

**A Daily Devotional
on 1 Peter**
By Ken Miller



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A Traveler's Guide for Christian Pilgrims

¹ Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ,

To those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, ² according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood:

May grace and peace be multiplied to you. – 1 Peter 1:1-2 ESV

As the salutation of this letter suggests, its author is none other than “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ.” This is the very same Peter whom Jesus called to be one of His disciples. He was first introduced to Jesus by his brother Andrew, who was originally a disciple of John the Baptist. These two men were fishermen, who had a business partnership with two other brothers: James and John (Luke 5:10). But Andrew had been drawn to the enigmatic ministry of John the Baptist, the rather bizarre and mysterious character who had shown up in the Judean wilderness declaring that the kingdom of God had come and calling the people to repent and be baptized. John’s message, mannerisms, and style of dress attracted a lot of attention.

John wore clothing made from camel’s hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his diet consisted of locusts and wild honey. Then people from Jerusalem, as well as all Judea and all the region around the Jordan, were going out to him, and he was baptizing them in the Jordan River as they confessed their sins. – Matthew 3:4-6 NLT

John’s unconventional wardrobe and message caused a great deal of conjecture among the people. Many thought he might be a prophet sent from God. Some even believed he might be the long-departed prophet, Elijah. Others went as far as to suggest he was the long-awaited Messiah. But John put all these rumors to rest when he declared, “I am a voice shouting in the wilderness, ‘Clear the way for the Lord’s coming!’” (John 1:23 NLT).

The Pharisees, perplexed by John and a bit put out by John’s growing reputation among the people, demanded to know what right he had to say and do the things he did.

“If you aren’t the Messiah or Elijah or the Prophet, what right do you have to baptize?” – John 1:25 NLT

And John responded emphatically, albeit a bit cryptically, “I baptize with water, but right here in the crowd is someone you do not recognize. Though his ministry follows mine, I’m not even worthy to be his slave and untie the straps of his sandal” (John 1:26-27 NLT). Andrew would have overheard these exchanges between John and the Jewish religious leaders. And the very next day, he just happened to be standing next to John when Jesus walked by. When he heard John say, “Behold, the Lamb of God!” (John 1:36 ESV), Andrew’s curiosity got the better of him and he followed Jesus. He ended up spending the entire day in the company of this stranger from Galilee and when the day was done, he made a beeline to his brother Simon.

Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of these men who heard what John said and then followed Jesus. Andrew went to find his brother, Simon, and told him, "We have found the Messiah" (which means "Christ"). – John 1:40-41 NLT

After less than 24 hours in Jesus' presence, Andrew had become convinced that He was the Messiah, the anointed one of God who would restore the fortunes of Israel by re-establishing the Davidic dynasty and restoring the nation to power and prominence. The next morning, his excitement undiminished, Andrew introduced his brother to the man he believed to be the one of whom the prophets spoke.

Then Andrew brought Simon to meet Jesus. Looking intently at Simon, Jesus said, "Your name is Simon, son of John—but you will be called Cephas" (which means "Peter"). – John 1:42 NLT

Upon meeting Simon, Jesus promptly changed his name to Cephas, the Aramaic version of the Greek name, Petras or Peter. But Simon received far more than a name change that day. He didn't realize it at the time, but his entire life was about to undergo a radical transformation that would have eternal ramifications. Yet, at the time, the newly named Peter seems to have made no plans to become a disciple of Jesus. In fact, according to Luke's gospel, Peter simply went back to his normal routine. But he would soon learn that his new name was just the beginning of the changes that Jesus had in store for him.

One day as Jesus was preaching on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, great crowds pressed in on him to listen to the word of God. He noticed two empty boats at the water's edge, for the fishermen had left them and were washing their nets. Stepping into one of the boats, Jesus asked Simon, its owner, to push it out into the water. So he sat in the boat and taught the crowds from there.

When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Now go out where it is deeper, and let down your nets to catch some fish."

"Master," Simon replied, "we worked hard all last night and didn't catch a thing. But if you say so, I'll let the nets down again." And this time their nets were so full of fish they began to tear! A shout for help brought their partners in the other boat, and soon both boats were filled with fish and on the verge of sinking.

When Simon Peter realized what had happened, he fell to his knees before Jesus and said, "Oh, Lord, please leave me—I'm such a sinful man." For he was awestruck by the number of fish they had caught, as were the others with him. His partners, James and John, the sons of Zebedee, were also amazed.

Jesus replied to Simon, "Don't be afraid! From now on you'll be fishing for people!" And as soon as they landed, they left everything and followed Jesus. – Luke 5:1-11 NLT

It would appear that Simon had not initially shared his brother's enthusiasm and certainty that Jesus was the Messiah. He simply went back to work. But Jesus was not done with Simon. This "change" encounter by the Sea of Galilee would dramatically alter the trajectory of one man's life and forever change the world. Simon the fisherman would become Peter the fisher of men. This impulsive and, oftentimes, impudent man would end up deserving his new name. He was a "rock" in more ways than one. Hardheaded and quick-tempered, Simon was a speak-first-think-later kind of guy who regularly put his mouth in gear before his brain was engaged. He was competitive, compulsive, prone to pride, and desperate for recognition. He was an overachiever whose rough edges rubbed a lot of people the wrong way.

And while Simon had been blown away by the miracle of the massive catch of fish, the greatest miracle would be the ultimate transformation of his own life. He would go from fisherman to follower of Jesus. In time, he would become one of three disciples who formed the inner circle of Jesus. He, James, and John would be privileged to witness the transfiguration of Jesus. They would be invited to join Jesus in the garden as He prayed on the night of His arrest. Simon would be the one to declare of Jesus, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16 ESV). But he would also be the one who, three separate times, denied even knowing Jesus. Yet, this man would become a "rock" in the early days of the Church.

After the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, Simon would earn his nickname as the "rock," preaching with boldness and conviction and producing a harvest of new lives for the Kingdom of God.

Peter continued preaching for a long time, strongly urging all his listeners, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation!"

Those who believed what Peter said were baptized and added to the church that day—about 3,000 in all. – Acts 2:40-41 NLT

It was this same Peter who penned the words of this letter that bears his name. And he wrote to an audience made up of new converts to Christ. These were believers living in such distant lands as Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. They were predominantly Gentiles who were having to live out their newfound faith in the middle of a secular and, oftentimes, hostile culture. Peter refers to them as "elect exiles of the Dispersion" to stress the temporary and alien nature of their status as followers of Christ. By aligning themselves with Jesus, they had made themselves enemies of the state. Misunderstood and often maligned, these individuals were facing extreme persecution and harsh retribution for their decision to follow Jesus. Yet, Peter was writing this letter to encourage them to remain strong in the face of opposition

Stand firm against him, and be strong in your faith. Remember that your family of believers all over the world is going through the same kind of suffering you are.

In his kindness God called you to share in his eternal glory by means of Christ Jesus. So after you have suffered a little while, he will restore, support, and strengthen you, and he will place you on a firm foundation. – 1 Peter 5:9-10 NLT

Ultimately, Peter wanted the recipients of his letter to understand that God was not only aware of their difficult circumstances, but He had sovereignly ordained them. Nothing they were experiencing was a surprise to God. Their salvation had been His doing, but their suffering and sanctification were also part of His divine plan. Peter knew that these people were beginning to question the efficacy of their salvation experience. They had come to Christ fully expecting the promise of abundant life. But now they were experiencing trials and tribulation, rejection, and ridicule. In their minds, the Gospel appeared to be some kind of bait and switch. But Peter wanted them to understand that it was all part of God's sovereign will for their lives. God had not abandoned them, and He was far from done with them. In fact, Peter wanted them to know that their current trials would be the source of great joy.

There is wonderful joy ahead, even though you must endure many trials for a little while. These trials will show that your faith is genuine. – 1 Peter 1:6-7 NLT

In a sense, Peter was providing his readers with a traveler's guide for Christian pilgrims. He was giving them much-needed directions for safely navigating the path that God had laid out for them.

Living With the End in Mind

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. ⁶ In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, ⁷ so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. ⁸ Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, ⁹ obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls. – 1 Peter 1:3-9 ESV

It is believed that Peter wrote this letter sometime around 64 A.D., and most likely while residing in Rome. This fisherman from the little village of Bethsaida, on the northern shore of the Sea Galilee, had come a long way. Three decades had passed since the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus. During that time, Peter had spent his life faithfully carrying out the commission Jesus had given to him and his fellow disciples. Immediately after the coming of the Holy Spirit, Peter had proven to be a powerful witness for the Gospel of Jesus Christ, preaching boldly to the Jewish pilgrims gathered in Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost.

“People of Israel, listen! God publicly endorsed Jesus the Nazarene by doing powerful miracles, wonders, and signs through him, as you well know. But God knew what would happen, and his prearranged plan was carried out when Jesus was betrayed. With the help of lawless Gentiles, you nailed him to a cross and killed him. But God released him from the horrors of death and raised him back to life, for death could not keep him in its grip.” – Acts 2:22-24 NLT

His message proved to be convicting and convincing, leading to the conversion and baptism of more than 3,000 individuals. Through the indwelling presence and power of the Holy Spirit, this man who had denied even knowing Jesus had been transformed into a bold and unapologetic messenger of the Kingdom of God. He would become one of the leading figures in the New Testament church, proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ and His Kingdom throughout Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8).

Yet, as he wrote this letter, Peter was nearing the end of his life and, according to the words of Jesus, his own martyrdom.

“I tell you the truth, when you were young, you were able to do as you liked; you dressed yourself and went wherever you wanted to go. But when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and others will dress you and take you where you don't want to go.” Jesus said this to let him know by what kind of death he would glorify God.” – John 21:18-196 NLT

According to the oral traditions of the early church fathers, Peter was put to death during the reign of Emperor Nero, and his manner of death was crucifixion. But it is believed that he chose to be crucified upside down, deeming himself unworthy to die in the same manner as His Lord and Savior. To his death, Peter remained a faithful follower of Jesus, dedicating his life to the proclaiming of the gospel but also to the ongoing edification of all those who came to faith in Christ. It was to that purpose he wrote this letter to the believers living in the regions of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia.

These people were living in difficult circumstances. They were most likely Gentiles who had converted to Christianity and were now suffering the unexpected consequences of their decision. Much to their surprise, the “good news” of Jesus Christ had produced some fairly bad outcomes. They were experiencing significant trials and persecution that had begun to produce doubt and despair. They were confused to find that their salvation had been accompanied by suffering. But Peter would remind them that “the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world” (1 Peter 5:9 NLT).

So, as he opens his letter, Peter attempts to refocus their attention on the core message of the gospel.

All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is by his great mercy that we have been born again, because God raised Jesus Christ from the dead. Now we live with great expectation... – 1 Peter 1:3 NLT

Their problem was that they had taken their eye off the prize. They had become obsessed with their current circumstances and had lost sight of the future hope that Jesus died to make possible. Jesus had died, not to give them their best life now, but to guarantee the hope of eternal life to come. His death and resurrection had made possible “a priceless inheritance—an inheritance that is kept in heaven for you, pure and undefiled, beyond the reach of change and decay” (1 Peter 1:4 NLT). That was to be their “great expectation.”

Peter’s letter is eschatological in nature. In other words, it focuses on the end times – the age to come. His readers were living in Asia Minor, but he wanted them to remember that they were “temporary residents and foreigners” (1 Peter 2:11), whose real home was somewhere else. They were having a difficult time understanding all that was going on around them and happening to them. The predominant culture in which they lived was pagan and antithetical to their faith. Many of them were suffering oppression and ostracism. Because of their decision to follow Christ, they had become social pariahs, facing the rejection of both family and friends.

But Peter wanted them to know that their salvation had a now, not yet aspect to it. Yes, when they had placed their faith in Christ, they had been immediately saved from their enslavement to sin and been provided full pardon and acceptance by God. But there was a future aspect to their salvation as well. And Peter reminded them that “God is protecting you by his power until you receive this salvation, which is ready to be revealed on the last day for all to see” (1 Peter 1:5 NLT). The *resurrection* of Jesus was the key to their salvation, but it would be His *return* that

would fulfill its final phase. In the meantime, God was protecting them through His divine power. He would preserve them till the end.

The trials they were suffering could do nothing to change the outcome of their salvation. Their current circumstances were a lousy barometer of God's faithfulness and power. As the author of Hebrews wrote:

For God has said,

*"I will never fail you.
I will never abandon you."*

So we can say with confidence,

*"The Lord is my helper,
so I will have no fear.
What can mere people do to me?" – Hebrews 13:5-6 NLT*

That's exactly the message Peter was trying to convey. In fact, he provided his readers with some rather strange-sounding advice:

So be truly glad. There is wonderful joy ahead, even though you must endure many trials for a little while. –1 Peter 1:6 NLT

Peter's counsel sounds eerily similar to the title of the 1986 song by the band Timbuk 3: "The Future's So Bright, I Gotta Wear Shades." But to people who were undergoing intense personal persecution, his words must have come across as insensitive and unhelpful. They were having a difficult time seeing anything remotely bright about their future. The day-to-day affairs of life were weighing them down, and the constant pressures of living in a fallen world were taking their toll.

Sound familiar? It should. Because that is the all-too-familiar lot of every follower of Christ. Even now, we find ourselves wrestling with a steady diet of trials and tribulations that can leave us disheartened and disenchanting with the "good news." A global pandemic, ongoing world strife, a steady decline in moral standards, and a growing anti-Christian sentiment have left many followers of Christ disillusioned and questioning the veracity of their faith. But Peter's words are meant for us as well. He wants us to understand that "These trials will show that your faith is genuine. It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold" (1 Peter 1:7 NLT). He encourages us to endure because the outcome of our faith will far outweigh any loss we may suffer in this life.

...when your faith remains strong through many trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honor on the day when Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world. – 1 Peter 1:7 NLT

The problem is that we live our lives as if this world is the end game. We mistakenly assume that Jesus died so that we might experience heaven on earth. We take His promise of abundant life (John 10:10) and turn it into a guarantee of a joy-filled, trouble-free existence right here, right now. And when He doesn't deliver on our expectations, we begin to waiver in our faith and waffle in our commitment to His calling. But Peter would have us remember that our faith is meant to be focused on the end that God has in mind – “on the day when Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world” (1 Peter 1:7).

And like the 1st-Century believers living in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, we have not seen Jesus. Yet Peter states, “You love him even though you have never seen him. Though you do not see him now, you trust him” (1 Peter 1:8 NLT). We claim to believe in a man we've never seen. Yet we struggle believing in the future He promised to provide. And Peter reminds us that our trust in Him and our hope in the truthfulness of His promise will not go unrewarded.

The reward for trusting him will be the salvation of your souls. – 1 Peter 1:9 NLT

Peter was not negating or dismissing the reality of our suffering. He was simply refocusing our attention on the joy to come. Our time on this earth is temporary but our future is eternal. That is why the believer must live with the end in mind. Our inheritance is secure. Our destiny is assured. And, as difficult as things may get in this life, we can rest on the words of the apostle John.

...we are already God's children, but he has not yet shown us what we will be like when Christ appears. But we do know that we will be like him, for we will see him as he really is. And all who have this eager expectation will keep themselves pure, just as he is pure.
– 1 John 3:2-3 NLT

Sufferings and Subsequent Glories

¹⁰ Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, ¹¹ inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. ¹² It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look. ¹³ Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.— 1 Peter 1:10-13 ESV

According to Peter, the trials and difficulties of this life become more understandable and even endurable when one considers “the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls” (1 Peter 1:9 ESV). He doesn’t mean that the sufferings we endure while living in the present age will be any less difficult, but he provides a way to put them in the perspective of eternity. He encourages us to keep our eye on the prize, just as the apostle Paul did.

I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us. – Philippians 3:14 NLT

And this ultimate salvation of our souls, as Peter puts it, is something about which the prophets spoke and wrote. As Peter penned this section of his letter, he must have reflected on the scene that took place just days after Jesus’ resurrection. He and the other disciples were gathered in a locked room somewhere in the city of Jerusalem. Suddenly, as if out of nowhere, Jesus was standing in the room with them.

Then he said, “When I was with you before, I told you that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and in the Psalms must be fulfilled.” Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. And he said, “Yes, it was written long ago that the Messiah would suffer and die and rise from the dead on the third day. It was also written that this message would be proclaimed in the authority of his name to all the nations, beginning in Jerusalem: ‘There is forgiveness of sins for all who repent.’ You are witnesses of all these things.” – Luke 24:44-48 NLT

Their resurrected Lord and Savior gave them a whirlwind Old Testament survey class, providing them with a comprehensive overview of the Law, the writings of the prophets, and the Psalms. Jesus went methodically through the Hebrew Scriptures, pointing out all the prophecies and predictions concerning Himself. For the first time in their lives, the disciples were able to see the full scope of God’s plan concerning the Messiah. Like all Jews, they had focused all their attention and hopes on those passages that predicted the glorification of the Messiah, while failing to recognize the many references to His suffering. For centuries, the Jewish people had waited for the fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy.

*For a child is born to us,
 a son is given to us.
 The government will rest on his shoulders.
 And he will be called:
 Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
 Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
 His government and its peace
 will never end.
 He will rule with fairness and justice from the throne of his ancestor David
 for all eternity.
 The passionate commitment of the Lord of Heaven's Armies
 will make this happen! – Isaiah 9:6-7 NLT*

They had been eagerly awaiting the arrival of this descendant of David who would restore the fortunes of Israel and bring peace to the world. But they had conveniently overlooked the other prophecies of Isaiah that told of “a man of sorrows... acquainted with grief” (Isaiah 53:3 ESV), who would endure tremendous pain and humiliation on behalf of His people.

*But he was pierced for our rebellion,
 crushed for our sins.
 He was beaten so we could be whole.
 He was whipped so we could be healed.
 All of us, like sheep, have strayed away.
 We have left God's paths to follow our own.
 Yet the Lord laid on him
 the sins of us all.*

*He was oppressed and treated harshly,
 yet he never said a word.
 He was led like a lamb to the slaughter.
 And as a sheep is silent before the shearers,
 he did not open his mouth. – Isaiah 53:5-7 NLT*

When Isaiah penned these words, he had no idea of their full import. Peter indicates that all the prophets “wondered what time or situation the Spirit of Christ within them was talking about when he told them in advance about Christ’s suffering and his great glory afterward” (1 Peter 1:11 NLT). These men had no way of understanding how all these prophecies fit together. They were operating under the influence and inspiration of the Holy Spirit, but that did not mean that they were given insight into God’s timeline concerning the Messiah. Even Jesus Himself spoke of how the prophets and the Old Testament saints would have longed to see and hear all that to which the disciples were given access.

“I tell you the truth, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, but they didn’t see it. And they longed to hear what you hear, but they didn’t hear it.” – Matthew 13:17 NLT

What Peter wanted his readers to understand was that the prophets had provided a comprehensive and detailed overview of Jesus’ life, writing of “the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories” (1 Peter 1:11 ESV). In other words, they had not left out the unattractive and unappealing parts of His life’s story. Yes, there would be glorification, but not before He endured great humiliation. That is exactly what Jesus had told the disciples as He stood before them in His glorified body.

“Yes, it was written long ago that the Messiah would suffer and die and rise from the dead on the third day.” – Luke 24:46 NLT

And the apostle Paul would later explain the sequence of events that unfolded in the life of Jesus. There had been a non-negotiable order to all that had taken place, and it had begun with His humiliation.

*Though he was God,
he did not think of equality with God
as something to cling to.
Instead, he gave up his divine privileges;
he took the humble position of a slave
and was born as a human being.
When he appeared in human form,
he humbled himself in obedience to God
and died a criminal’s death on a cross. – Philippians 2:6-8 NLT*

Jesus was required to leave His Father’s side in glory and take on “the humble position of a slave.” Yet, He did so willingly. He gave up His divine rights and privileges so that He might take on human flesh and dwell among men. And while in human form, He suffered greatly. He was regularly rejected and ridiculed. He went without food and sleep. Jesus even said of Himself, “the Son of Man has no place even to lay his head” (Luke 9:58 NLT). And the downward trajectory of His life culminated with His death on a Roman cross. Yet, Paul went on to explain that Jesus’ humiliation was followed by glorification.

*Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honor
and gave him the name above all other names,
that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father. – Philippians 2:9-11 NLT*

Humiliation preceded glorification. Jesus had to be lifted up on a cross before He could be elevated to the place of highest honor. It was necessary that His character be slandered before His name could be honored. He had to be vilified before He could be glorified.

And Peter reminds his readers that “this Good News has been announced to you by those who preached in the power of the Holy Spirit sent from heaven” (1 Peter 1:12 NLT). Through the Spirit-inspired preaching of the apostles, the believers in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia had heard the gospel message and had responded in faith. They had been “born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading” (1 Peter 1:3-4 NLT). And that priceless inheritance was being “kept in heaven...pure and undefiled, beyond the reach of change and decay” (1 Peter 1:4 NLT).

Just as the prophets were unable to comprehend every last detail of their own writings, so Christ-followers will not fully understand the significance of God’s eternal plan for their lives. While we have been given access to the full Canon of Scripture and provided insights into God’s future plans for His creation, there is much we will never understand until it actually happens. And Peter indicates that it’s all “so wonderful that even the angels are eagerly watching these things happen” (1 Peter 1:12 NLT). The plan of God is unfolding all around us and all according to His sovereign, immutable will. Nothing can stop it and no one can delay it. So, what should we do in the meantime? Peter answers that question in a single sentence.

...prepare your minds for action and exercise self-control. Put all your hope in the gracious salvation that will come to you when Jesus Christ is revealed to the world. – 1 Peter 1:13 NLT

And he will spend the rest of his letter unpacking and explaining what that should look like in everyday life. Once again, we are to live with our eyes on the prize. We are to focus our hope on the gracious salvation to come. But as we wait for the day when Jesus Christ is revealed to the world, we must live with the same attitude He displayed in His earthly life.

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. – Hebrews 12:2 BSB

You Shall Be Holy

¹⁴ As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, ¹⁵ but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, ¹⁶ since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.” ¹⁷ And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one’s deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, ¹⁸ knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, ¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. – 1 Peter 1:14-19 ESV

Peter is writing to those whom he considers to be “elect exiles.” They were predominantly Gentile believers living in Asia Minor who, while having been chosen by God, were undergoing unexpected suffering for their faith. Peter has acknowledged that they have been “grieved by various trials” (1 Peter 1:6 ESV), but he has also reminded them that they have been “born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Peter 1:3 ESV). And, as a result, they are the heirs of “an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven” (1 Peter 1:4 ESV).

Peter’s emphasis on this future reality was meant to encourage and motivate the recipients of his letter. He wanted them to understand that their salvation was far from over. While their current experience was marked by suffering and persecution, it would also include their ongoing sanctification and, ultimately, their future glorification. That is why he challenged them to live with the end in mind.

Put all your hope in the gracious salvation that will come to you when Jesus Christ is revealed to the world. – 1 Peter 1:13 NLT

Peter knew that by fixing their hope on the final phase of God’s redemptive plan, they would find the strength to endure the trials of this life. God had set them apart as His own and had something truly remarkable in store for them. In a sense, they were no longer citizens of this world. In fact, later in this same letter, Peter refers to them as “temporary residents and foreigners” (1 Peter 2:11 NLT). They were to consider themselves to be strangers living in a strange land. Like the Israelites living in exile in Babylon, these Gentile believers were to consider their living arrangements in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia as temporary. They were not to get comfortable or to compromise their convictions.

Peter wanted them to understand that they were “a chosen people...royal priests...a holy nation...God’s very own possession” (1 Peter 2:9 NLT). Their unique status as God’s holy or set-apart people was to impact the way they lived in this life. And Peter made sure they understood the implications of their foreordained inclusion into God’s family.

So you must live as God’s obedient children. Don’t slip back into your old ways of living to satisfy your own desires. You didn’t know any better then. – 1 Peter 1:14 NLT

Chosen and set apart by God, these people were faced with a choice of their own. Each day they had to decide whether they would live out their new identity in Christ or revert back to their old ways of living. God had called them out of darkness into his wonderful light (1 Peter 2:9), and their behavior was to illustrate that reality. Peter's words of admonition mirror those of the apostle Paul, written to the believers in Corinth.

Don't team up with those who are unbelievers. How can righteousness be a partner with wickedness? How can light live with darkness? – 2 Corinthians 6:14 NLT

And using the Hebrew scriptures, Paul quotes the words of God Himself to emphasize the distinctiveness of the Father-Child relationship the Corinthians believers enjoyed.

For we are the temple of the living God. As God said:

*"I will live in them
and walk among them.
I will be their God,
and they will be my people.
Therefore, come out from among unbelievers,
and separate yourselves from them, says the Lord.
Don't touch their filthy things,
and I will welcome you.
And I will be your Father,
and you will be my sons and daughters,
says the Lord Almighty." – 2 Corinthians 6:16-18 NLT*

Peter uses one word to describe this idea of separation and set-apartness: Holy.

*But now you must be **holy** in everything you do, just as God who chose you is **holy**. – 1 Peter 1:15 NLT*

The Greek word Peter used is *hagios*, and it carries the idea of sacredness or consecration. It was used to refer to anything that had been set apart for God and deemed to be His exclusive possession. What made something holy was not its inherent value, but its status as God's possession. The temple was just a building, but because it had been set apart for God, it was considered holy and sacred. Everything in it was dedicated to God and was to be used for His glory alone. There was nothing special about the bowls and utensils that were used as part of the sacrificial system. What made them holy was their designation as God's possessions. Once they had been set apart for the service of God, they were considered sacred and off-limits for any other use. The same was true of the priests whom God had consecrated to serve in His house. Yes, they were mere men, but they had been set apart as God's servants, charged with caring for the temple and serving as mediators on behalf of the people.

Peter's charge to "be holy" was meant to remind his readers of their set-apart status as God's children. Whether they realized it or not, their identity was no longer the same. While much about their lives remained unchanged, they had undergone a radical transformation. God had set them apart as His own and they were now considered holy in His eyes. What Peter wanted them to realize was that their new status was going to require a new way of living. That is why he wrote, "you must be holy in **everything** you do" (1 Peter 1:15 NLT). As God's chosen people, they could no longer live as they liked. There could be no sacred-secular split in their lives. They now belonged to God and, as His children, they were to reflect His character.

"You must be holy because I am holy." – 1 Peter 1:16 NLT

Holiness is not something we become. It is who we already are as God's chosen people. He has set us apart as His own. And as His possession, we are expected to reflect His character and be dedicated to His service – in all that we do.

The thought of God as our Father should bring us comfort and peace. But we should never lose sight of the fact that God is also the righteous Judge "who judges impartially according to each one's deeds" (1 Peter 1:17 ESV). Peter did not intend this statement as a threat but as a reminder of God's expectations concerning His children. The Greek word *krinō*, which is translated as "judges," carries the idea of approval or esteem. In a sense, Peter is suggesting that God is looking for holy behavior among His children. He is "judging" them to find something good. He is not looking for behavior that might *make* us holy, but He is looking for behavior that *reflects* our holiness.

What God sets apart as His own, He fully expects to remain set apart as His sole possession. That is why Peter states, "you must live in reverent fear of him during your time here as 'temporary residents'" (1 Peter 1:17 NLT). As long as they lived on this planet, they were to remember that they belonged to God. They were His children, His royal priesthood, His holy nation, and His very own possession. The apostle Paul gave the believers in Corinth a similar pep talk.

Don't you realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God? You do not belong to yourself, for God bought you with a high price. So you must honor God with your body. – 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 NLT

God's possession of His people did not come without a cost. As Paul states, God paid a high price, and Peter describes the exorbitant nature of the payment He made: "the precious blood of Christ, the sinless, spotless Lamb of God" (1 Peter 1:19 NLT). The apostle John put it this way: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son" (John 3:16 ESV).

God sacrificed His own Son so that He might ransom sinful men and women out of their captivity to sin and death. Jesus had even said of Himself, "even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45 NLT). And Paul would pick up on this theme in his first letter to Timothy.

He gave his life to purchase freedom for everyone. This is the message God gave to the world at just the right time. – 1 Timothy 2:6 NLT

Peter desperately wanted his readers to understand that their lives were no longer their own. They belonged to God. They had been purchased at a high price and set apart for His glory. They now belonged to Him and were to consider their lives as dedicated to Him alone. But God did not view them as *property*. He considered them His *progeny* – His beloved children and the heirs of “a priceless inheritance—an inheritance...pure and undefiled, beyond the reach of change and decay” (1 Peter 1:4 NLT). And as God’s heirs, they were to emulate their Father’s character through their conduct.

Living and Loving Like Christ

²⁰ He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you ²¹ who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

²² Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, ²³ since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; ²⁴ for

*“All flesh is like grass
and all its glory like the flower of grass.
The grass withers,
and the flower falls,
²⁵ but the word of the Lord remains forever.”*

And this word is the good news that was preached to you. – 1 Peter 1:20-25 ESV

“He was foreknown before the foundation of the world.” Who and what is Peter talking about? Obviously, the “he” to which Peter refers is Jesus. But what does he mean when he says that Jesus was “foreknown?” Isn’t Jesus part of the Godhead and, therefore, a non-created being who is eternal in nature? So, in what sense was He foreknown?

The answer is found in the preceding verse, where Peter refers to Jesus as the lamb whose precious blood was shed. It was John the Baptist who, upon seeing Jesus, stated, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29 ESV). It was Jesus’ incarnation that had been foreknown by God. In other words, it was His assumption of humanity that God preordained, long before He spoke the universe into being. And it was in His role as a man that Jesus would serve as the substitutionary sacrifice for the sins of mankind. The incarnation was not a knee-jerk reaction on God’s part. The fall did not catch God off guard and force Him to implement an alternative strategy. In fact, at no point in the unfolding of the human story has God ever been surprised or forced to come up with a plan B. His Son’s invasion of earth as the sinless Lamb of God had been in place long before Adam and Eve were created or had the opportunity to sin.

And Peter drives the home the point that the preordained plan for Jesus’ incarnation was ultimately fulfilled in time and space. He actually showed up, on time, and according to plan. And Peter reminds his readers that, “in these last days he has been revealed for your sake” (1 Peter 1:20 NLT). Jesus, the Son of God, became a man living, breathing man, and made Himself known and knowable. The apostle John put it this way:

*...the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and **we have seen his glory**, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. – John 1:29 ESV*

Yet, as Peter stated earlier, his readers had never had the privilege of seeing Jesus with their own eyes.

*You love him even though **you have never seen him**. Though **you do not see him now**, you trust him; and you rejoice with a glorious, inexpressible joy. – 1 Peter 1:8 NLT*

But it was Jesus' preordained and predetermined incarnation that made possible His death, burial, and resurrection. Had Jesus not taken on human flesh, He could not have lived a fully obedient life and fulfilled the requirement of a sinless sacrifice. It was only as the unblemished Lamb that Jesus could offer His life as an acceptable payment for the sins of mankind. And His resurrection was proof that God the Father was fully satisfied with His sacrifice. That led Peter to announce:

Through Christ you have come to trust in God. And you have placed your faith and hope in God because he raised Christ from the dead and gave him great glory. – 1 Peter 1:21 NLT

The apostle Paul echoed Peter's sentiments when he wrote:

...being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. – Philippians 2:8-11 ESV

Both Peter and Paul stressed the significance of Jesus' resurrection. Had Jesus not been raised from the dead, there would be no hope of forgiveness for sin or any chance of being restored to a right relationship with God. It was Paul who repeatedly warned the believers in Corinth of the vital nature of the resurrection.

And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. – 1 Corinthians 15:14 ESV

And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. – 1 Corinthians 15:17 ESV

If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. – 1 Corinthians 15:19 ESV

And Peter reminds his readers that because Jesus was raised from the dead, their sins truly were forgiven.

You were cleansed from your sins when you obeyed the truth... – 1 Peter 1:22 NLT

Having never seen the resurrected Lord themselves, they still placed their faith and hope in the reality of His resurrection. They believed the truth concerning His sacrificial death and the miraculous news of His restoration to life.

This is where Peter takes the inexplicable doctrine of the resurrection and makes it practical. Jesus' resurrection guaranteed their transformation, and their transformation was expected to result in tangible manifestations of love for one another. They were expected to "love one another earnestly from a pure heart" (1 Peter 1:22 ESV). Their new lives in Christ were expected to bear fruit. The "seed" had been planted and the expectation was for that seed to produce fruit. This statement from Peter is reminiscent of the words of Jesus.

"I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat is planted in the soil and dies, it remains alone. But its death will produce many new kernels—a plentiful harvest of new lives." – John 12:24 NLT

God had spoken His plan of redemption into existence long before He created the sun, moon, stars, the earth, or any living thing that lives on it. His Word concerning mankind's salvation had included the death of the Seed – His Son. But with Jesus' resurrection, He became the first of many who would experience newness of life. Or as Paul put it in one of his sermons recorded in the book of Acts: "...the Messiah would suffer and be the first to rise from the dead, and in this way announce God's light to Jews and Gentiles alike" (Acts 26:23 NLT).

This new life should produce a new way of living. Those who have placed their faith in the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ have received the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit of God. And the Spirit provides them with a radical new capacity to live and love like Jesus did.

Peter seems to be attempting to refocus their attention from their sufferings in this earthly life to the joys of eternal life in Christ. Because of the resurrection of Jesus, their lives were to be marked by joy, hope, and love. Even the trials and difficulties of this life were powerless to thwart the preordained will of God. Earthly troubles were incapable of thwarting God's sovereign plan of redemption or robbing believers of "the gracious salvation that will come...when Jesus Christ is revealed to the world" (1 Peter 1:13 NLT).

Peter reminded them of the fleeting nature of this life.

*"People are like grass;
their beauty is like a flower in the field.
The grass withers and the flower fades.
But the word of the Lord remains forever."* – 1 Peter 1:24-25 NLT

The trials of life will one day end, and those who perpetrated them will pass away as well. But the word of the Lord remains forever. His promise of eternal life will never end. The resurrection of Jesus remains historically true and eternally significant. And, as followers of Christ, we can rest in the knowledge that God's promises will all be fulfilled.

God is not a man, so he does not lie. He is not human, so he does not change his mind. Has he ever spoken and failed to act? Has he ever promised and not carried it through? – Numbers 23:19 NLT

Put Off and Drink Up!

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

In light of the fact that his readers had been “born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Peter 1:3 ESV), and called to be holy just as God is holy (1 Peter 1:15), Peter expected them to live lives in keeping with their status as God’s chosen people. As sons and daughters of God, their behavior was to reflect the character of their Heavenly Father. God had paid an extremely high price to ransom them from the empty life they had inherited from their ancestors (1 Peter 1:18). He had sent His Son to die on their behalf. On the cross, the sinless Savior had offered up His life as the unblemished Lamb, providing them with forgiveness of sins and a guarantee of “a priceless inheritance—an inheritance that is kept in heaven for you, pure and undefiled, beyond the reach of change and decay” (1 Peter 1:4 NLT).

But the recipients of Peter’s letter were wrestling with the realities of living in a culture that stood opposed to everything in which they believed. Their minds filled with doubt and despair as they struggled to reconcile their circumstances with their faith. The “good news” they had so eagerly embraced had resulted in some far-from-great outcomes. And while many of their trials were external in nature, they were also suffering from unexpected internal battles that left them demoralized and even doubting their salvation. Peter referred to these inner temptations as “worldly desires that wage war against your very souls” (1 Peter 2:11 NLT).

These inner and outer battles were beginning to take their toll. The congregation to whom Peter wrote was experiencing a sense of disappointment and despair. When they had placed their faith in Jesus Christ, they had done so with an expectation that the good news would produce positive results. But now, they were having to endure unprecedented and unexpected troubles on both an individual and corporate level. That’s why Peter went out of his way to assure them of the unwavering faithfulness of God’s promises because they were backed by the reliability of God’s Word.

...you have been born again, but not to a life that will quickly end. Your new life will last forever because it comes from the eternal, living word of God. – 1 Peter 1:23 NLT

Regardless of what was happening around them, they could count on God. He would do His part and fulfill every promise He had made. But they had their part to play as well. Peter encouraged them to stay focused and fix their hope on God and the reliability of His redemptive plan.

...prepare your minds for action and exercise self-control. Put all your hope in the gracious salvation that will come to you when Jesus Christ is revealed to the world. – 1 Peter 1:13 NLT

But they were not to be content with waiting on the return of Christ and their eventual glorification. They were to take positive, tangible steps that would set them apart as God's chosen people – His “temporary residents and foreigners” living in exile on earth (1 Peter 2:11 NLT). So, he provided them with a formidable and seemingly impossible challenge:

...get rid of all evil behavior. Be done with all deceit, hypocrisy, jealousy, and all unkind speech. – 1 Peter 2:1 NLT

The apostle Paul gave a similar admonition to the believers in Ephesus.

Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior. – Ephesians 4:31 NLT

And he would provide the believers in Colossae with a slightly abridged version of the same list of off-limit behaviors.

...get rid of anger, rage, malicious behavior, slander, and dirty language. Don't lie to each other, for you have stripped off your old sinful nature and all its wicked deeds. – Colossians 3:8-9 NLT

Both Peter and Paul were advising their readers to put aside” or cast off those things that might hinder their spiritual walk. They were to be viewed as unnecessary burdens that weigh down and encumber one's spiritual journey. Like the character, Christian, in John Bunyan's classic tale, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, believers too often journey through life still bearing heavy loads that were meant to be discarded when they came to faith in Christ. Peter describes these burdens as “evil behavior” and then gets specific by mentioning deceit, hypocrisy, jealousy, and unkind speech. These particular behaviors are attitudes and actions that can do serious and irreparable damage to a church. They can destroy and sense of community and stand in direct opposition to the “brotherly love” Peter mentioned in chapter 1.

Once again, Paul used similar language to encourage the Ephesian believers to put off the old and put on the new.

...put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. – Ephesians 4:22-24 ESV

Their new life in Christ should be accompanied by new attitudes and desires. Peter puts it in the terms of “cravings.”

Like newborn babies, you must crave pure spiritual milk... – 1 Peter 2:2 NLT

Peter's use of the image of a hungry infant longing for milk is powerful. It conveys the ideas of dependency and desire. In using it, he portrays his readers as innocent, helpless, and totally reliant upon the care of another. Since they had been "born again to a living hope" (1 Peter 1:3 ESV) "through the living and abiding word of God" (1 Peter 1:23 ESV), their lives depended upon the ongoing provision of their Heavenly Father. He had brought about their new birth and He would sustain their new spiritual life. But for them to grow, they would need to crave or long for the right form of nutrition. And contained in Peter's admonition is the idea that they must develop a taste for the pure spiritual milk of God's Word. Even newborn babies instinctively learn to appreciate the benefits of their mother's milk. In time, they develop an understanding that there is only one source that can satisfy their hunger. And the same should be true of every believer concerning the spiritual benefits of God's Word.

Initially, a baby has no awareness of the nutritional value of milk. He simply eats because he's hungry. But in time, his body begins to benefit from the nutrients it receives through each feeding, and it grows – slowly and, sometimes, imperceptibly. And Peter promises that a steady diet of God's Word results in a believer's spiritual growth.

...by it you may grow up into salvation... – 1 Peter 2:2 ESV

In Peter's mind, spiritual growth in the life of the believer was as natural as the physical growth of an infant. It was a normal sign of healthy maturity. He even picked up on this same theme in his second letter.

*...grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ... – 2 Peter 3:18
ESV*

Peter's reference to the milk of God's Word is not meant to suggest a simpler, easy-to-digest diet of spiritual pabulum. In other words, this is not intended as an indictment of their spiritual status. This passage is sometimes linked to the following statement from the apostle Paul written to the church in Corinth.

Dear brothers and sisters, when I was with you I couldn't talk to you as I would to spiritual people. I had to talk as though you belonged to this world or as though you were infants in Christ. I had to feed you with milk, not with solid food, because you weren't ready for anything stronger. And you still aren't ready, for you are still controlled by your sinful nature. – 1 Corinthians 3:1-3 NLT

Paul was criticizing the believer in Corinth for their lack of spiritual growth. They had not grown or matured in their faith. Their desire for the "meatier" things of God's Word had never developed. But that is not what Peter is suggesting. He is not exposing a lack of spiritual growth among his audience. He is simply encouraging them to live their lives in total dependence upon the soul-nourishing milk of God's Word.

Peter's goal for his audience was their ongoing spiritual maturity, fueled by constant feeding on the truth of Scripture and the promises of God it contains. At their salvation, they had gotten a taste of God's goodness. Now, it was time to drink in all the goodness that God's imperishable seed could provide.

We're in This Together

⁴ As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, ⁵ you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. ⁶ For it stands in Scripture:

*“Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone,
a cornerstone chosen and precious,
and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.”*

⁷ So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe,

*“The stone that the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone,”*

⁸ and

*“A stone of stumbling,
and a rock of offense.”*

They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.

⁹ But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. ¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. — 1 Peter 2:4-10 ESV

Peter spoke to his audience, not so much as individuals, but as a corporate community. In verse two he addressed them as “newborn infants,” using the plural designation rather than the singular. Together, they represented a collection of “born again” people who all shared a common bond as the children of God. And it was *together* that they were to “grow up into salvation” (1 Peter 2:2 ESV). The walk of faith is not a solo sport, but a community event in which God’s people engage in a symbiotic and mutually beneficial relationship with one another. And Peter emphasizes the communal nature of that relationship by switching to a building metaphor.

Each believer shared a common story. They had come to faith in Jesus “according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood” (1 Peter 1:2 ESV). It was their individual relationships with Jesus that bonded them together into one family in which they shared God as their Heavenly Father. These people probably came from different economic, social, and even ethnic backgrounds. Yet, they each had come to Jesus “the living cornerstone of God’s temple,” who was “rejected by people, but he was chosen by God for great honor” (1 Peter 2:4 NLT).

Jesus was the foundation of their shared faith story. Their new lives were being built upon and around Him. A cornerstone was a massive piece of cut stone that, when put in place, established the pattern for all the other stone to come. It provided a guide for the builder, determining the right angles necessary for laying perfectly perpendicular rows of stones. Without the cornerstone, the walls could become easily misaligned, leaving the final structure unsightly and even unsafe for use.

But Peter describes his readers as “living stones that God is building into his spiritual temple” (1 Peter 2:5 NLT). At one time, each of them had been an unfinished, rough-hewn stone. But God had chosen and carefully prepared them to fit into the plan for His holy temple. They were in the process of having their rough edges smoothed away. Their shape was being reformed by the Builder, so that they might become a seamless and integral part of God’s glorious House. Peter’s point seems to be that you can’t build a house with a single stone. Even Jesus Himself was the “cornerstone” and not the house itself. And while it is true that every believer has the Holy Spirit living within them, Paul pointed out that it is the collective body of Christ that forms the temple of God.

*Don’t you realize that **all of you together are the temple of God** and that the Spirit of God lives in you? – 1 Corinthians 3:16 NLT*

Back in verse nine of 1 Corinthians, Paul declared to the believers in Corinth: “You are God’s building.” Then in verse 17, he re-emphasizes their collective status as God’s temple.

God’s temple is holy, and you are that temple. – 1 Corinthians 3:17 NLT

And Paul used this same building metaphor when writing to the believers in Ephesus.

*So now you Gentiles are no longer strangers and foreigners. You are citizens along with all of God’s holy people. You are members of God’s family. **Together, we are his house, built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. And the cornerstone is Christ Jesus himself. We are carefully joined together in him, becoming a holy temple for the Lord.** Through him you Gentiles are also being made part of this dwelling where God lives by his Spirit. – Ephesians 2:19-22 NLT*

Don’t miss what Paul is saying.

Together, we are his house...

We are carefully joined together...

We are being made part of this dwelling where God lives...

Paul is stressing our unity and shared sense of identity and purpose. The temple was the place where God’s glory dwelt, and as His “spiritual house,” we serve as the dwelling place of His

presence and power in this day and age. This spiritual structure, like the Old Testament temple, is meant to be the place where the priests of God mediate on behalf of the people of God. In this holy place, sinners can discover the grace of God and receive cleansing from their sins. The church, the body of Christ, is to be the place where the condemned can find full acquittal for their sins. They are the messengers of God's gracious act of redemption made possible through the sacrifice of His own Son on the cross. It is the place where the holy priesthood "offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:5 ESV). Peter is not inferring that additional blood sacrifices must be made to atone for sin, but that the church was to be a place marked by selfless and sacrificial service to God. That's exactly what Paul wrote to the believers in Rome.

I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him. – Romans 12:1 NLT

This is the same thought that Paul had expressed earlier in the same letter.

...present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. – Romans 6:13 NLT

After stressing the communal aspect of their faith and their corporate status as God's dwelling place, Peter returned to the metaphor of the cornerstone. Quoting from Isaiah 28:16 and Psalm 118:22, Peter discloses that Jesus was the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah. Jesus had been the cornerstone whom God had promised, but the Jewish people ended up rejecting Him. They set aside the One who had been destined to be the source of their hope and salvation. They cast Him aside like an ill-formed stone, refusing to recognize Him as "chosen and precious" (1 Peter 2:6 ESV). And quoting from another Old Testament passage (Isaiah 8:14), Peter makes the sad assessment that the Jews had ended up turning the cornerstone into "A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense" (1 Peter 2:8 ESV). The One who could have offered them salvation became a cause of their stumbling and eventual fall.

It was the apostle Paul who wrote, "we preach Christ crucified, **a stumbling block to Jews** and folly to Gentiles" (1 Corinthians 1:23 ESV). Because Jesus didn't appear in the form they were expecting or produce the outcome they were anticipating, they stumbled over Him. And Peter points out the cause of their fall.

They stumble because they do not obey God's word, and so they meet the fate that was planned for them. – 1 Peter 2:8 NLT

John the Baptist had appeared on the scene, preaching, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Mark 3:2 ESV), and Jesus had picked up on that same message when He began His earthly ministry. But the majority of the Jewish people refused to heed the message and ended up rejecting the King for whom they had long been waiting. And Peter pointed out that they met "the fate that was planned for them."

But Peter had good news for the believers to whom he wrote his letter.

But you are not like that, for you are a chosen people. You are royal priests, a holy nation, God's very own possession. – 1 Peter 2:9 NLT

Peter borrows from Old Testament imagery that was most often associated with the people of Israel. Because they had rejected the cornerstone, the message concerning the good news of the Kingdom was taken to the Gentiles. And when they accepted God's gracious offer of salvation through faith alone in Christ alone, they became the chosen people of God, His royal priests, a holy nation, and His chosen possession. And Peter stressed the amazing nature of this transformation in their status. They had once been living in darkness, but God had graciously called them out and exposed them to the wonderful light of life – His Son.

And Peter goes out of his way to remind them of the staggering implications of their spiritual rags-to-riches story. And, once again, he uses an Old Testament passage, most often associated with the people of Israel to make his point.

*Once you had no identity as a people;
now you are God's people.
Once you received no mercy;
now you have received God's mercy. – 1 Peter 2:10 NLT*

The apostle Paul provides another reminder of this remarkable and undeserved transformation that has taken place in the life of every believer.

He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. – Colossians 1:13-14 ESV

And as Peter will point out, that transformation should produce a complete renovation of our character and conduct.

The Cost of Commitment

¹¹ Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. ¹² Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

¹³ Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, ¹⁴ or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. ¹⁵ For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. ¹⁶ Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. ¹⁷ Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor. – 1 Peter 2:11-17 ESV

What does it mean to be “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession” (1 Peter 2:9 ESV)? Peter has told his audience that their new status comes with a responsibility:

...that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. – 1 Peter 2:9 ESV

But what does that look like in real life? Those who have been transformed by God are expected to live in such a way that their character and conduct give evidence of their new status as children of God. What Peter seems to be telling his audience is that, while their circumstances may not have changed for the better, their lives should be radically different than before. At one time, they were living in complete spiritual darkness and, as the apostle Paul puts it, “alienated from God” (Colossians 1:21 BSB). Paul also reminded the believers in Ephesus of their former alienation from God.

Don't forget that you Gentiles used to be outsiders. You were called “uncircumcised heathens” by the Jews, who were proud of their circumcision, even though it affected only their bodies and not their hearts. In those days you were living apart from Christ. You were excluded from citizenship among the people of Israel, and you did not know the covenant promises God had made to them. You lived in this world without God and without hope. – Ephesians 2:11-12 NLT

But Paul went on to give them the good news: “Once you were far away from God, but now you have been brought near to him through the blood of Christ” (Ephesians 2:13 NLT). And with that same thought in mind, Peter gives his readers a much-needed lesson on what it looks like to be God's people.

Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. – 1 Peter 2:11 ESV

First, he reminds them that they are loved. But in using the word “beloved” (ἀγαπητός), Peter doesn’t seem to be expressing *his* feelings for them. While there is little doubt that Peter had great affection for those to whom he wrote, he was much more interested in helping them understand that they were loved by God. Another way of translating his statement is “those who are loved by God.” They had experienced the love of God as expressed in the gracious gift of His Son. The apostle Paul expressed the remarkable nature of this love when he wrote: “But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners” (Romans 5:8 NLT).

Peter was urging them to return God’s love for them by manifesting the transformed nature of their lives. First, they were to consider themselves to be “temporary residents and foreigners” (1 Peter 2:11 NLT) on this earth. Peter is alluding to their new status as citizens of heaven, exactly what Paul meant when he wrote: “He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son” (Colossians 1:13 ESV).

These people were wrestling with the reality of being kingdom citizens while still having to live on this earth. They were experiencing what it was like to be God’s ambassadors, charged with the task of living in a “foreign land” and representing their sovereign King. And as His ambassadors, they were expected to represent Him well. Which meant that their behavior was to reflect His character and constantly honor the trust He had placed in them. Which meant that they were to “keep away from worldly desires that wage war against your very souls” (1 Peter 2:11 NLT). They were not to blend in with the local customs and conduct of their assigned posting. As ambassadors, they were forbidden from compromising their divine commission by taking on the qualities of their host country. But at the same time, Peter did not want them to live aloof and isolated lives. They were not to separate themselves from the “riff-raff” of this world, looking down on them in judgment and pride. No, Peter told them to “**Be careful to live properly** among your unbelieving neighbors” (1 Peter 2:12 NLT).

It’s important to consider the context in which these people were having to live their lives. Most, if not all of them, had come to faith out of pagan backgrounds. And their decision to follow Christ had required a great deal of sacrifice. It is likely that they had been treated as outcasts by their own families. Some were suffering ostracization, finding themselves as social pariahs within their own community. They had lost their jobs, their influence, and any sense of social credibility. When they walked down the street, everyone pointed their fingers at them in ridicule. These people were considered outsiders and treated scorn and derision.

And yet, Peter encourages them to keep a close watch on their conduct. They were to behave in such a way that their unbelieving neighbors and friends would see the transformed nature of their lives. But Peter acknowledges that this determination to conduct their lives with care would not be met with praise or applause. But it will make an impact.

Then even if they accuse you of doing wrong, they will see your honorable behavior, and they will give honor to God when he judges the world. – 1 Peter 2:12 NLT

Peter wanted them to know that their righteous behavior was going to be met with ridicule and defamatory accusations. But Jesus suffered in the same way. He too was treated with scorn. His righteous conduct left Him labeled as a drunkard and a friend of prostitutes and sinners. He was accused of blasphemy and accused of being on the payroll of Satan. But Jesus' response was to simply keep doing what He had come to do – what He had been sent to do.

Peter is attempting to get his readers to understand the calling God has placed on their lives. In a sense, he is echoing the words of Paul, delivered to the believers in Philippi.

...you must live as citizens of heaven, conducting yourselves in a manner worthy of the Good News about Christ. – Philippians 1:27 NLT

And just to ensure that they understood the practical nature of his message, Peter gave them a very tangible example.

For the Lord's sake, submit to all human authority—whether the king as head of state, or the officials he has appointed. For the king has sent them to punish those who do wrong and to honor those who do right. – 1 Peter 2:13-14 NLT

These people were living in a pagan culture ruled over by a godless government. And yet, Peter was telling them to submit to all human authority, including the king. As citizens of heaven living in Asia Minor, they found themselves living under the jurisdiction of the Roman Emperor, Nero. This egotistical and homicidal ruler had made it his personal mission to persecute Christians all throughout the Roman world. He saw them as a threat to the Roman way of life and he was intent on exterminating them. But here we have Peter demanding that these persecuted believers submit to the emperor and all those who work on his behalf. This is the same message Paul sent to believers who were living in the Roman capital.

Everyone must submit to governing authorities. For all authority comes from God, and those in positions of authority have been placed there by God. So anyone who rebels against authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and they will be punished. For the authorities do not strike fear in people who are doing right, but in those who are doing wrong. Would you like to live without fear of the authorities? Do what is right, and they will honor you. The authorities are God's servants, sent for your good. But if you are doing wrong, of course you should be afraid, for they have the power to punish you. They are God's servants, sent for the very purpose of punishing those who do what is wrong. So you must submit to them, not only to avoid punishment, but also to keep a clear conscience. – Romans 13:1-5 NLT

Both Peter and Paul were acknowledging the God-ordained role of government. They were not suggesting that all governments are *godly*. But they were declaring that the role of government had been determined by God. The fact that governments can become corrupt and godless was obvious to Peter and Paul because they had both suffered at the hands of the Roman authorities. Both had been arrested, imprisoned, beaten, and threatened by agents working on

behalf of the Roman government. But at no point did either one of them suggest insurrection or revolution as the proper response to government overreach or abuse. Both of them had been falsely accused, poorly treated, and wrongly incarcerated – simply for doing their jobs as ambassadors for Christ. And Peter wanted his readers to know that their lives would be no different. That’s why he told them:

It is God’s will that your honorable lives should silence those ignorant people who make foolish accusations against you. – 1 Peter 2:15 NLT

It didn’t matter whether those foolish accusations came from the government, a family member, or a neighbor. Followers of Christ were to respond by living honorable lives that reflect their ultimate allegiance and submission to God. And Peter was speaking from personal experience. Early on in his ministry, he had been dragged before the high council of Israel for preaching about the resurrected Christ. And the high priest was infuriated with Peter’s refusal to obey his commands.

“We gave you strict orders never again to teach in this man’s name!” he said. “Instead, you have filled all Jerusalem with your teaching about him, and you want to make us responsible for his death!” – Acts 5:28 NLT

They had been arrested and warned before. They had been commanded to refrain from teaching anything about Jesus, especially His resurrection. But Peter stood before these rulers of Israel and calmly replied, “We must obey God rather than any human authority” (Acts 5:29 NLT).

When it came to obeying God or obeying the governmental authorities, Peter drew a distinct line. If earthly authorities demanded compliance that stood in the way of obedience to the call of Christ, the decision was a no-brainer. We must obey God rather than any human authority. For Peter, that meant he was willing to suffer imprisonment for proclaiming Christ. He was willing to suffer the consequences for remaining faithful to his God-given mission. He was going to conduct his life in a manner worthy of the gospel – at all times and at all costs.

Anything but PC

¹⁸ Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. ¹⁹ For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. ²⁰ For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. – 1 Peter 2:18-20 ESV

Peter has encouraged his readers to view themselves “as people who are free” but also “as servants of God” (1 Peter 2:16 ESV). Because of their relationship with Christ, they had been set free from their old way of life. Through placing their faith in Christ, they had experienced the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit and been made sons and daughters of God. But their new status as God’s children required that they not “slip back into” their old ways living (1 Peter 1:14 NLT). They were no longer slaves to their old desires and passions. The Spirit of God living within them was a source of life-transforming power that made it possible to live distinctively different lives. That is why Peter charged them “you must be holy in everything you do” (1 Peter 1:15 NLT).

Peter knew that they needed a timely reminder of their new life in Christ because the difficult conditions in which they were living had begun to cast doubt on the efficacy of the “good news.” Their faith in Christ had actually produced some unexpected negative consequences that probably left them wondering where the abundant life was that Jesus had promised (John 10:10). Much of their trouble stemmed from the harsh treatment they received at the hands of the Roman government. Nero was emperor at the time, and he was cracking down on this radical and subversive sect that followed the martyred Jewish Rabbi. Christianity had begun to spread throughout the Roman empire, and he viewed the growing number of its adherents as a threat to his power. The Roman historian, Tacitus, provided a graphic and unflattering description of Nero’s egregious treatment of Christians.

“Covered with the skins of beasts, [Christians] were torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or were doomed to the flames and burnt, to serve as nightly illumination when daylight had expired.”

Yet, surprisingly, Peter encouraged the Christians to whom he wrote to “submit to all human authority—whether the king as head of state, or the officials he has appointed” (1 Peter 2:13-14 NLT), and all for the Lord’s sake. Peter knew this admonition would be difficult for his readers to accept and even harder to pull off. It’s likely that these very same individuals had heard of some of the saying of Jesus and wondered if Peter was offering a contradictory form of teaching. After all, it was Jesus who had said, “if the Son sets you free, you are truly free” (John 8:36 NLT). They had accepted the truth regarding Jesus and Jesus had said, “the truth will set you free” (John 8:32 NLT). So, why was Paul now telling them to submit to an ungodly Roman government that treated them as worse than slaves?

So, what exactly did Peter mean when he told them to “Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God” (1 Peter 2:16 ESV)? Were they slaves or freemen? The interesting thing is that Peter refers to them as “servants” of God. The Greek word is δούλος (*doulos*), which can be translated as servant, slave, or bondman. It was often used metaphorically to refer to “one who gives himself up wholly to another’s will.” In a sense, Peter was informing his readers that while they had been set free from slavery to sin, they had actually become slaves to God.

Their new relationship with God, made possible through the atoning work of Jesus Christ, had freed them from the condemnation of sin and death, but it had not released them from their worldly circumstances. They were still living under Roman rule. They were still surrounded by unbelieving friends and neighbors who viewed their faith as strange and even dangerous. They were still experiencing pain and suffering, just as they had before they came to faith in Christ and, in some cases, things had actually gotten worse. But now they answered to a different Master. They were free, but in a completely different sense. That is why Peter drops the non-PC directive, “You who are slaves must submit to your masters with all respect. Do what they tell you—not only if they are kind and reasonable, but even if they are cruel” (1 Peter 2:18 NLT).

This must have come across like a brick to the forehead. It would have been as shocking to them as it is to us living in the 21st-Century. How could Peter demand that slaves who had come to faith in Christ remain in their unjust and inhumane circumstances? Wouldn’t Jesus want them to experience the joy of physical as well as spiritual emancipation? And yet, what Peter was telling them was in keeping with the teaching of Paul.

Yes, each of you should remain as you were when God called you. Are you a slave? Don’t let that worry you—but if you get a chance to be free, take it. And remember, if you were a slave when the Lord called you, you are now free in the Lord. And if you were free when the Lord called you, you are now a slave of Christ. God paid a high price for you, so don’t be enslaved by the world. Each of you, dear brothers and sisters, should remain as you were when God first called you. – 1 Corinthians 7:20-24 NLT

What both men were trying to convey was that freedom in Christ had nothing to do with earthly circumstances. Jesus had not come to set people free from physical, financial, or societal forms of slavery. In Christ, an actual slave was just as free as his believing master. His social status as a slave had no bearing on his standing before God. That is why Paul wrote:

For you are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus. And all who have been united with Christ in baptism have put on Christ, like putting on new clothes. There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus. – Galatians 3:26-28 NLT

Earthly conditions and circumstances do nothing to change a believer’s relationship with God. He shows no partiality and offers His free gift of grace to all who will believe, whether they are enslaved or free. This is made clear in Paul’s letter to his friend, Philemon. It seems that

Philemon had a slave named Onesimus who had run away. But in God's providence, Onesimus had come into contact with Paul and come to faith in Christ. When Paul realized that Onesimus was actually Philemon's runaway slave, he sent him back with a personal letter to his friend. In it, he pleaded that Philemon accept Onesimus back, not as a slave but as a brother in Christ.

It seems you lost Onesimus for a little while so that you could have him back forever. He is no longer like a slave to you. He is more than a slave, for he is a beloved brother, especially to me. Now he will mean much more to you, both as a man and as a brother in the Lord. – Philemon 1:15-16 NLT

Technically and legally, Onesimus was still a slave and Philemon had a legal right to discipline him for having run away. But Paul was stressing the change that had taken place in their relationship due to their common faith in Christ. Philemon and Onesimus were no longer to view themselves from the worldly perspective of master and slave, but as brothers in Christ. From the worldly point of view, nothing had changed. Onesimus was still a slave. But from God's vantage point, the relationship between these two men had been radically and permanently transformed – forever.

Peter wanted his readers to understand that their faith in Christ was not meant to be a panacea for all their worldly problems. They would still face trials and tribulations. If they were a slave, they would still remain so even after coming to faith. If they were poor, their circumstances were not guaranteed to change just because they had accepted Christ as their Savior. Regardless of their earthly circumstances, they were children of God and heirs of the Kingdom of God. And nothing could change that. And Peter reminds them that "God is pleased when, conscious of his will, you patiently endure unjust treatment. Of course, you get no credit for being patient if you are beaten for doing wrong. But if you suffer for doing good and endure it patiently, God is pleased with you" (1 Peter 2:19-20 NLT).

As long as they lived on this earth, they were to seek to live holy lives, regardless of their particular circumstances. Whether slave or free, they each had an obligation to live in a manner worthy of the gospel that had transformed them into sons and daughters of God.

Equipped and Empowered

²¹ For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. ²² He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. ²³ When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. ²⁴ He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. ²⁵ For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls. – 1 Peter 2:21-25 ESV

You have been called to suffer. It doesn't take much imagination to consider how that thought must have come across to Peter's audience. And he was quite specific about the kind of suffering he has in mind.

...if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. – 1 Peter 2:20 ESV

Peter had been addressing those within the local congregation who were slaves. The Greek word Peter used is *oiketēs*, which most often referred to a household servant. Another common reference to slaves was the Greek word *doulos*, which means "one who is subservient to, and entirely at the disposal of, his master; a slave." It is estimated that, during the 1st-Century, as much as one-third of the Roman population were slaves. As a result, slaves were a ubiquitous part of society, with many of them coming to faith in Christ and becoming members of local congregations throughout the Roman empire. Some of these people had been taken as captives of war. Others were born into slavery. But there was another class of individuals who had been required to enter into indentured servitude out of necessity. If someone owed a debt he could not pay, he could agree to work off the unpaid balance by becoming a bondservant. This was a situation that was covered under the Mosaic Law and was essentially a form of welfare. The Law even made provision for an individual to remain a slave out of gratitude to his master.

"But the slave may declare, 'I love my master, my wife, and my children. I don't want to go free.' If he does this, his master must present him before God. Then his master must take him to the door or doorpost and publicly pierce his ear with an awl. After that, the slave will serve his master for life." – Exodus 21:5-6 NLT

Yet, it is difficult to understand how the New Testament authors seem to have remained silent about the injustice of slavery. In our day, when slavery has been deservedly castigated and virtually eradicated, we find it strange that Jesus and His followers had little to say about it.

"The church never addressed the institution of slavery in society, for it was outside its province—society in that day did not claim to be representative, and certainly not representative of Christians, concepts that arrived with the Enlightenment—but it did address

the situation in the church, where no social distinctions were to be allowed, for all were brothers and sisters (Gal. 3:28; 1 Cor. 12:13; Col. 3:11; Phile. 16), however shocking that was to society at large.” – Peter H. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*

Their silence on the matter should not be taken as a form of validation or justification. But as was pointed out in yesterday’s point, Peter and the other apostles were not out to redeem the culture of their day. They had a God-given mandate to spread the good news of the Kingdom of God and make disciples of all the nations. Any impact they were to make on the culture would come through the reconciliation of individual men and women to God. And their efforts were bearing fruit. The church was growing, and its presence was beginning to be felt all throughout the Roman Empire. It was within the body of Christ that individuals from all walks of life could gather together in an atmosphere marked by unity and equity. The apostle Paul repeatedly emphasized the equalizing nature of the gospel.

There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus. – Galatians 3:28 NLT

Some of us are Jews, some are Gentiles, some are slaves, and some are free. But we have all been baptized into one body by one Spirit, and we all share the same Spirit. – 1 Corinthians 12:13 NLT

And Peter took the time to address the slaves within the local fellowship to whom he wrote. He wanted to use them as an example of what it meant to suffer for the sake of Christ. These individuals, while free in Christ, still found themselves living as literal slaves to men. Considered to be little more than personal property, they had no rights. For Peter, the hopeless and helpless circumstance of a slave provided the perfect illustration of his earlier point.

For you are free, yet you are God’s slaves, so don’t use your freedom as an excuse to do evil. – 1 Peter 2:16 NLT

This message had been addressed to the entire congregation, but now Peter was applying it to the life of a slave. He knew that many of these enslaved brothers and sisters in Christ were suffering unjustly at the hands of their masters. It is quite possible that some of them were actually enduring increased hostilities for their profession of faith. So, Peter reminds them that “God is pleased when, conscious of his will, you patiently endure unjust treatment” (1 Peter 2:19 NLT).

And because Peter knew that this call would be difficult to hear, let alone obey, he turned their attention to Jesus. Peter could recall the teachings of Jesus and knew that His life had been the consummate illustration of humble servanthood and willing submission to doing good, no matter what the cost. The words of Jesus still rang in Peter’s ear.

“Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you must become your slave. For even the Son of Man came not to be

served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many.” – Matthew 20:26-28 NLT

Jesus had been called by God to serve, suffer, and sacrifice His life, so His followers should not expect their calling to be any different.

For God called you to do good, even if it means suffering, just as Christ suffered for you. He is your example, and you must follow in his steps. – 1 Peter 2:21 NLT

With the prophetic words of Isaiah in mind, Peter paints a vivid picture of Jesus, the suffering servant.

*He never sinned,
nor ever deceived anyone.
He did not retaliate when he was insulted,
nor threaten revenge when he suffered.
He left his case in the hands of God,
who always judges fairly.
He personally carried our sins
in his body on the cross
so that we can be dead to sin
and live for what is right.
By his wounds
you are healed.
Once you were like sheep
who wandered away.
But now you have turned to your Shepherd,
the Guardian of your souls. – 1 Peter 2:22-25 NLT*

Jesus provided an incomparable example of selfless, sacrificial servanthood. He was the Son of God and the Savior of the world, and yet He willingly allowed Himself to be rejected and ridiculed by those whom He had made. The Creator placed Himself at the mercy of His creation. Peter’s words echo the sentiment of Paul, expressed in his letter to the believers in Philippi.

You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had.

*Though he was God,
he did not think of equality with God
as something to cling to.
Instead, he gave up his divine privileges;
he took the humble position of a slave
and was born as a human being.
When he appeared in human form,*

*he humbled himself in obedience to God
and died a criminal's death on a cross. – Philippians 2:5-8 NLT*

Peter understood the formidable nature of his admonition. He was asking his readers to do the impossible. Yet, at the same time, Peter knew from personal experience that this kind of selfless life could be accomplished through the power of the indwelling Spirit of God. In fact, in a second letter he wrote, Peter introduced himself as “Simon Peter, a slave and apostle of Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:1 NLT). He considered himself to be a slave of Jesus and wanted his readers to understand that they not only shared his identity but were equipped with the same source of power to live it out in everyday life.

*May God give you more and more grace and peace as you grow in your knowledge of
God and Jesus our Lord.*

*By his divine power, God has given us everything we need for living a godly life. – 2 Peter
1:2-3 NLT*

There was nothing they would face for which they were not already equipped. There was no suffering they might undergo that Jesus Himself had not endured and overcome. Even enslavement could not prevent their successful emulation of Jesus. No circumstance they could face in life would be able to stand against the indwelling presence and power of the Spirit of God. They had been called to do good, and even if suffering were part of God's divine plan, they would find themselves fully capable of following in the footsteps of Jesus.

Women of God

¹ Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, ² when they see your respectful and pure conduct. ³ Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear— ⁴ but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God’s sight is very precious. ⁵ For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their own husbands, ⁶ as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. And you are her children, if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening. – 1 Peter 3:1-6 ESV

Peter is attempting to encourage and motivate members of local congregations throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are facing ongoing persecution for their faith. This is an encyclical letter, intended to be copied and circulated among the churches, each of which was located in Asia Minor. While it’s likely that these congregations consisted primarily of born-again Gentiles, the presence of converted Jews would not have been surprising. At this point in history, Asia Minor had become a popular destination for Jewish immigrants who had chosen to leave Israel and settle in other lands. The 1st-Century Jewish historian Josephus wrote, “there is no city, no tribe, whether Greek or barbarian, in which Jewish law and Jewish customs have not taken root.” At the time Peter wrote his letter, Asia Minor contained one of the largest concentrations of Jews in the world. So, it is likely that these congregations were made up of Greeks and Jews, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarians, Scythians, slaves, and freemen (Colossians 3:11). And, according to Peter, they all shared one thing in common.

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

Regardless of their ethnic or cultural identities, these people were all one in Christ. And Peter expected each of them to “Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God” (1 Peter 2:16 ESV). He wanted them to understand that God had redeemed them out of their former state of slavery to sin. God had purchased their freedom by offering His own Son as the payment. Peter was trying to convey the same message that Paul wrote to the church in Corinth.

*Don’t you realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God? **You do not belong to yourself**, for God bought you with a high price. So you must honor God with your body. – 1 Corinthians 6:19-20* NLT

Peter had opened his letter with a similar reminder of their new status as God’s purchased possession. God the Father had paid the ultimate price for their freedom.

For you know that God paid a ransom to save you from the empty life you inherited from your ancestors. And it was not paid with mere gold or silver, which lose their value. It was the precious blood of Christ, the sinless, spotless Lamb of God. – 1 Peter 1:18-19 NLT

As a result, they were expected to conduct their lives in a manner that would honor God among their unbelieving friends and neighbors. God had not brought about a change in their circumstances, but He had reconciled them from their former state of alienation to Him. Rather than living as enemies of God, they found themselves to be His children. They were still living in the same home and remained married to the same person. Their jobs had not changed. If they were poor when they came to faith in Christ, they had not experienced a sudden change in their financial circumstances. If they had come to faith while a slave, their condition remained unchanged. But, at the same time, Peter wanted them to know that everything about them had changed. They were new creations. They were now sons and daughters of God. They were indwelt by the Holy Spirit of God and possessed all the power they needed for living godly lives (2 Peter 1:3).

But Peter knew that his admonitions were going to have to be specific in nature. What was this new life in Christ supposed to look like? If they were somehow free but remained servants of God, how would that make a difference in their daily lives? And as if to answer these very questions, Peter began broad and then narrowed his focus to a few specific circumstances. Addressing every single believer in his audience, Peter wrote, “Be subject for the Lord’s sake to every human institution...” (1 Peter 2:13 ESV). Due to their residence in Asia Minor, they all remained citizens of the Roman government. God had not miraculously transported them out from under the despotic rule of Nero. And they needed to understand that their newfound freedom in Christ did not absolve them from submission to the governmental authorities. Even Jesus had taught His disciples, “give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and give to God what belongs to God” (Mark 12:17 NLT).

Peter wanted them to understand that their submission to the governing authorities was “for the Lord’s sake.” Their willingness to submit was to be based on an understanding that these authorities were instruments of God. The apostle Paul articulated this concept of divine authorization in his letter to the Romans.

Everyone must submit to governing authorities. For all authority comes from God, and those in positions of authority have been placed there by God. So anyone who rebels against authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and they will be punished. For the authorities do not strike fear in people who are doing right, but in those who are doing wrong. Would you like to live without fear of the authorities? Do what is right, and they will honor you. The authorities are God’s servants, sent for your good. – Romans 13:1-14 NLT

Peter then applied this concept of submission to slaves, stating, “Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust” (1 Peter 2:18 ESV). God had not redeemed them from their slavery to men, but He had set them free from

their enslavement to sin. That meant that they could respond to their earthly circumstance in ways that were consistent with their new identity as God’s children. Rather than resentment and anger, they could display love, honor, and respect, even to their unjust masters. Through the Spirit’s indwelling power, they could live as salt and light, even as slaves of men. They could display the mind of Christ and mirror the heart of the apostle Paul.

I have learned how to be content with whatever I have. I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. I have learned the secret of living in every situation, whether it is with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little. For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength. – Philippians 4:11-13 NLT

Next, Peter focuses his attention on the married women in his audience, telling them, “wives, be subject to your own husbands” (1 Peter 3:1 ESV). Notice the transition in Peter’s thinking. He has moved from encouraging everyone to be subject to the ruling authorities to slaves willingly submitting to their masters. Now, he takes this topic of submission into the home. Peter was well aware that some of these women had come to faith in Jesus, while their husbands remained unsaved and unsympathetic to their conversion to Christianity. And, sadly, even in the Gentile community of that day, women had few rights and were often treated as second-class citizens. For some of these women, there would be a strong temptation and inclination to use their newfound faith as an excuse to leave their husbands. Yet, Peter had already warned them, “you are free, yet you are God’s slaves, so don’t use your freedom as an excuse to do evil” (1 Peter 2:16 NLT). And it was Paul who warned the believers in Corinth about misusing their newfound freedom in Christ.

Each of you should continue to live in whatever situation the Lord has placed you, and remain as you were when God first called you. This is my rule for all the churches. For instance, a man who was circumcised before he became a believer should not try to reverse it. And the man who was uncircumcised when he became a believer should not be circumcised now. For it makes no difference whether or not a man has been circumcised. The important thing is to keep God’s commandments.

Yes, each of you should remain as you were when God called you. Are you a slave? Don’t let that worry you—but if you get a chance to be free, take it. And remember, if you were a slave when the Lord called you, you are now free in the Lord. And if you were free when the Lord called you, you are now a slave of Christ. God paid a high price for you, so don’t be enslaved by the world. Each of you, dear brothers and sisters, should remain as you were when God first called you. – 1 Corinthians 7:17-24 NLT

Like Paul, Peter’s focus was on godly conduct. The salvation provided by God through Christ was not intended to remedy all earthly injustices or correct all unpleasant conditions. It was meant to transform human lives from the inside out and equip them with divine power to conduct their lives in a manner worthy of the Lord (Colossians 1:10). This is why Peter encourages believing wives to live in the power of the Spirit so that their unbelieving husbands might “be won over by observing your pure and reverent lives” (1 Peter 3:1-2 NLT).

And Peter reminds them that the source of their strength and influence was internal and not external. Contrary to the trends and fads of their contemporary culture, these Christian women were to understand that true beauty was not a result of outer adornment but “from within, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is so precious to God” (1 Peter 3:4 NLT). These women were living in a culture that was male-dominated and where they enjoyed few, in any, rights. In a real way, many of them were treated as no better than slaves, experiencing conditions in which they were considered as little more than property.

Peter is not encouraging or advocating the oppression of women. He is not suggesting that these women meekly subject themselves to verbal and physical abuse. He is promoting godly behavior even in the midst of what appears to be ungodly conditions. Sadly, over the centuries, this passage has been used within the church to promote the subjugation of women. But that was not Peter’s intent. He was dealing with a cultural reality in which women were truly second-class citizens, and he was attempting to encourage these women to use the power in their possession to bring about radical and redemptive change in their homes. While the world deprived them of value and influence, the Spirit had transformed them into powerful agents of change.

Peter wanted them to understand that they were God’s daughters and that their Heavenly Father cared for them deeply, and He would watch over them and protect them. That is why Peter called them to “do good and do not fear anything that is frightening” (1 Peter 3:6 ESV). He was not minimizing the nature of their circumstance but was emphasizing the sovereign power of their God.

In the Same Way...

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

⁸ Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. ⁹ Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing. ¹⁰ For

*“Whoever desires to love life
and see good days,*

*let him keep his tongue from evil
and his lips from speaking deceit;*

¹¹ *let him turn away from evil and do good;
let him seek peace and pursue it.*

¹² *For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous,
and his ears are open to their prayer.*

But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.” – 1 Peter 3:7-12 ESV

For the second time, Peter uses the Greek word, ὁμοίως (*homoiōs*), which can be translated, “in the same way.” He incorporated it in his admonition to Christian women whose husbands had not yet placed their faith in Christ. And in the same way that Peter expected bond slaves to submit to their masters, he was calling on these believing women to express godly submission to their unbelieving husbands. Peter was not suggesting that these women were no better than slaves or that they needed to assume some kind of subservient relationship to their husbands. For Peter, it was all about godly conduct and living as servants of God. That’s why he told the entire congregation to “Respect everyone, and love the family of believers. Fear God, and respect the king” (1 Peter 3:17 NLT).

As daughters of God, the believing wives in this local congregation were expected to “be subject to” to their husbands. He was encouraging them to willingly come under their husband’s leadership as the God-ordained head of the household. There was a divinely mandated order of roles and responsibilities within the marriage relationship, and it had nothing to do with capabilities or qualifications. The apostle Paul articulated the very same pattern for leadership that God established for the home.

And further, submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

*For wives, this means submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For a husband is the head of his wife as Christ is the head of the church. He is the Savior of his body, the church. As the church submits to Christ, so you wives should submit to your husbands in everything.
– Ephesians 5:21-24 NLT*

Notice how Paul presents submission as an all-encompassing requirement for the people of God. We're all supposed to submit to one another – out of reverence for Christ. And when a woman submits to her husband's leadership, she is actually submitting to the authority of Jesus Himself. As members of Christ's body, every believer daily submits themselves to Christ's headship. They willingly come under His leadership and live as His humble servants, in whatever circumstance in which they find themselves – as citizens, slaves, wives, and, yes, as husbands.

After addressing the wives, Peter turns his attention to believing husbands, and he uses that same Greek word, *ὁμοίως*, again. In “the same way” that wives are to submit to their husbands, so husbands are to live with their wives in “an understanding way” (1 Peter 3:7 ESV). Peter does not delineate whether the wife is a believer or not. In that culture, the woman was expected to follow her husband's lead and accept whatever faith he chose for the family. The woman had no say in the matter. But Peter doesn't want believing husbands to use their God-given authority in a unsympathetic or coercive way. That's why he recommends that husbands display an intimate “knowledge” of their wives. A Christian husband was to take the time to understand his wife's temperament and emotions. He was to cultivate a healthy respect for her unique physical, emotional, and psychological makeup. This would require listening to what she had to say and actively ministering to her needs. And that would require submission.

Peter wanted godly men to understand that their wives were vessels of honor, worthy of their respect and deserving of their care and protection. His reference to the wife as the “weaker vessel” was not intended as a slight or a declaration of her lesser value. In other words, this has nothing to do with superiority and inferiority. The term “weaker vessel” has to do with strength, not value. The Greek word is *ἀσθενής* (*asthenēs*) and it means “without strength.” The Greek word for “vessel” is *σκεῦος* (*skeuos*) and it has to do with a household utensil. It could be used to refer to a fragile clay pot or even a more expensive pitcher made of fine porcelain. Paul used the same word when referring to the believer's body in which “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God” resides (2 Corinthians 4:6 ESV).

But we have this treasure in jars [σκεῦος] of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. – 2 Corinthians 4:7 ESV

Christians husbands are to view their wives as priceless in value and vulnerable to spiritual attack. As heads of their household, these men were expected to protect and honor their wives, treating them as fellow heirs of the inheritance of faith. If a believing husband had a wife who shared his faith, he was to view her as a co-heir of “an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven” (1 Peter 1:4 ESV). He was no better than her. He was no more deserving of God's grace and mercy that she was.

But even if his wife was not a believer, the husband was still expected to love and honor her as a priceless treasure given to him by God. To drive home the seriousness of this matter, Peter announces that a failure to do so will result in unanswered prayer. A husband could not treat his wife with dishonor or disrespect and expect God to hear and answer his prayers.

Finally, Peter turns his attention back to the church as a whole.

Finally, all of you should be of one mind. Sympathize with each other. Love each other as brothers and sisters. Be tenderhearted, and keep a humble attitude. Don't repay evil for evil. Don't retaliate with insults when people insult you. Instead, pay them back with a blessing. That is what God has called you to do, and he will grant you his blessing. – 1 Peter 3:8-9 NLT

After getting specific with slaves, wives, and husbands, Peter addressed the need for the entire congregation to embrace unity, mutual submission, sacrificial love, and humility. There was no place in the body of Christ for revenge or retaliation. Brothers and sisters in Christ might inadvertently hurt one another, but they were to respond with grace, mercy, and forgiveness. As transformed followers of Christ, they were no longer to live out of their old lifestyles. They were new creations who were each equipped with the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

And Peter wraps up his admonition by quoting from Psalm 34:12-16.

*"If you want to enjoy life
and see many happy days,
keep your tongue from speaking evil
and your lips from telling lies.
Turn away from evil and do good.
Search for peace, and work to maintain it.
The eyes of the Lord watch over those who do right,
and his ears are open to their prayers.
But the Lord turns his face
against those who do evil." – 1 Peter 3:10-12 NLT*

Each of these people had come to faith in Christ hoping that they would experience a joyful and prosperous life. But instead, they were having to endure persecution and rejection. They were facing trials and tribulations of all kinds, and the natural tendency was to react with anger, resentment, and even hatred toward those who were the source of their problems. But Peter calls them to refrain from speaking evil, to speak truth rather than lies, and to do good rather than evil. In no way does Peter suggest that their trials are going to go away if they do these things. His reference to "happy days" is not intended as a promise of a trouble-free life.

By reacting to the unpleasant circumstances in a Christlike manner, they could experience true joy. This is exactly what James wrote in the book that bears his name.

Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing. – James 1:2-4 NLT

Their relationship with Christ might not alter their circumstances, but through the power of the Spirit, they could see a marked difference in their reaction to them.

To Love Like Christ

¹³ Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? ¹⁴ But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, ¹⁵ but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, ¹⁶ having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. ¹⁷ For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil. – 1 Peter 3:13-17 ESV

Peter has just quoted from the book of Psalms to encourage his readers. He has used the Old Testament Scriptures to remind them that “the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous” (Psalm 34:15). But not only that, “the face of the Lord is against those who do evil” (Psalm 34:16). He wanted them to know that God the Father was watching over them and was on their side. The presence of difficulties and trials in their lives was not a sign that God had abandoned them. The psalmist had called the people of God to live in obedience to the will of God, even in the face of opposition and the seeming absence of God's presence. He was there. He was always there. And not only did God see their righteous response to the unrighteous actions of others, but the full weight of His righteous indignation was against those individuals. He would repay the wicked. Their only responsibility was to not return evil for evil. In fact, they were to turn away from evil and do good.

Then Peter follows up his quotation of Psalm 34 by paraphrasing yet another message found in the psalms.

*...in God I trust; I shall not be afraid.
What can man do to me? – Psalm 56:11 ESV*

*The Lord is on my side; I will not fear.
What can man do to me?
The Lord is on my side as my helper;
I shall look in triumph on those who hate me. – Psalm 118:6-7 ESV*

And the author of the book of Hebrews used these same passages as when trying to articulate God's unwavering faithfulness and care for His own.

Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” So we can confidently say,

*The Lord is my helper;
I will not fear;
what can man do to me? – Hebrews 13:5-6 ESV*

Financial distress was no reason to worry or lose hope. And the love of or desire for money should never replace God as the believer's sole source of sustenance and comfort. Material goods would make lousy substitutes for God. That is why Jesus warned in His Sermon on the Mount:

“Don’t store up treasures here on earth, where moths eat them and rust destroys them, and where thieves break in and steal. Store your treasures in heaven, where moths and rust cannot destroy, and thieves do not break in and steal. Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be.” – Matthew 6:19-21 NLT

The love of money and the fear of man are two powerful forces that constantly pull on the followers of Christ. We are prone to believe that money can bring contentment and that men are our primary source of acceptance. The world teaches us that material wealth can make us happy, and that our peers can make us or break us. They can build us up or tear us down. Yet the psalmists, Jesus, and Peter teach something quite different. And Peter chooses to make his point by asking a rather strange question that is cleverly worded paraphrase of Psalm 56:11.

Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? – 1 Peter 3:13 ESV

To those hearing Peter's letter being read to them, the obvious and logical answer might be: Everybody! As they looked at the very real circumstances surrounding their lives, they could easily confess that there were plenty of people ready, willing, and able to do them harm for doing what is good. So much of their suffering was a result of their decision to follow Jesus.

But Peter was trying to get them to understand that their reaction to their suffering was a key demonstration of their faith in Christ. Were they willing to remain committed to doing good, even in the face of opposition and oppression? Would their mistreatment at the hands of their enemies cause them to respond in like manner or would they be a *mimētēs* or an imitator of Jesus. Centuries before Jesus suffered persecution at the hands of the Sanhedrin and the Roman government, the prophet Isaiah prophesied how He would respond to their unjustified and unrighteous treatment of Him.

*He was oppressed, and he was afflicted,
yet he opened not his mouth;
like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,
and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent,
so he opened not his mouth. – Isaiah 53:7 ESV*

And Matthew records how Jesus fulfilled this prophecy.

But when the leading priests and the elders made their accusations against him, Jesus remained silent. – Matthew 27:12 NLT

Jesus suffered for the sake of righteousness. He didn't defend Himself. He didn't lash out in anger or resentment. And Peter lets his readers know that they too would suffer for the sake of righteousness and, when it happened, they could know that their suffering would bring the blessing of God. They would one day be justly and rightly rewarded for their faithfulness, just as Jesus was.

God will reward you for it. So don't worry or be afraid of their threats. – 1 Peter 3:14 NLT

Jesus had told His disciples, "Don't be afraid of those who want to kill your body; they cannot touch your soul. Fear only God, who can destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matthew 10:28 NLT). And He knew what He was talking about. Jesus was well aware that His future fate involved His own physical death at the hands of His enemies. They would kill His body, but fail to touch His soul. Jesus would die, but His body would be resurrected and reunited with His soul in its glorified form. His death was far from the end. It was just the beginning of God's grand redemptive plan to reconcile lost humanity to Himself. It was on the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came, that Peter made the following statement to his Jewish audience.

"So let everyone in Israel know for certain that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, to be both Lord and Messiah!" – Acts 2:16 NLT

And it was some time later that Peter would stand before the high council of the Jews, defending himself for having healed a lame man. And he would tell them:

"Let me clearly state to all of you and to all the people of Israel that he was healed by the powerful name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, the man you crucified but whom God raised from the dead." – Acts 4:10 NLT

Jesus had suffered the ultimate form of persecution: Death by crucifixion. And yet, He was raised to life by the power of the Holy Spirit and it was His resurrection power that enabled Peter, John, and the other disciples to do "good deeds" even in the face of persecution. Peter knew from first-hand experience what suffering for the faith looked like. And he wanted his readers to know the secret to his ministry and resilience.

...worship Christ as Lord of your life. – 1 Peter 3:15 NLT

You might put it this way: Stop worrying and start worshiping. Rather than obsessing over what men might do *to them*, they needed to start praising Jesus for all that He had done *for them*. They were sons and daughters of God. They were heirs of the Kingdom. They were forgiven, redeemed, reconciled, and had the Holy Spirit of God living within them. They had much for which to be grateful and plenty of cause to worship Jesus.

But along with praising Jesus for all that He had done for them, they were to tell others about the source of their hope, joy, and peace amid life's struggles.

...if someone asks about your hope as a believer, always be ready to explain it. – 1 Peter 3:16 NLT

And as they shared their faith, even with their persecutors, they were to do so in love. They were not come across as judgmental or self-righteous. Their relationship with Christ was not to be a badge of honor or superiority that they flaunted before the less spiritual or ungodly. No, Peter told them they were to explain their faith “in a gentle and respectful way” (1 Peter 3:16 NLT). In doing so, they would maintain a clear conscience, free from hate and marked by gracious humility. And this Christ-like response to suffering for the sake of righteousness would have a remarkable impact on their enemies.

Then if people speak against you, they will be ashamed when they see what a good life you live because you belong to Christ. – 1 Peter 3:16 NLT

It’s one thing to be hated for doing what is wrong. That is to be expected. But it is another thing to be hated for doing what is right and righteous. And Peter wants the believers to whom he is writing to understand the difference. If they respond to mistreatment with hate, they will only receive more hate in return. But if they respond in love, in total contradiction to human nature, their enemies won’t know what to do with it. This is not a promise of immunity from further suffering or even death. It is a reminder that the believer’s power to show love to their enemies is evidence that they belong to Christ.

Jesus told His disciples that they would suffer. He warned them that the world would hate in the same way it hated Him. But Jesus loved the world enough to die for it. And as Jesus told the Pharisee, Nicodemus: “God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him.” (John 3:17 NLT). And, as His followers, we are love the world by sharing that message of divine love and salvation – even in the face of opposition, oppression, and the threat of death.

“Remember,” Peter writes, “it is better to suffer for doing good, if that is what God wants, than to suffer for doing wrong!” (1 Peter 3:17 NLT).

The Ark of God

¹⁸ For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, ¹⁹ in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, ²⁰ because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. ²¹ Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, ²² who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him. – 1 Peter 3:18-22 ESV

Peter knew that the idea of suffering for the sake of Christ was a difficult concept to grasp and even harder to embrace. It sounded counter-intuitive. If the salvation offered through faith in Christ was supposed to be “good news,” how were Christians supposed to reconcile the presence of suffering? Yet even Jesus had warned His disciples that their lives would be characterized by trials and sorrows.

“But the time is coming—indeed it’s here now—when you will be scattered, each one going his own way, leaving me alone. Yet I am not alone because the Father is with me. I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world.” – John 16:32-33 NLT

After Jesus’ ascension, the disciples would soon find themselves facing all kinds of opposition and persecution – all because of their relationship with Him. Refusing to hide anything from His disciples, Jesus had clearly told them that the world would hate them, just as it had hated Him.

“The world would love you as one of its own if you belonged to it, but you are no longer part of the world. I chose you to come out of the world, so it hates you.” – John 15:19 NLT

And that hatred would take the form of intense and ongoing persecution, resulting in false accusations, beatings, and even imprisonment. According to church tradition, many of the apostles were martyred for their faith. Peter himself had experienced his fair share of suffering on behalf of Christ, so his words were far from academic or theoretical. Yet rather than point to himself, he focused their attention on Jesus.

Christ suffered for our sins once for all time. He never sinned, but he died for sinners to bring you safely home to God. He suffered physical death, but he was raised to life in the Spirit. – 1 Peter 3:18 NLT

Jesus’ suffering had been purposeful and effective. It had an end in mind. He had not been mistreated for doing wrong. As Peter pointed out, Jesus “never sinned.” The author of Hebrews

points out that Jesus “faced all of the same testings we do, yet he did not sin” (Hebrews 4:15 NLT). And the suffering of the sinless Savior should bring His children hope.

Since he himself has gone through suffering and testing, he is able to help us when we are being tested. – Hebrews 2:18 NLT

For Peter, one of the key takeaways concerning the suffering and death of Jesus was the victory that it ultimately produced. According to Peter, Jesus was “put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit” (1 Peter 2:18 ESV). His suffering and death were physical in nature, resulting in the cessation of life. Jesus experienced real pain and went through the agony of an excruciating death. But unlike everyone human being who has ever lived, Jesus’ body did not decay.

Paul spoke of this amazing reality when addressing the congregation in the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch.

“God raised Him from the dead, never to see decay. As He has said: ‘I will give you the hold and sure blessings promised to David.’

“So also, He says in another Psalm: ‘You will not let Your Holy One see decay.’

*“For when David had served God’s purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep. His body was buried with his fathers and saw decay. **But the One whom God raised from the dead did not see decay.**” – Acts 13:34-37 NLT*

In His post-resurrection form, Jesus had a glorified body that still bore the marks left by the nails and spear. He consumed food just as He had done before His death. He appeared to His disciples in a recognizable form, yet He seemed to have the ability to pass through locked doors. And Peter indicates that it was in His “spirit form” that Jesus “went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison” (1 Peter 3:20 ESV). This is not inferring that Jesus was a ghost or some kind of ethereal phantom. It is an indication that Jesus was no longer bound by the natural restraints of a human body. And the apostle Paul points out that every follower of Christ will have the same kind of body some day – a body made especially for an eternal existence.

For we know that when this earthly tent we live in is taken down (that is, when we die and leave this earthly body), we will have a house in heaven, an eternal body made for us by God himself and not by human hands. – 2 Corinthians 5:1 NLT

Because of the fall, the human body has been condemned to ongoing decay and eventual death. But because of Jesus’ sacrificial death, believers are guaranteed a new, resurrected body that will never age or deteriorate in any way. It will be both physical and spiritual, rendering it eternal.

But what does Peter mean when he says that Jesus went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison? There has been a lot of debate about this statement over the centuries. Who are these spirits in prison and what did Jesus proclaim to them? Peter seems to provide some insight when he refers to them as “those who disobeyed God long ago when God waited patiently while Noah was building his boat” (1 Peter 3:19 ESV). Why does Peter bring up Noah and the ark, and what does it have to do with Jesus’ post-resurrection nature?

First of all, the ark was intended to foreshadow the salvation that would be made possible through Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection. In Genesis chapter 6, the state of the world is described in highly negative terms.

The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the Lord regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. So the Lord said, “I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens, for I am sorry that I have made them.” – Genesis 6:5-7 ESV

But Noah “found favor in the eyes of the Lord” (Genesis 6:8 ESV). And God commanded Noah to build an ark that would become His means of “saving” a remnant of mankind. The ark became a type of Christ. Noah, like the prophets who would come after him and John the Baptist, would call sinful mankind to repent and be saved. In his second letter, Peter describes Noah as a “herald of righteousness.”

...he [God] did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven others, when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly. – 2 Peter 2:5 ESV

Through his obedience in constructing the ark, Noah demonstrated righteousness to sinful humanity. He gave visible evidence of his faith in God by carrying out the command to build a “vessel” of salvation. And Peter indicates that God “did not spare the ancient world, but...brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly” (2 Peter 2:5 ESV). Yet, because Noah and his family heeded the call of God and entered the ark, they were spared from death.

But who are the “spirits” to whom Jesus preached and what do they have to do with Noah? In keeping with the context, it would appear that Peter is stressing that those who were destroyed by the flood in Noah’s day were judged and destroyed by God. They drowned in the flood, their souls were separated from the bodies, and they were confined to Sheol, the holding place until the final judgment.

There are some who believe that Peter was suggesting that Jesus, in His resurrected form, visited these spirits in hell. But it makes much more sense to understand that Jesus, in His pre-incarnate form, spoke through Noah, the “herald of righteousness,” and declared the coming judgment. But they refused to listen, were judged, and condemned to eternal separation from

God. Verse 19 might be better translated, “He went and preached to the spirits who are *now* in prison.” In other words, Peter is not saying that Jesus, in His resurrected form, went and preached to those who were imprisoned in Sheol. It was in His pre-incarnate form, before He took on human flesh, that Jesus proclaimed righteousness through the provision of the ark, as ordained by God and obediently constructed by Noah.

It was in the ark that “a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water” (1 Peter 3:20 ESV). A remnant was spared and saved. And Peter makes an interesting comparison between the water of the flood and the water of baptism. The water that flooded the earth and destroyed all life was the same water that floated the ark and spared the lives of Noah and his family. In the same way, the presence of death that entered the world because of the sins of mankind would be the very same means by which God would bring salvation to sinful mankind. Jesus’ death would result in life. And Peter states that water baptism is a reflection of both the ark and the body of Jesus. When a believer is baptized, it “is a picture of baptism, which now saves you, not by removing dirt from your body, but as a response to God from a clean conscience. It is effective because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 3:21 NLT).

Baptism is a symbol of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. In the same way, when Noah and his family entered the ark, it was as if they entered into death, but were spared and eventually released to walk in newness of life. The flood surrounded them but did not destroy them. Those who place their faith in Christ will survive the “flood waters” of life. Our guarantee of eternal life is secure in Christ who, according to Peter, “has gone to heaven” and “is seated in the place of honor next to God” (1 Peter 3:22 NLT). And it is from heaven He will one day return for His bride, the church.

Don't Lose Hope

¹ Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, ² so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God. ³ For the time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry. ⁴ With respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you; ⁵ but they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. ⁶ For this is why the gospel was preached even to those who are dead, that though judged in the flesh the way people are, they might live in the spirit the way God does. – 1 Peter 4:1-6 ESV

Peter has pulled out the big guns, choosing to use Jesus as the consummate example of suffering for the sake of righteousness. In fact, according to Peter, Jesus Christ “suffered once for sins, **the righteous for the unrighteous**, that he might bring us to God” (1 Peter 3:18 ESV). As the sinless Son of God, Jesus willingly laid down His life so that sinful humanity might be reconciled to God. He offered Himself as the unblemished Lamb of God and allowed His blood to be poured out as the once-for-all sacrifice that would offer permanent cleansing from sin. And because Jesus accomplished the will of His Heavenly Father by giving His life as a ransom for many (Matthew 20:8), He was resurrected back to life and now sits “at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him” (1 Peter 3:22 ESV).

Jesus suffered and died but was resurrected and glorified. He paid the high price for mankind’s sin debt with His own life and, as a result, He was returned to His former glorified state and restored to His well-deserved position at His Father’s side. The fact that Jesus was resurrected and restored to His former pre-incarnate state is to be understood as proof of the effectiveness of His sacrifice. His death satisfied the just demands of His holy and fully righteous Father. The apostle Paul puts it this way:

...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. – Romans 3:23-26 ESV

Jesus’ suffering and death allowed God to remain just and loving at the same time. Because of His holiness, God had to punish sin. He couldn’t turn a blind eye or act as if it never happened. Mankind’s rebellion against His rule and reign had to be dealt with. But because God is love, He wanted to provide a way to acquit sinful men and women of their crimes against Him. That is where Jesus came in, and He described His one-of-a-kind role in unequivocal terms.

“For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. God sent his Son into the world

not to judge the world, but to save the world through him.” – John 3:16-17 NLT

And Jesus went on to explain that all those who refused to accept Him as God’s substitutionary sacrifice on their behalf would find themselves remaining under the just wrath and condemnation of God Almighty.

“There is no judgment against anyone who believes in him. But anyone who does not believe in him has already been judged for not believing in God’s one and only Son.” – John 3:18 NLT

And Peter uses the selfless sacrifice of Jesus as a powerful source of motivation for his readers. He reminds them, “since Christ suffered physical pain, you must arm yourselves with the same attitude he had, and be ready to suffer, too” (1 Peter 4:1 NLT). Peter wanted them to know that their suffering for the sake of righteousness was actually proof of their reconciliation with God. They had aligned themselves with Jesus Christ and were suffering the consequences of their decision. They found themselves despised and hated by the world just as Jesus had been.

All throughout his letter, Peter has been very clear that the kind of suffering to which he is referring is that which is associated with doing what is right.

*For God is pleased when, conscious of his will, you patiently endure unjust treatment...if **you suffer for doing good** and endure it patiently, God is pleased with you. – 1 Peter 2:19, 20 NLT*

*For **God called you to do good**, even if it means suffering, just as Christ suffered for you. He is your example, and you must follow in his steps. – 1 Peter 2:21 NLT*

And when the believer suffers for doing what is right and responds in kindness, love, and patient endurance, he or she “has ceased from sin” (1 Peter 4:1 ESV). Rather than lashing out in hate and bitter remonstrations, the Christ-follower is to follow the example of Christ and “do good.” And that unexpected response to undeserved suffering serves as proof of the believer’s status as a redeemed and Spirit-empowered child of God. No longer a slave to sin, that child of God can “live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God” (1 Peter 4:2 ESV). In other words, the one who has placed their faith and hope in Christ and received the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit has the power to say no to sin and yes to God. While they still retain their sinful nature, they don’t have to give in to it. Paul spoke about this capacity to choose right from wrong in his letter to the church in Galatia.

So I say, let the Holy Spirit guide your lives. Then you won’t be doing what your sinful nature craves. The sinful nature wants to do evil, which is just the opposite of what the Spirit wants. And the Spirit gives us desires that are the opposite of what the sinful nature desires. – Galatians 5:16-17 NLT

And Paul went on to point out the powerful influence the Spirit has over the life of the believer.

...the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things! Those who belong to Christ Jesus have nailed the passions and desires of their sinful nature to his cross and crucified them there. Since we are living by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit's leading in every part of our lives. – Galatians 5:22-25 NLT

And that is the very same message Peter is trying to convey to his readers. He wanted them to remember that they were new creations in Christ, equipped with a new capacity to live holy lives in the midst of an unholy and, oftentimes, unjust society. They were surrounded by “godless people” who “enjoy their immorality and lust, their feasting and drunkenness and wild parties, and their terrible worship of idols” (1 Peter 4:3 NLT). But the believers who received Peter’s letter were being reminded that they were free to live distinctively different lives. And when they did, their former friends would be shocked and surprised at their behavior.

...your former friends are surprised when you no longer plunge into the flood of wild and destructive things they do. – 1 Peter 4:4 NLT

But rather than seeking the source of the believers’ transformed lives, these former friends will slander and malign them. Good deeds don’t always produce good responses. Our acts of righteousness can often bring down the wrath of those who misunderstand and misjudge our actions. But Peter encourages his audience to live the fate of these kinds of people to God.

...remember that they will have to face God, who stands ready to judge everyone, both the living and the dead. – 1 Peter 4:5 NLT

His reference to the living and the dead was meant to be a reference to all those who had heard the gospel message but had since died. There were many who had heard the gospel message, believed it, and then went on to experience the judgment of their flesh. In other words, like all human beings, they died. But Peter reminds his readers of the part of the gospel message that makes it “good news.”

...although they were destined to die like all people, they now live forever with God in the Spirit. – 1 Peter 4:6 NLT

Peter was emphasizing the reality that every human being will one day stand before God. His concern was that those to whom he wrote would remain faithful to their calling and committed to following the example of Jesus. Their future reward was secure. And while they might suffer in this life, they could remain confident in God’s promise of their eternal security.

Now we live with great expectation, and we have a priceless inheritance—an inheritance that is kept in heaven for you, pure and undefiled, beyond the reach of change and

decay. And through your faith, God is protecting you by his power until you receive this salvation, which is ready to be revealed on the last day for all to see. – 1 Peter 1:3-5 NLT

Work While You Wait

⁷ *The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers.* ⁸ *Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.* ⁹ *Show hospitality to one another without grumbling.* ¹⁰ *As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace:* ¹¹ *whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.* — 1 Peter 4:7-11 ESV

One thought that Peter and the other apostles couldn't get out of their heads was the words Jesus had spoken to them not long before He left them.

*"Don't let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, and trust also in me. There is more than enough room in my Father's home. If this were not so, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? When everything is ready, **I will come and get you, so that you will always be with me where I am.** And you know the way to where I am going."* — John 14:1-4 NLT

While they didn't fully understand the gist of His message at the time, the promise contained in it had stayed with them. And their eager anticipation of His return can be found throughout their writings. Peter clearly reveals his belief that Jesus' return, which will signal the end of this age, could not be far away: "The end of all things is at hand" (1 Peter 4:7 ESV). But he was not alone in that estimation. James wrote:

You, too, must be patient. Take courage, for the coming of the Lord is near. — James 5:8 NLT

The apostle Paul, writing with equal intensity and eager anticipation, put it this way:

This is all the more urgent, for you know how late it is; time is running out. Wake up, for our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is almost gone; the day of salvation will soon be here. — Romans 13:11-12 NLT

John understood that the Antichrist and the persecution he would bring would precede the return of Christ. He could sense the increasing intensity of persecution and suffering in the world and believed that the end was nearing.

Dear children, the last hour is here. You have heard that the Antichrist is coming, and already many such antichrists have appeared. From this we know that the last hour has come. — 1 John 2:18 NLT

And the author of the book of Hebrews encouraged his readers to eagerly await the return of Christ.

And just as each person is destined to die once and after that comes judgment,²⁸ so also Christ was offered once for all time as a sacrifice to take away the sins of many people. He will come again, not to deal with our sins, but to bring salvation to all who are eagerly waiting for him. – Hebrews 9:27-28 NLT

Each of these men lived with a sense of anticipation and expectation. They understood that the return of the Lord was a vital part of God’s redemptive plan. As Paul put it, “the day of salvation” was tied directly to the second coming of Jesus. His return was an essential and non-negotiable requirement for the Kingdom to be restored, and each of these men still longed to see that happen in their lifetimes. Jesus’ departure had delayed but not diminished their hopes. He had promised to return, and they believed Him.

“I am leaving you with a gift—peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don’t be troubled or afraid. Remember what I told you: I am going away, but I will come back to you again. If you really loved me, you would be happy that I am going to the Father, who is greater than I am. I have told you these things before they happen so that when they do happen, you will believe.” – John 14:27-29 NLT

At the time Peter wrote his letter, the apostle John had not yet received his vision from God that eventually produced the book of Revelation. Late in his life, John found himself living on the desolate island of Patmos. He had been exiled there by the Roman Emperor as a punishment for his continued promotion of “the Way” – the derogatory name used by the Romans to refer to the Jewish sect that still followed the martyred Rabbi, Jesus. But as John sat imprisoned on Patmos, he was given a divinely inspired vision of the future, delivered to him by an angel of God.

This is a revelation from Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants the events that must soon take place. He sent an angel to present this revelation to his servant John, who faithfully reported everything he saw. This is his report of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. – Revelation 1:1-2 NLT

Notice that he too believed that the things he saw and later recorded would “soon take place.” John was not given a detailed timeline for the events described in the revelation he received from Jesus. But it seems clear that he believed he would live to witness their arrival. And, once again, he was given ample reason to reach that conclusion when he heard and wrote down the last words Jesus spoke in his vision.

He who testifies to these things says, “Surely I am coming soon.” – Revelation 22:20 ESV

John and his fellow apostles lived with a deep longing to see their Savior again. They had been faithful to fulfill the commission He had given them and had taken the gospel of the Kingdom to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). The size of the church had increased significantly but so had the persecution. And these 1st-Century saints found

motivation and determination in the promise of Christ's return. They lived with the end in mind.

That's why Peter told his readers to "be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers" (1 Peter 4:7 ESV). According to Peter, the end of all things was close at hand. In other words, the return of Christ was imminent. It could happen at any moment. Peter knew that his readers were undergoing intense persecution and it would be easy for them to become fixated on their circumstances and lose hope. So, he called them to refocus their attention on the promise of Christ's return. This was going to require that they think clearly and evaluate their circumstances soundly. The apostle Paul encouraged the believers in Colossae to have the same kind of attitude about life.

Since you have been raised to new life with Christ, set your sights on the realities of heaven, where Christ sits in the place of honor at God's right hand. Think about the things of heaven, not the things of earth. For you died to this life, and your real life is hidden with Christ in God. And when Christ, who is your life, is revealed to the whole world, you will share in all his glory. – Colossians 3:1-4 NLT

A clear-headed understanding of Christ's place of power and prominence at God's right hand would result in a much-needed reminder of His sovereign control over all things, including their suffering and persecution. Nothing they would endure in this life would prevent their experience of eternal life. But, as Peter warns, the failure to think clearly about the present and the future would negatively influence their prayer lives. When believers lose sight of the goal, their prayers become focused on their present problems and their hope for the immediate gratification of their desires. This life becomes all there is. That's why Paul said, "set your sights on the realities of heaven."

It was Jesus who provided His disciples with a model prayer designed to refocus their petitions to God.

"When you pray, don't babble on and on as the Gentiles do. They think their prayers are answered merely by repeating their words again and again. Don't be like them, for your Father knows exactly what you need even before you ask him! Pray like this:

*Our Father in heaven,
may your name be kept holy.
May your Kingdom come soon.
May your will be done on earth,
as it is in heaven." – Matthew 6:7-10 NLT*

Even Jesus promoted a future-minded mentality. It is by focusing on the reality of the future, as prescribed by God, that believers can make sense of the present. Jesus went on to encourage prayers for daily provision, forgiveness, and protection from temptation. But all these requests

are intended to provide the endurance necessary to survive in this world while waiting for the next. They are focused on the end.

But Peter went on to encourage a lifestyle marked by grace-based love, complaint-free hospitality, and a God-glorifying use of their spiritual gifts. They were to love as they had been loved by God. They were to open their hearts and homes, providing the same gracious and warm welcome into the family of God that they had received. And they were to use the gifts given to them by the Spirit of God to bless the people of God. As they waited for the return of the Lord, they were to remain busy about the business of doing good.

So let's not get tired of doing what is good. At just the right time we will reap a harvest of blessing if we don't give up. Therefore, whenever we have the opportunity, we should do good to everyone—especially to those in the family of faith. – Galatians 6:9-10 NLT

No Surprises Here

¹² *Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.* ¹³ *But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.* ¹⁴ *If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.* – 1 Peter 4:12-14 ESV

Peter continues to encourage his readers to see their trials as a form of purification, a refining process that God was using to prove the quality and genuineness of their faith. These tests were for their benefit, not God's. The Almighty knew their hearts and needed no proof to determine the legitimacy of their faith. But He also knew that the very presence of trials in their lives was causing them to doubt and reconsider their faith. That is why Peter repeats the message he delivered earlier in his letter.

So be truly glad. There is wonderful joy ahead, even though you must endure many trials for a little while. These trials will show that your faith is genuine. It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold—though your faith is far more precious than mere gold. So when your faith remains strong through many trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honor on the day when Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world. – 1 Peter 1:6-7
NLT

Their Spirit-empowered capacity to endure the sufferings they faced would actually end up strengthening their faith and result in their future glorification and commendation by God.

Peter lovingly rebukes them for allowing the presence of trials to surprise or shock them. He tells them, “don't be **surprised** at the fiery trials you are going through” (1 Peter 4:12 NLT). And he incorporated the same Greek word he had used earlier when referring to those who were attacking them.

*...your former friends are **surprised** when you no longer plunge into the flood of wild and destructive things they do. So they slander you.* – 1 Peter 4:4 NLT

The non-believers whom these Christians used to consider as friends had been blown away by their change in behavior. They had thought their conversions would be short-lived and they would lose their enthusiasm for this strange sect called “the Way.” And the Christians' commitment to their faith had left their friends surprised and angered. It's likely that their pagan friends felt judged and convicted by their new way of life. Some were probably jealous of the new relationships they had developed. So, they lashed out in anger and resentment, belittling their so-called Savior and His sad band of gullible followers.

But Peter continued to remind his brothers and sisters in Christ to live with the end in mind. They had reason to rejoice because their future was secure.

...rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. – 1 Peter 4:13 ESV

From Peter's perspective, it was a joy to share in the sufferings of Christ. His friend and Savior had endured rejection, ridicule, and, ultimately, death – all so that sinful mankind could be made right with God. Peter had denied His Lord and Savior but had been given a second chance to prove his fealty and faith. And he was willing to endure any degree of suffering that might come his way because he longed to identify himself with every aspect of Jesus' life. The apostle Paul shared this same perspective.

I want to know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised him from the dead. I want to suffer with him, sharing in his death, so that one way or another I will experience the resurrection from the dead! – Philippians 3:10-11 NLT

Both men understood that Jesus' suffering and death were just as much a part of His redemptive story as His resurrection and glorification. There would have been no resurrection without suffering and death. The path to Jesus' glorification had to pass through Calvary and included the shame and humiliation of the cross. So, for Peter and Paul, it was ridiculous to think that their life journeys would be devoid of suffering and pain. Jesus had warned them: "Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows" (John 16:33 NLT). But He had gone on to assure them: "But take heart, because I have overcome the world" (John 16:33 NLT).

And the apostle Paul would make this promise of suffering and eventual victory a permanent part of his missionary message. When he and Barnabas passed through Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch of Pisidia, they strengthened the believers living in those pagan communities.

They encouraged them to continue in the faith, reminding them that we must suffer many hardships to enter the Kingdom of God. – Acts 14:23 NLT

Our entrance into the Kingdom was made possible through Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross. But the path to the Kingdom was not going to be easy. The prophet Isaiah wrote:

...there will be a highway called the Way of Holiness. The unclean will not travel it—only those who walk in the Way—and fools will not stray onto it. – Isaiah 35:8 BSB

In this life, we are called to live the "Way of Holiness," a radical lifestyle of sold-out commitment to God and His ways. We are expected to live distinctively different lives, reflecting our unique status as His adopted sons and daughters. And even Jesus warned that the path to our future inheritance would be marked by difficulties and distractions.

"You can enter God's Kingdom only through the narrow gate. The highway to hell is broad, and its gate is wide for the many who choose that way. But the gateway to life is very narrow and the road is difficult, and only a few ever find it." – Matthew 7:13-14 NLT

But we have been given all the resources we need to remain on the path and to reach our final destination. At times, we will experience loneliness as we make our way. The path we have chosen is not the popular or well-traveled one. There will be plenty of distracting detours. We will find ourselves running out of steam and tempted to give up. But the author of Hebrews provides us with some much-needed words of encouragement.

...let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us. We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now he is seated in the place of honor beside God's throne. Think of all the hostility he endured from sinful people; then you won't become weary and give up. After all, you have not yet given your lives in your struggle against sin. – Hebrews 12:1-4 NLT

And the apostle Paul provided his own version of the same sage advice.

Don't you realize that in a race everyone runs, but only one person gets the prize? So run to win! All athletes are disciplined in their training. They do it to win a prize that will fade away, but we do it for an eternal prize. So I run with purpose in every step. I am not just shadowboxing. I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should. – 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 NLT

Each of these New Testament authors was attempting to motivate those whom God had placed under their care. Like Peter, they shared a commitment to “make disciples” and not just followers. They were well aware that the walk of faith was difficult because they were experiencing it themselves. But they also knew that the future rewards for present faithfulness made any difficulties in this life pale in comparison. That is why Peter reminded his readers:

If you are insulted because you bear the name of Christ, you will be blessed, for the glorious Spirit of God rests upon you. – 1 Peter 4:14 NLT

Peter wanted them to grasp the remarkable reality that God had placed His Holy Spirit within each of them. And as Paul told the believers in Ephesus, the Spirit's presence was to be understood as proof of our future glorification.

The Spirit is God's guarantee that he will give us the inheritance he promised and that he has purchased us to be his own people. He did this so we would praise and glorify him. – Ephesians 1:14 NLT

The Spirit of God is meant to be a kind of down-payment from God that reserves and preserves our future place in His coming Kingdom. So, while we may suffer in this life, we can rest assured that we will enjoy peace, joy, and pleasure forevermore in the life to come.

You will show me the way of life, granting me the joy of your presence and the pleasures of living with you forever. – Psalm 16:11 NLT

Self-Inflicted Suffering

¹⁵ But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. ¹⁶ Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name.

¹⁷ For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? ¹⁸ And

*“If the righteous is scarcely saved,
what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?”*

¹⁹ Therefore let those who suffer according to God’s will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good. – 1 Peter 4:15-19 ESV

As a student of human nature, Peter felt the need to address the topic of self-inflicted suffering. He knew from his own experience that not all suffering was for righteousness’ sake. His three-part denial of Jesus in the courtyard of the high priest had resulted in a period of prolonged emotional suffering. The shame and humiliation he bore for having denied the one very whom he had confessed to being the Messiah had left him devastated and demoralized. And he did not want his brothers and sisters in Christ to confuse suffering for the sake of sin with suffering for the sake of righteousness. That’s why he told them:

...remember that the heavenly Father to whom you pray has no favorites. He will judge or reward you according to what you do. So you must live in reverent fear of him during your time here as “temporary residents.” – 1 Peter 1:17 NLT

The whole point of Peter’s letter was to encourage godly living among those who were privileged to be called the sons and daughters of God. He had been very clear regarding his expectation of their behavior.

God called you to do good, even if it means suffering, just as Christ suffered for you. – 1 Peter 2:21 NLT

To do good was to emulate the character of Christ Himself. It was to live as Christ lived. And that kind of selfless, obedient, and righteous lifestyle would result in suffering. It wasn’t a matter of *if*, but of *when*. Those who followed Christ would experience the same resistance and rejection that He did. Their attempts to spread the gospel of the kingdom and demonstrate its power through their own reconciled lives would be met with hatred and hostility. But Peter reminded them, “if you suffer for doing good and endure it patiently, God is pleased with you” (1 Peter 2:20 NLT).

Suffering was inevitable. But Peter wanted his readers to know that there were two different causes for suffering, and they were not to be confused. Living for Christ was a sure-fire way to experience suffering. The world hated Him, and it would hate His own. But Peter reminded the recipients of his letter “if you suffer for doing what is right, God will reward you for it. So don’t

worry or be afraid of their threats” (1 Peter 3:14 NLT). Righteous suffering in this life would be graciously rewarded in the next one.

But every minute of every day, believers are faced with the constant decision to choose right or wrong. They must decide whether they will live in the flesh or according to the power of the Holy Spirit. They can choose to live in obedience to God and suffer the rejection and ridicule of the world, or they can choose to compromise their convictions and live according to their old sinful nature. But that decision will also result in suffering.

Remember, it is better to suffer for doing good, if that is what God wants, than to suffer for doing wrong! – 1 Peter 3:17 NLT

Sinful decisions always produce sinful consequences. But when believers choose to live in disobedience to God’s will, their choices result in God’s loving discipline.

*“My child, don’t make light of the Lord’s discipline,
and don’t give up when he corrects you.
For the Lord disciplines those he loves,
and he punishes each one he accepts as his child.” – Hebrews 12:5-6 NLT*

After quoting from the Old Testament book of Proverbs, the author of Hebrews went on to explain, “If God doesn’t discipline you as he does all of his children, it means that you are illegitimate and are not really his children at all” (Hebrews 12:8 NLT). The loving discipline of God can be painful, but it is a reminder of His love. Yet Peter would prefer that his believing friends avoid that kind of painful discipline by staying away from such things as “murder, stealing, making trouble, or prying into other people’s affairs” (1 Peter 4:15 NLT).

It is not clear why Peter chose to list these four particular sins. But each of them reflects a decision to do harm to another individual. They are inherently selfish sins that show no care or concern for the other person. Peter seems to be describing four different ways of life: That of a murderer, a thief, a troublemaker, or a meddler. These four ungodly pursuits stand in stark contrast to the life of a Christian. Those who practice such behavior deserve to suffer and bring shame upon themselves – even among the unbelieving world. “But it is no shame to suffer for being a Christian” (1 Peter 4:16 NLT). A murderer will not only suffer the penalty for his crime but he will have to endure the added pain of public shame. He will get what he deserves.

But while a Christian might suffer for doing what is good, he will have no reason to be ashamed. He can hold his head high because he is doing the will of his Heavenly Father. He is following in the footsteps of Jesus.

One of the things Peter wants his readers to understand is that their suffering is relegated to this life. As long as they live in this world, they will be “temporary residents and foreigners” (1 Peter 2:11 NLT), and they will experience the unpleasant reality of living as strangers in a

strange land. But their eternal future will be suffering-free. Paul gave a similar admonition to the believers in Corinth.

For our present troubles are small and won't last very long. Yet they produce for us a glory that vastly outweighs them and will last forever! So we don't look at the troubles we can see now; rather, we fix our gaze on things that cannot be seen. For the things we see now will soon be gone, but the things we cannot see will last forever. – 2 Corinthians 4:17-18 NLT

And Paul told the believers in Rome the very same thing.

And since we are his children, we are his heirs. In fact, together with Christ we are heirs of God's glory. But if we are to share his glory, we must also share his suffering. Yet what we suffer now is nothing compared to the glory he will reveal to us later. – Romans 8:17-18 NLT

And Jesus told His disciples, “There is no judgment against anyone who believes in him. But anyone who does not believe in him has already been judged for not believing in God’s one and only Son” (John 3:18 NLT). For the believer, the future holds no judgment or suffering. Yet, for all those who refuse to accept Jesus as their Savior, the future is one of judgment and eternal suffering. That is why Peter states, “what terrible fate awaits those who have never obeyed God’s Good News” (1 Peter 4:17 NLT).

Peter understood the reality of God’s coming judgment against sinful mankind. He alluded to the fact that we live in a time of judgment. As Jesus stated, mankind lives under the righteous wrath of God and already stands judged and condemned by Him. Their only hope is to be found in Jesus. But rather than turning to Him in faith, they were turning their hatred of Him on His followers. It was just as Jesus had said it would be.

“The world would love you as one of its own if you belonged to it, but you are no longer part of the world. I chose you to come out of the world, so it hates you.” – John 15:19 NLT

The world is “judging” God’s people. That is what Peter means when he writes, “the time has come for judgment, and it must begin with God’s household” (1 Peter 4:17 NLT). The sinful are judging the righteous. But the day is coming when the Righteous One will judge the sinful. All those who have refused to accept the gracious gift of salvation made possible through the sacrificial death of Jesus will face the Great White Throne Judgment and an eternity marked by suffering and pain.

Peter paraphrases Psalm 11:31 in an attempt to illustrate the difficulty with which the believer must navigate from this life to the next. It will not be easy. We are “barely saved” in the sense that our future glorification is preceded by suffering and pain in this life. Again, Peter’s

emphasis is on present suffering and future glorification. This is exactly what Jesus was referring to in His Sermon on the Mount.

“For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.” – Matthew 7:14 ESV

Peter is unsparing in his disclosure that this life will not be easy for the follower of Christ. It will be marked by pain and suffering. But we are to remember that all our suffering takes place this side of glory. For us, eternity is suffering and judgment-free.

“He will dwell with them. They will be His people, and God Himself will be with them as their God. ‘He will wipe away every tear from their eyes,’ and there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the former things have passed away.” – Revelation 21:3-4 BSB

So, that is why Peter was able to provide his readers with the following words of encouragement.

So if you are suffering in a manner that pleases God, keep on doing what is right, and trust your lives to the God who created you, for he will never fail you. – 1 Peter 4:19 NLT

You can suffer now or you can suffer later. For the believer, the choice is a simple one. It makes much more sense to suffer the momentary light afflictions of this life, knowing that there will be no more pain, suffering, or judgment in the life to come.

Shepherding Has Its Rewards

¹ So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: ² shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; ³ not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. ⁴ And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. – 1 Peter 5:1-4 ESV

At the end of the day, Peter was a highly practical man who knew that theology alone was not enough to help his readers navigate the uncertain cultural waters in which they found themselves. They were drowning in a sea of competing ideologies that stood diametrically opposed to the gospel of Jesus Christ. And their status as followers of Christ made them a tempting target for all those who viewed them as a threat to the prevailing status quo. So, Peter went out of his way to apply the promises contained in the Scriptures with the theological lessons found in the life and ministry of Jesus. Peter was a faithful shepherd who cared deeply about the everyday needs of his flock and was determined to help them apply the hope of their future inheritance to their present circumstances.

At this point in his letter, Peter focused his attention on the elders whom God had appointed to shepherd the local fellowships to whom Peter had addressed his letter. All throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, there were individual gatherings of believers that were being shepherded by faithful men. These men played a vital role in guiding and protecting the men and women who were being “grieved by various trials” (1 Peter 1:6 ESV). Since many of these believers were still relative infants in Christ, they were not yet spiritually mature enough to understand and endure the difficulties they were encountering. And that’s why the elders were so vital to the health and overall well-being of each local church.

This rather brief parenthetical statement was aimed at those men who shared Peter’s role as a God-appointed elder in the church of Jesus Christ. He had even opened his letter with the salutation: “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ...” (1 Peter 1:1 ESV). He presented himself “as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ” (1 Peter 5:1 ESV). Along with sharing their distinctive role as an elder, he brought the added weight of having been a personal eye-witness to the suffering and death of Jesus. In a sense, he was establishing his official status as an apostle of Jesus.

He had been there the day that Jesus had been crucified and killed. But, not only that, Peter had plenty of first-hand experience when it came to the topic of suffering. Ever since the Holy Spirit had come on the day of Pentecost, Peter had faithfully preached the gospel of the kingdom and been rewarded with arrest, imprisonment, interrogation, and even disciplinary beatings. He knew what it was like to suffer for the sake of righteousness. And he was calling the local elders to step up their game and lead by example. They too would one day be partakers “in the glory that is going to be revealed” (1 Peter 5:1 ESV). Any suffering they had to

endure in this life would be well worth it once Jesus appeared in all His glory at the end of the age.

So, with that hope ringing in the ears, Peter challenges his fellow elders to shepherd well.

Care for the flock that God has entrusted to you. Watch over it willingly, not grudgingly—not for what you will get out of it, but because you are eager to serve God.
– 1 Peter 5:2 NLT

Like any good shepherd, they were to do their job willingly and not out of some sense of heartless duty. Shepherding was to be viewed as a privilege and not a job. They were to care for the flock of Jesus Christ with compassion and love, not out of greed or for personal gain.

It was Jesus who used Himself as an example of the “good shepherd.” He was a caring and completely selfless shepherd who put the needs of the flock ahead of His own – even to the point of laying down His life for the sheep.

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd sacrifices his life for the sheep. A hired hand will run when he sees a wolf coming. He will abandon the sheep because they don’t belong to him and he isn’t their shepherd. And so the wolf attacks them and scatters the flock. The hired hand runs away because he’s working only for the money and doesn’t really care about the sheep.” – John 10:11-13 NLT

And Peter wanted these local shepherds to remain at their posts, refusing to run at the first sign of trouble. Their ministry as shepherds was to be marked by a deep desire to serve God, and it was to manifest itself in a determination to stand beside the flock even in the face of life-threatening circumstances. They must be willing to lay down their lives just as Jesus had done for them. By following His example, they would become examples to their flock. And Peter reminded them that there would be a reward for their faithful service.

...when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. – 1 Peter 5:4 ESV

All this discussion of sheep and shepherds was near and dear to Peter’s heart because he couldn’t help but view it through the lens of his own experience. Even as he wrote these words, he must have had a fateful scene from his past in mind. It was after the resurrection of Jesus from the dead when Peter had a face-to-face encounter with the one whom he had earlier denied even knowing.

After breakfast Jesus asked Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?”

“Yes, Lord,” Peter replied, “you know I love you.”

“Then feed my lambs,” Jesus told him.

Jesus repeated the question: “Simon son of John, do you love me?”

“Yes, Lord,” Peter said, “you know I love you.”

“Then take care of my sheep,” Jesus said.

A third time he asked him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?”

Peter was hurt that Jesus asked the question a third time. He said, “Lord, you know everything. You know that I love you.”

Jesus said, “Then feed my sheep.” – John 21:15-17 NLT

Jesus had handed over to Peter the responsibility of caring for His sheep. And that was not something Peter took lightly or for granted. Peter had denied Jesus three separate times, but now Jesus had pressed him to confirm his love three times. And Jesus explained that the way for Peter to prove His love for Him would be by loving and caring for His sheep. And that is exactly what Peter charged these elders to do.

Peter’s mention of the “unfading crown of glory” seems to be for motivation. It is intended as an incentive to do their jobs well in this life because there is a reward to come in the next life. But it is unlikely that Peter is referring to a literal crown. He is talking about the eschatological reward of eternal life in the Kingdom of God. It is the same reward he mentioned in the opening chapter of his letter.

*...an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you. –
1 Peter 1:4 ESV*

The greatest “crowning” achievement of these men will be their faithful carrying out of their role as God’s humble and obedient shepherds. And their reward will be the joy of living in the Kingdom of God – for eternity.

Even if their reward ends up being a literal crown, the book of Revelation reveals that, in the coming Kingdom, no one will stand before God glorying in their own achievements. Instead, they will recognize that all glory and honor goes to God alone.

Whenever the living beings give glory and honor and thanks to the one sitting on the throne (the one who lives forever and ever), the twenty-four elders fall down and worship the one sitting on the throne (the one who lives forever and ever). And they lay their crowns before the throne and say,

*“You are worthy, O Lord our God,
to receive glory and honor and power.
For you created all things,
and they exist because you created what you pleased.”* – Revelation 4:9-11 NLT

The greatest reward any of us can receive is to live in the presence of God forever. Anything else will pale in comparison.

The Heights of Humility

⁵ Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”

⁶ Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, ⁷ casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. – 1 Peter 5:5-7 ESV

The church needs godly leadership. So, Peter called on the elders of the local congregations in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia to step up and do their God-appointed duty well.

Care for the flock that God has entrusted to you. Watch over it willingly, not grudgingly—not for what you will get out of it, but because you are eager to serve God.
– 1 Peter 5:2 NLT

But Peter knew it was almost impossible to lead those who refused to follow. That’s why he turned his attention to the members of those local congregations and urged them to live lives of humble submission and obedience, graciously and willingly submitting themselves to their elders and to one another. And he began by addressing the young men who, in every generation, sometimes find submission to authority to be a difficult and distasteful proposition. Naturally headstrong and strongly independent, young men inherently desire to come out from under the authority of their elders. They want to sow their oats, captain their own ship, and operate as the masters of their own fates. But Peter challenged them to “accept the authority of the elders” (1 Peter 5:5 NLT).

Peter knew that the health of the church was dependent upon the willingness of its members to lovingly submit to one another. There was no place for competition within the body of Christ. While the church requires a God-ordained hierarchy of leadership, there is no excuse for attitudes of superiority or favoritism. Paul addressed the unique nature of the body of Christ in his first letter to believers living in the city of Corinth.

The human body has many parts, but the many parts make up one whole body. So it is with the body of Christ. – 1 Corinthians 12:12 NLT

He went on to use the human body as an apt illustration of the spiritual body of Christ – the church.

Yes, the body has many different parts, not just one part. If the foot says, “I am not a part of the body because I am not a hand,” that does not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear says, “I am not part of the body because I am not an eye,” would that make it any less a part of the body? If the whole body were an eye, how would you hear? Or if your whole body were an ear, how would you smell anything? – 1 Corinthians 12:14-17 NLT

Each part of the body is necessary and serves its own unique purpose. It is only as they function in harmony that they all enjoy the mutual benefits inherent in their relationship. And the same is true of the church. That is why Paul insisted, “our bodies have many parts, and God has put each part just where he wants it” (1 Corinthians 12:18 NLT). Yes, there are those who are designated as elder and teachers, but that does not mean they have greater value or worth. It is as each member of the body of Christ learns to utilize its unique attributes for the benefit of the whole, that the church grows and thrives. And Paul insisted that it was all of God’s divine plan.

So God has put the body together such that extra honor and care are given to those parts that have less dignity. This makes for harmony among the members, so that all the members care for each other. – 1 Corinthians 12:24-25 NLT

Having addressed the younger generation within the church, Peter expanded the circumference of his message by including every “part” of the body.

...all of you, dress yourselves in humility as you relate to one another, for

*“God opposes the proud
but gives grace to the humble.” – 1 Peter 5:5 NLT*

According to Peter, every member of a local congregation had the responsibility to adorn themselves with an attitude of humility. No one was to view themselves as irreplaceable or indispensable. An elder, while holding a leadership position within the body of Christ, was expected to be a servant of all. Every individual within a local fellowship was to maintain a humble evaluation of themselves. The apostle Paul put it a bit more bluntly.

I give each of you this warning: Don’t think you are better than you really are. Be honest in your evaluation of yourselves, measuring yourselves by the faith God has given us. Just as our bodies have many parts and each part has a special function, so it is with Christ’s body. We are many parts of one body, and we all belong to each other. – Romans 12:3-5 NLT

Peter was paraphrasing Proverbs 3:34 when he wrote “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” And James did the same thing in the letter that bears his name.

As the Scriptures say,

*“God opposes the proud
but gives grace to the humble.”*

So humble yourselves before God. – James 4:6-7 NLT

Humility is a non-negotiable characteristic of a Christ-follower. That's why Paul told the believers in Philippi:

Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too.

You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had. – Philippians 2:3-5 NLT

And Paul went on to describe exactly what kind of attitude Jesus had.

*...he gave up his divine privileges;
he took the humble position of a slave
and was born as a human being.
When he appeared in human form,
he humbled himself in obedience to God
and died a criminal's death on a cross.* – Philippians 2:7-8 NLT

Jesus was the Son of God and, yet He did not think of Himself as too good to take on human flesh and live among sinful humanity. The co-creator of the entire universe willingly left His Father's side and entered this world as the servant of all. He was the suffering servant and the good shepherd, who laid down His life for the sheep. And we are to follow His example. We are to share His mindset of humility and selfless service.

And with Jesus as the prime example, Peter urges his readers: "So humble yourselves under the mighty power of God, and at the right time he will lift you up in honor" (1 Peter 5:6 NLT). Slaves who submitted to their masters, wives who lived in loving submission to their husbands, husbands who submissively and sacrificially served their wives, and individual Christians who willingly submitted to one another would each be submitting to God. And He would eventually reward them just as He had rewarded His Son. Which is exactly what Paul had written about our humble and selfless Savior.

*Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honor
and gave him the name above all other names,
that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.* – Philippians 2:9-11 NLT

As Peter states earlier, God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. His grace is our reward. The grace of the gospel, made possible by the selfless sacrifice of Jesus rewards us with salvation, forgiveness, sanctification, and, ultimately, our future glorification. We can look forward to a future reward that will include eternal life in His unshakeable Kingdom.

Since we are receiving a Kingdom that is unshakable, let us be thankful and please God by worshiping him with holy fear and awe. – Hebrews 12:28 NLT

Peter wanted his readers to live humbly, sacrificially, selflessly, and expectantly. Yes, they would suffer in this life. And yes, they were expected to live submissively in this life. And yet, one day, their humility will be richly rewarded.

An Expectation of Exaltation

⁸ Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. ⁹ Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. ¹⁰ And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. ¹¹ To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen. – 1 Peter 5:8-11 ESV

As children of God, we will always find ourselves at odds with this world. As Peter reminded his readers, the status of every Christ-follower is that of a sojourner or exile in this world. We are citizens of another Kingdom, with allegiances to God that will create a constant source of conflict between ourselves and the citizens of this world. Even Jesus warned the disciples that the world would hate them.

*“If the world hates you, be aware that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, the world would love you as its own. However, because you do not belong to the world, but I chose you out of the world, **for this reason the world hates you.**”* – John 15:18-19 NLT

Not only that, but in John 10:10, Jesus alludes to the ongoing animosity we can expect from Satan: “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy.” He too, hates us, and is out to make our life on this earth as miserable as possible. His life’s mission is to distract and dissuade us from following the will of our heavenly Father, just as he did with Adam and Eve in the garden. He is a deceiver, the accuser of the brethren, and an angel of light, who subtly misleads the people of God with half-truths and convincing arguments that lead to nothing but spiritual death. So, Peter warns his readers to be sober-minded and watchful.

We live in dangerous times, and Satan, like a hungry lion, stalks the world looking for easy prey to devour. Like any predator, he will focus on the weak and defenseless first. But that doesn’t mean he will ignore the spiritually mature. He loves nothing more than destroying the witness of those who are in positions of spiritual authority, such as elders, pastors and teachers. He studies our habits and takes note of our spiritual flaws and weaknesses. It is when we think we are invulnerable, that we are the most susceptible to his attacks. Paul put it this way: “If you think you are standing strong, be careful not to fall” (1 Corinthians 10:12 NLT). It’s why he told the Ephesians:

Put on all of God’s armor so that you will be able to stand firm against all strategies of the devil. For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places. – Ephesians 6:11-12 NLT

Peter encourages his readers to be sober-minded. The Greek word he used refers to a state of soberness, the opposite of drunkenness. Someone who is drunk cannot think clearly. They lack the capacity to make wise choices. They are incapable of defending themselves or from causing

harm to themselves. To be sober-minded is to not allow ourselves to be “drunk” on the affairs of life. A sober-minded individual will not willingly allow their mind to come under the influence of someone or something else. And yet, how easy it is to become intoxicated by pleasure, materialism, popularity, money, entertainment, comfort, and any of a number of other distractions in this life. It was Blaise Pascal who wrote of the diversions that that the enemy uses to so easily distract us and tempt us off course.

Diversion. – Men are entrusted from infancy with the care of their honor, their property, their friends, and even with the property and the honor of their friends. They are overwhelmed with business, with the study of languages, and with physical exercise; and they are made to understand that they cannot be happy unless their health, their honor, their fortune, and that of their friends be in good condition, and that a single thing wanting will make them unhappy. Thus, they are given cares and business which make them bustle about from break of day. It is, you will exclaim, a strange way to make them happy! What more could be done to make them miserable? – Indeed! what could be done? We should only have to relieve them from all these cares; for then they would see themselves: they would reflect on what they are, whence they came, whither they go, and thus we cannot employ and divert them too much. And this is why, after having given them so much business, we advise them, if they have some time for relaxation, to employ it in amusement, in play, and to be always fully occupied. How hollow and full of ribaldry is the heart of man! – Blaise Pascal, *Thoughts*

But Peter lets us know that we can resist the enemy, but only if we remain firm in our faith. We don’t do it in our own strength. That’s why the apostle Paul wrote: “Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power” (Ephesians 6:1 NLT).

We don’t fight this battle alone. We do not suffer alone. Peter would have us recognize that this very same spiritual battle is taking place all across the planet, impacting the lives of our brothers and sisters in Christ. Together, we must resist and stand firm. We must remain sober-minded and watchful. And we must constantly remind ourselves that this suffering will not last forever. Suffering has a purpose, and it also has an end. There is a day coming, Peter states, when “after you have suffered a little while, he will restore, support, and strengthen you, and he will place you on a firm foundation” (1 Peter 5:10 NLT).

Remember, this world is not our home. We are sojourners and exiles. One day, God will take us home to be with Him. The suffering will come to an end. The enemy will be defeated once and for all time. Sin will be eliminated, and death will no longer loom over us. We can have hope, even amid our suffering, because God is on our side. Peter started out his letter by reminding those to whom he was writing that God had chosen them. Their relationship with God had been His decision, not their own. Now, at the end of his letter, he states yet again, “In his kindness **God called you** to share in his eternal glory by means of Christ Jesus” (1 Peter 5:10 NLT).

He had chosen them. He had called them. And the end goal was for them to one day share in His eternal glory. So, with that in mind, they were to resist the enemy. They were to stay sober-minded and watchful. They were to stand firm in their faith. God’s choice and calling of them

was secure and their future was set. There was no need to worry or doubt. Their faithful God had their future in His fully capable hands, so they were to resist like it. And the same is true today. All of us who “been born again,” can “live with great expectation,” because “God raised Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Peter 1:3 NLT). And because of that reality, we can rest in the knowledge that “we have a priceless inheritance—an inheritance that is kept in heaven...pure and undefiled, beyond the reach of change and decay” (1 Peter 1:4 NLT).

As a result, we can live with peace, confidence, security, contentment, joy, hope, and full assurance that our inheritance is secure, and our future is unshakeable. Any suffering we endure in this life will be short-lived and incomparable to the glory to come.

So after you have suffered a little while, he will restore, support, and strengthen you, and he will place you on a firm foundation. All power to him forever! Amen. – 1 Peter 5:10-11 NLT

Stand Firm and Stand Together

¹² *By Silvanus, a faithful brother as I regard him, I have written briefly to you, exhorting and declaring that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it.* ¹³ *She who is at Babylon, who is likewise chosen, sends you greetings, and so does Mark, my son.* ¹⁴ *Greet one another with the kiss of love.*

Peace to all of you who are in Christ. – 1 Peter 5:12-14 ESV

Even when attempting to close out his letter, Peter could not refrain from offering one more exhortation to his readers. You can sense his pastor's heart as he expresses his care and concern for their spiritual well-being.

Peter mentions Silvanus, an individual he describes as “a faithful brother.” He is likely the same Silvanus who accompanied Paul on his missionary journeys.

*For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, whom we proclaimed among you, **Silvanus** and Timothy and I, was not Yes and No, but in him it is always Yes.* – 2 Corinthians 1:19 ESV

*Paul, **Silvanus**, and Timothy, to the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace.* – 1 Thessalonians 1:1 ESV

*Paul, **Silvanus**, and Timothy, to the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.* – 2 Thessalonians 1:1 ESV

Silvanus was a Greek name, and its Roman form was Silas. In the book of Acts, Luke mentions Silas 12 different times and describes him as having been an apostolic emissary, carrying an important letter to the Gentile converts to Christianity.

*Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They sent Judas called Barsabbas, and **Silas**, leading men among the brothers, with the following letter... – Acts 15:22-23 ESV*

There has been much debate over the centuries as to what Silvanus' exact role was in regards to this letter. There are some who believe that Silvanus acted as Peter's personal secretary or *amanuensis*. When Peter states, “**By Silvanus...I have written** briefly to you...,” they interpret it to mean that Peter dictated his thoughts to Silvanus, who then wrote the actual letter that was read to the various church throughout Asia Minor. The apostle Paul was known to use this process with some of his letters. In Paul's letter to the Romans, Tertius, his amanuensis, identified himself.

I Tertius, who wrote this letter, greet you in the Lord. – Romans 16:22 ESV

So, it would not have been uncommon or unexpected for Peter to use someone like Silvanus to pen the actual message to the churches. This personal greeting from Peter at the end of the letter would have been a reminder to its readers that its content was from him.

There are others who believe that Silvanus was simply the messenger, chosen by Peter to take the letter to the churches located in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. Peter's reference to Silvanus as "a faithful brother" is meant to identify him as a trustworthy messenger who was carrying an actual letter from the apostle Peter. It was important to Peter that the recipients of the letter also receive Silvanus as more than just an errand boy tasked with hand-delivering Peter's message. He was a proven and faithful co-worker who had served alongside the apostles and would be an invaluable asset to the churches in Asia Minor.

But regardless of whether Silvanus penned Peter's letter or simply delivered it, Peter provided his reason for sending it in the first place.

My purpose in writing is to encourage you and assure you that what you are experiencing is truly part of God's grace for you. – 1 Peter 5:12 NLT

Their suffering for the sake of Christ was all part of God's plan for their lives. Peter describes it as "God's grace" for them – the true grace of God. This is the same grace he had mentioned just a few sentences earlier in his letter.

...after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. – 1 Peter 5:10 ESV

Yes, they were experiencing suffering, just as Jesus had in His earthly life. But Peter wanted them to know that their present suffering would result in their future glorification, just as it had for Jesus. The author of Hebrews provides much-needed encouragement when it comes to facing the trials and difficulties of this life.

...let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us. We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now he is seated in the place of honor beside God's throne. Think of all the hostility he endured from sinful people; then you won't become weary and give up. – Hebrews 12:1-3 NLT

By focusing on the faithful suffering of Jesus and recognizing that His pain was our gain, we are better able to endure the difficulties we face in this life. He is seated in the place of honor beside His Heavenly Father. His suffering resulted in glorification. His humiliating and painful execution was followed by His glorious exaltation. And the same will be true of all those who place their hope and faith in Him. They too will one day be glorified, exalted, and enter into the presence of God Almighty. And Peter reminds his readers that, at that time, God will "restore,

confirm, strengthen, and establish you” (1 Peter 5:10 ESV). That very thought led Peter to exclaim, “To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen” (1 Peter 5:11 ESV).

There was nothing they would face in this life that could remove them from the protective power of God’s grace. He would watch over them and preserve them, guaranteeing that they would one day receive the future inheritance He had ordained for them. This was the very message Peter used to open his letter.

It is by his great mercy that we have been born again, because God raised Jesus Christ from the dead. Now we live with great expectation, and we have a priceless inheritance—an inheritance that is kept in heaven for you, pure and undefiled, beyond the reach of change and decay. And through your faith, God is protecting you by his power until you receive this salvation, which is ready to be revealed on the last day for all to see. – 1 Peter 1:3-5 NLT

Even if their suffering for the sake of Christ was to result in death, they could rest easy knowing that their death would usher them into God’s presence. But should they live and their suffering were to continue, they would see it come to an end with the Lord’s return. Their salvation was guaranteed. Their future was secure. The apostle Paul gave a powerful exhortation to the believers in Corinth, challenging them to never give up.

That is why we never give up. Though our bodies are dying, our spirits are being renewed every day. For our present troubles are small and won’t last very long. Yet they produce for us a glory that vastly outweighs them and will last forever! So we don’t look at the troubles we can see now; rather, we fix our gaze on things that cannot be seen. For the things we see now will soon be gone, but the things we cannot see will last forever. – 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 NLT

He was encouraging them to live with the end in mind, and that was Peter’s point as well. He challenged his readers to “stand firm” in the grace of God. Their Heavenly Father could be trusted. His promises were true, and He always kept His word.

As Peter wraps up his letter, he makes a rather interesting reference to “She who is at Babylon” (1 Peter 5:13 ESV). It is believed that Peter is using the name of the ancient and infamous city of Babylon to refer to Rome. At one time, Babylon had been the 800-pound gorilla in that part of the world, having dominated and defeated the other nations, including Israel. They had terrorized the world, establishing a far-reaching empire that spread their idolatry and immorality as far as the eye could see. And Peter sarcastically refers to Rome as nothing more than the latest version of ancient Babylon. Like Babylon, their 15-minutes of fame would come to an end. But in the meantime, Peter was writing his letter from Rome and sending greetings from the believers who lived right under the nose of the Roman emperor.

Peter refers to these believers as “likewise chosen” by God. This was the way he had addressed the recipients of his letter.

God's chosen people who are living as foreigners in the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. – 1 Peter 1:1 NLT

They were not alone. There were other believers going through the same difficulties.

Remember that your family of believers all over the world is going through the same kind of suffering you are. – 1 Peter 5:9 NLT

These people did not live in the Internet age. They did not have access to social media and instant information. There was no way they could communicate with other believers and know what was going on in other cities or countries. News traveled slowly. And it would be easy for the various churches to assume that their particular difficulties were unique to them. But Peter assured them that their struggles were common to all.

After sending greetings from the church in Rome and from Mark, his ministry companion, Peter encourages the believers in these far-flung churches to “Greet one another with the kiss of love” (1 Peter 5:14 ESV). It would seem odd that Peter was suggesting that the believers in the church located on Pontus should hug and kiss one another. Yes, brotherly love and affection are essential for every local body of believers. But it makes more sense to view Peter as calling on each of these believers, regardless of their location, to express love for their brothers and sisters all across the world. In a sense, Peter was encouraging them to send a “kiss of love” to one another, understanding that distance could not separate them from the other members of their God-ordained family. The Greek word for “greet” is *aspazomai* and it means “to embrace” or “to receive joyfully.” Peter wanted the churches in Asia Minor to see their family as far larger and more significant than just their local congregation. The body of Christ was growing and spreading and, while they could not physically see their brothers and sisters in Christ, they could “greet” them with expressions of love and mutual concern. And they could all share in the peace that was theirs through Jesus Christ.