule.

REFLECTION

- ▶ How do these facts help us when life is difficult and we are suffering for being followers of Jesus? Life may be difficult now but suffering is not the final word!
- ▶ Have we become too familiar with the concept of Jesus having suffered for us? Have we lost the wonder and appreciation for all that He has done?

In the context of the words about Christ's triumphant victory over sin and death we have some difficult verses to try to understand. There are three major ways that people have understood these verses.

"The three most common views on this passage are:

1. Between Jesus' death and resurrection, he preached to the dead in Hades, the realm of the dead (the view of many church fathers, citing 4:6). Greeks had myths about heroes such as Heracles or Orpheus descending temporarily to Hades.
2. Christ preached through Noah to people in Noah's day (the view of many Reformers).
3. Before or (more likely) after his resurrection, Jesus proclaimed triumph over the fallen angels (the view of most scholars today, citing v. 22)

Early Christians nearly always used "spirits" for angelic or demonic spirits rather than human ones, except when explicitly stating the latter.

The Spirit raised Jesus;

by the Spirit (and thus, in this context, presumably after his resurrection) Jesus "made proclamation";

in v. 22, his exaltation declared his triumph over fallen angels. Most ancient Jewish readers believed that Ge 6:1 – 3 refers to angels who fell in Noah's day (v. 20); after the flood, they were said to be imprisoned (so also 2Pe 2:4; Jude 6), either below the earth

or in the atmosphere (cf. v. 22; note on Eph 2:2). Then, according to a well-known Jewish tradition, Enoch was sent to proclaim God's judgment to them; here Christ is the one who proclaims their demise."

NIV Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible, ed. John H. Walton and Craig S. Keener (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016).

The other difficulty in this passage is the talk about Noah and 8 people being saved through water which symbolizes baptism.

Noah lived at a time when the society rejected God. (You can read the story in Genesis chapters 6-9.) God proclaimed judgement through the flood but only Noah and his family believed God. God was faithful to them even though they were only few in number and He saved them from the complete destruction of the flood as they sheltered in the Ark.

Likewise, those who have accepted Jesus (the public sign of that commitment is Baptism) are saved. Remember Baptism is not a bath to clean up the dirty outside of our lives, rather it points to what Jesus has done in dying for our sin and cleansing us from within. He did what we cannot do.

As you can see it is not easy to understand some passages. We may have to wait to get to heaven before we can be absolutely certain of what they mean, but there are certain principles that we can apply from the Bible generally.

- We know for example that nowhere does the Bible say that someone has a second chance after they die. Our response to God in this life determines where we spend eternity.
- Whatever this passage means it is crystal clear that Jesus has risen from the dead and is in complete control of everything.
- It is God alone who saves through what Jesus has done.
- The person who responds to what Jesus has done is completely saved.

For these Christians, probably very small in number, living in a society that was against Jesus and probably would persecute Christians, they were assured that Jesus had saved them; He had died for them; He had risen from the dead; He had conquered evil and was Lord of all. Even their suffering can produce good.

REFLECTION

- What is one thing that you find helpful from this difficult section? It might be for yourself or to help you pray for persecuted Christians.

Let's finish this study by looking at how Peter applied all of this.

1 Peter 4:1-6

Therefore, since Christ suffered in His body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because whoever suffers in the body is done with sin. ² As a result, they do not live the rest of their earthly lives for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God. ³ For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do—living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry. ⁴ They are surprised that you do not join them in their reckless, wild living, and they heap abuse on you. ⁵ But they will have to give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. ⁶ For this is the reason the gospel was preached even to those who are now dead, so that they might be judged according to human standards in regard to the body, but live according to God in regard to the spirit.

It can be an ongoing challenge to live in a society that is constantly opposed to God's way of living. People don't understand and may even abuse you because of it. That was the situation for Peter's readers. It is certainly true for millions of Christians around the world and it is becoming increasingly true for us. You only have to see the way people talk about Christians in public life. They often deride them just because they are Christian. We may experience ridicule and opposition when we have different views from our society over ethical issues, how we spend our time and money and what we won't participate in.

Peter wanted his readers to realise that suffering is normal in this life and he wanted them to make a conscious choice to always choose God's way over the way of a world that rejects God.

Peter did this by pointing back to Jesus. Jesus dealt with sin on our behalf and He is now the risen conquering Lord. While we are forgiven for sin because of Jesus, we will of course still do wrong. But now we are free to turn our life away from being focused on a sinful life and to choose to live God's way. Let us live according to our new identity which is united with Jesus.

Some people have a 'gutter to glory' testimony. In other words they remember how they did things that they are terribly ashamed of now. Peter wants to make sure they do remember in the sense of not making choices to go back to that sort of lifestyle. They know how pointless it all was.

Others don't have a 'gutter to glory story' but have turned to Christ because they know that sin is really all about not having Him as the Lord of their lives. They may have been 'good people' but still enemies of God. They too need to keep their focus on Jesus and on living to please Him.

However we came to Christ, we will all face the challenge of keeping our focus on Jesus. We will be different to the world around us but we know that they will face the judgement of God one day. They will be accountable for having rejected Jesus as the Gospel has

been proclaimed. We on the other hand know that Jesus stood in our place and took our punishment for us.

For the readers of Peter's day there was probably a concern for those Christians who had died through suffering. Where did they stand now? Some certainly believed that Jesus would come back in their lifetime so they wondered what happened to Christians who had died. Peter assured them that though they may have died in the body — especially any who had died because of persecution — they were very much alive in the Spirit. They were safe with God. They had not missed out and the Christian need not fear death.

Our experience of Covid 19 has given us all cause to re-examine our lives in this world. We have experienced something that took most of us by surprise. We were stretched in trusting God when life suddenly became difficult and uncertain. We saw the fragility of the whole world and experienced restrictions that we never thought would happen. It has been a wake-up call to realise that we live in a broken world and that this is not our final destiny.

REFLECTION

- ▶ How are you growing in your desire to live for God and through God's power?

- ▶ What challenges have you been given from this study as you continue to live your life in this broken world as God's person in fellowship with God's people?

- ▶ What encouragement have you been given from this study as you continue to live your life in this broken world knowing that the best is yet to come?



Study 4 — 1 Peter 4:7-5:14

Peter was a mature disciple of Jesus as he wrote to the Christians who were facing challenging times. Peter's faith had grown as he had to face some really difficult experiences in his life. He had learnt steadily as Jesus had revealed more and more to him. Now he was passing it onto others. We can learn much as we see the connection between Peter's own experiences and how he then encouraged others.

In today's study we are going to explore some of those experiences and how they might help us appreciate what Peter wrote to these Christians.

In study 1, we remembered the passage from Matthew 16 where Peter declared that Jesus was the Messiah. However Peter had the wrong idea of what the Messiah had come to do. When Jesus started talking about his death Peter rebuked Him. Then in Matthew 16: 23 we read, *Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns."*

Just before Jesus was arrested, He predicted that all the disciples would fall away. This is recorded in **Matthew 26:31-35**

³¹ *Then Jesus told them, "This very night you will all fall away on account of me, for it is written: "'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.'*

³² *But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee."*

³³ *Peter replied, "Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will."*

³⁴ *"Truly I tell you," Jesus answered, "this very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times."*

³⁵ But Peter declared, "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you." And all the other disciples said the same.

Peter was so full of pride. He couldn't hear what Jesus was saying to him. He knew better. When Jesus was arrested He whipped out his sword or dagger and cut off the ear of the high priest's servant. (John 18:10)

Peter was so enthusiastic and brave in fighting for Jesus' cause but then he denied Jesus just as Jesus had predicted. He must have been so confused and ashamed. His wrong understanding of God's purposes had led him down a very dangerous path. Yet Jesus forgave him and restored him.

Peter had become a patient man who understood that God's ways were different to his. It is very interesting to see the sorts of things that Peter now writes to these Christians who are living in challenging times.

1 Peter 4:7-11

⁷ The end of all things is near. Therefore be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray. ⁸ Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. ⁹ Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. ¹⁰ Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. ¹¹ If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.

REFLECTION

- What do you notice about Peter as he gave these instructions to those Christians? How had he changed? What did he now see as important?

Notice that Peter knew that the next major event in God's plan would be the return of Jesus as judge — the end of this world as we know it. This event was to shape how these Christians were to live their lives. Notice the instructions and the reasons for them.

V7 Be alert and sober so you can pray!

As Peter wrote this, I wonder whether he went back in his mind to when he failed to be sober and to pray. It was in the garden of Gethsemane. Jesus was in emotional, mental and spiritual agony. He had taken his three closest friends with him (Peter, James and John) and he had asked them to stay awake with him and to pray. Three times Jesus

came and found them sleeping. (Mark 14:32-42) One wonders what might have been different if they had obeyed Jesus?

REFLECTION

- ▶ How seriously are you taking prayer at the moment, particularly in praying about being faithful to the Lord in difficult times?

 - ▶ Are you praying about those things in your life that take you away from being wholehearted for the Lord?

 - ▶ What is one small change that you can make to help you grow in your prayer life?
-

V8 Love each other deeply as a top priority!

Peter had seen himself as above the other disciples. He had been so full of pride, but then he had come to understand how crucial loving others is. Perhaps Jesus' words had really sunk in when Jesus said at the last supper, as recorded in John 13:34-35 *"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."*

Peter knew that not only did Christians need to demonstrate what it meant to love others and build each other up for the Church's sake, but it was also the most identifying thing to the non-Christian world. The quality of our relationships with other Christians matters enormously.

In particular, Peter seemed to have in mind the importance of forgiveness. 'Love covers over a multitude of sins.' This does not mean we ignore the sin of others. It doesn't mean we don't take action — especially when abuse is involved — but we are also called to forgive. Forgiveness is often a long process and forgiveness never means that that someone's sin doesn't matter.

REFLECTION

- ▶ Is the Lord asking us to think about attitudes we have towards others because they have wronged us or offended us in some way?

- ▶ Do any of these situations apply to you? Loving someone through forgiveness may also involve some tough things for us to do over a period of time.
 - Perhaps to really love them may mean we talk to them about their sin — often we haven't even spoken to the person who has wronged us.
 - Perhaps to really love them means that they do need to experience consequences for their actions so it is not a 'cheap' forgiveness we are talking about. For example if someone never paid us back money we lent them, it doesn't mean we lend them money again. If someone committed a crime it doesn't mean they shouldn't go to jail.
 - Perhaps for our own safety we may not be able to be with that person but we can still ask the Lord to help us let go of our bitterness and anger over time.
 - Forgiveness may be a long process and we need to be very careful about just telling others they need to forgive. What might be a first step in the forgiveness journey?
 - For some of us we have resentments and attitudes that need to be addressed urgently. We may need to go to other people and ask for their forgiveness.
-

V9 Offer hospitality without grumbling

Hospitality focuses on the guest and their needs. Travelling preachers in the early church, would have been dependent on hospitality. Church meetings took place in homes, as did gatherings for encouragement or to help people fleeing persecution. This passage recognises that it is not always easy to put oneself out for the needs of others.

REFLECTION

For us today there is a great need to be hospitable in our attitudes.

- ▶ Do we welcome new people to church and groups? Do we offer more than a smile and a quick hello?
- ▶ Do we have racial or social reactions that make us inhospitable?

- ▶ How can you develop hospitality in your church, groups and home?
 - ▶ How can you work together to do this?
-

V10-11 Use your gifts to build others up

Notice that God has gifted his people in various ways so that we might build one another up as we do this in His strength and for His glory. These gifts help us grow as we use them and as people receive the benefit from the use of our gifts. They help us spread the Gospel message. So often great work happens as people come together to use their gifts.

REFLECTION

- ▶ How can you be an encouragement to others through the gifts that God has given to you? If you don't know what they are ask others for some feedback.
- ▶ How can you work with others to maximise the ministry that God has given to you all? How can combining your different gifts create exciting possibilities for serving the Lord?

Remember that this passage is about being ready for the end of the world when that comes. To be ready for Jesus' return. That focus is really important as we think about how we prioritise our time and abilities and opportunities.

- ▶ What have you been particularly challenged by in this section?
-

It is interesting that Peter wanted to prepare people for the challenges that were ahead. Perhaps he regretted not having listened to the way that Jesus tried to prepare him for the challenges that he would face. When Jesus predicted that Peter (also called Simon) would deny him he also said in **Luke 22:31-32**:

"Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift all of you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers."

That's exactly what Peter was doing when he wrote his letter. He was seeking to strengthen those Christians not only for what they were going through at the time but also for what the future may have held.

Suffering so often raises questions for us. Why is God letting this happen? Why doesn't God stop this? Have I done something wrong? Let's listen to how Peter encouraged these Christians and see what we can learn also?

1 Peter 4:12-19

¹² Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³ But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. ¹⁴ If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. ¹⁵ If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. ¹⁶ However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name. ¹⁷ For it is time for judgment to begin with God's household; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? ¹⁸ And,

*"If it is hard for the righteous to be saved,
what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?"*

¹⁹ So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.

From when the Gospel first started being preached, persecution and opposition were the norm. The book of Acts gives us a lot of information about this. Peter wanted to help these Christians be able to see the positive side of what was happening and would happen.

- **V12** Persecution should be expected as normal. Testing has the idea of producing growth and refinement.
- **V13** They were to rejoice because they were suffering for Jesus. Jesus has suffered and yet when Jesus returns He will be glorified. Jesus will be revealed as the true one and they, as His followers, will be seen to have been right after all.
- **V14-16** providing they were suffering because they were Christians and not because they had done something wrong and deserved punishment, then they could be sure that they were Jesus' followers. They could praise God that they belonged to him and they could know that it was a privilege to suffer for Him.
- **V17-18** God does discipline and refine His people through suffering — that can be hard and challenging — but it results in growth and glory to God. The Christian has the assurance of the Gospel that Jesus has died for our sin but what chance does the non-Christian have in facing the judgement of God?

- **V19** How is a Christian to handle the difficulty of persecution? We are to keep on entrusting ourselves to the faithful Creator and continue to make the choice to do good. This is what Jesus did in all of His suffering.

REFLECTION

- ▶ On the whole, we don't experience suffering like this in Australia. We can easily dismiss it and never think about what God may ask of us in the future. How can we be prepared for future suffering?
- ▶ How can we support those millions of Christians who are suffering persecution around the world? How does this passage inform our prayers for them?

Peter finished his letter by addressing the various leaders among these Christians. Again much of what Peter shared here possibly comes from his own experience.

Think about some of the things that Peter learnt the hard way about leadership.

- Peter had not been good at listening to Jesus as His leader. Peter had corrected Jesus, ignored His warnings, not really understood the nature of Jesus' Kingdom with its different values to the world.
- Specifically Jesus had taught and modelled servant leadership e.g. John 13 when he washed the disciples' feet and told them that this was an example for them to follow.
- Jesus had reversed the ways of the world. In Matthew 20:25–28 Jesus taught a radical principle.

²⁵ Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. ²⁶ Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, ²⁷ and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— ²⁸ just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Let's see how Peter encouraged the leaders of the Church to apply what He had learnt especially in the light of Jesus' return and the suffering that they were going through.

1 Peter 5:1-4

To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ's sufferings who also will share in the glory to be revealed: ² Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; 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 crown of glory that will never fade away.

REFLECTION

- ▶ What stands out to you about what the leaders were to be like?

- ▶ There is a sense in which we all lead or influence someone else in our lives. How might this passage challenge us in our behaviour or attitude?

Peter addressed those who were younger and instructed them to submit to their elders and then he had a word to the whole Church. It is interesting to see that the younger people are submitting to people who are to be modelling servant leadership not leadership based on power.

1 Peter 5:5-11

⁵ In the same way, you who are younger, submit yourselves to your elders. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, "God opposes the proud but shows favour to the humble."

⁶ Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. ⁷ Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

⁸ Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. ⁹ Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings.

¹⁰ And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. ¹¹ To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.

REFLECTION

- ▶ What actions did Peter tell Christians to take and what are the reasons we are to do them?
 - ▶ How aware are you of the spiritual battle that we are involved in (v8&9)?
 - ▶ How do these instructions encourage you in your Christian life at the moment?
 - ▶ How do these instructions help us to pray for one another?
 - ▶ How do these verses help us face the reality of the difficulties and challenges as Christians in this life and the hope that the Gospel brings?
-

Peter finished this letter by referring to a number of people.

1 Peter 5:12-14

¹² With the help of Silas, whom I regard as a faithful brother, I have written to you briefly, encouraging you and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand fast in it.

¹³ She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you her greetings, and so does my son Mark. ¹⁴ Greet one another with a kiss of love.

Peace to all of you who are in Christ.

Peter acknowledged the significance of both Silas and Mark. He is no longer the lone follower of Jesus who sees himself as better than others.

Babylon is probably a reference to Rome where Peter is believed to be writing from so he was sending greetings from the church there.

This is a great reminder that God's Kingdom is bigger than just our own area of involvement. God's grace has gathered His church even when they are scattered. We are the family of God and Peter encouraged us to relate warmly to each other.

In the midst of a world that is opposed to Jesus and the sure knowledge that suffering is a part of this world, it is great to know God's peace is always there for us. That peace that has turned us from enemies to friends, that peace that gives us hope and comfort in a broken world and that peace that settles troubled hearts and longs for the coming of God's Kingdom in all of its fullness.

REFLECTION

- ▶ As you reflect back on this study what are you taking away to think about more or to apply to your life?

- ▶ As we look to a future in this life that is sure to have challenges and difficulties, what encouragements can you hold onto in order to faithfully serve God and His people no matter what you face?

- ▶ What wisdom have you gained by thinking about how to live for Jesus in a world that, on the whole, is opposed to the Gospel? What encouragements are there for us in this?

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