

2 Peter 1.1 - 11

1. Introduction. What do you recall about Peter?

As we read the Gospel accounts, we see Peter talking when he should have been listening (Matthew 16:21, 22), sleeping when he should have been praying (Mark 14:37), stepping out when he should have held back (John 18:10), and holding back when he should have stepped out (John 13:8).

That's why Peter is such a favorite of mine—I see his characteristics and tendencies in my own walk and history. Maybe you see them in yours as well. But here's the great news, the amazing truth, the glorious fact: Even with all of his failures and denials, even with all of his setbacks and stumbles, Simon made it through.

Why? Because he was such a great guy?

No. Simon made it through because Jesus prayed for him (Luke 22:32). And guess what. The same thing is true of you and me. We're all people who want to do right, but who invariably mess up. We're all people whose spirits are willing, but whose flesh is unbelievably weak. Yet even right now, Jesus knows the temptation we're facing, the fears we're feeling, the questions that are churning. He knows them all, and He's praying for us (Hebrews 7:25)—not because we're worthy, but because He's faithful.

2. How does Peter describe himself?

Peter's descriptions of himself show him to be one under authority and having authority. The term "servant" (δοῦλος, *doulos*) refers not simply to one who serves but to a slave, one whose will is completely subject to another. Peter therefore reminds his readers that his life has been completely given over to Christ. Perhaps his readers are to remember that his life has been one of persecution, hardship, and courage. He has earned the right to be heard. At the same time, he does not hesitate to remind them that as Christians, they have an obligation to accept his teaching. He is a chosen apostle of Jesus, and any readers who may be listening to the false teachers need to be reminded of this fact. The term "apostle" (ἀπόστολος, *apostolos*) in this context refers to the authoritative role first shared by the twelve and later expanded to include other men who were witnesses to Jesus' resurrection. In Ephesians 2:20 Paul mentions apostles first in his ordered list of leaders in the early

church. They were the guarantors of the message of Jesus during the earliest days of the church, and their words in writing (in the New Testament) function in the same way today.

3. The underlying word here is *doulos*—commonly translated “slave.” (See HCSB.) Do you see yourself as a friend of Jesus or a slave of Jesus?

Understanding the difference between being a servant and being a friend of Jesus will make a huge difference in how you experience your grace walk. One creates a heavy sense of duty, and the other gives life to the experience of joyful delight.

Slaves do what they do because they don’t want to make their master angry. Friends do things for each other because they love each other and want to make the other happy because of love. Slaves do the bare minimum to satisfy the boss. Friends go overboard so they can thrill the heart of their companion. Slaves try to keep the rules. Friends don’t live by rules but are motivated by the relationship they have with the one they love.

Do you behave in your relationship to Christ like a slave or a friend? The fact is that He adores you and always will, no matter what you do or how well you do it. Ask Him to help you grow in friendship with Him. As you do, you’ll find your motivation becoming an increasingly joyful one.

4. Do a search for the word “slave” in the New Testament. What other verses can you find?

Scripture’s prevailing description of the Christian’s relationship to Jesus Christ is the slave/master relationship. But do a casual read through your English New Testament and you won’t see it.

The reason for this is as simple as it is shocking: the Greek word for slave has been covered up by being mistranslated in almost every English version—going back to both the King James Version and the Geneva Bible that predated it. Though the word slave (*doulos* in Greek) appears 124 times in the original text, it is correctly translated only once in the King James. Most of our modern translations do only slightly better.¹⁸ It almost seems like a conspiracy.

Instead of translating *doulos* as “slave,” these translations consistently substitute the word servant in its place. Ironically, the Greek language has at least half a dozen words that can mean servant. The word *doulos* is not one of them. Whenever it is used, both in the New Testament and in secular Greek literature, it always and only means slave. According to the Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, a foremost authority on the meaning of Greek terms in Scripture, the word *doulos* is used exclusively “either to describe the status

of a slave or an attitude corresponding to that of a slave.” The dictionary continues by noting that

the meaning is so unequivocal and self-contained that it is superfluous to give examples of the individual terms or to trace the history of the group. . . . [The] emphasis here is always on “serving as a slave.” Hence we have a service which is not a matter of choice for the one who renders it, which he has to perform whether he likes it or not, because he is subject as a slave to an alien will, to the will of his owner. [The term stresses] the slave’s dependence on his lord.

5. Why is it important that we see ourselves as slaves of Christ?

The New Testament reflects this perspective, commanding believers to submit to Christ completely, and not just as hired servants or spiritual employees—but as those who belong wholly to Him. We are told to obey Him without question and follow Him without complaint. Jesus Christ is our Master—a fact we acknowledge every time we call Him “Lord.” We are His slaves, called to humbly and wholeheartedly obey and honor Him.

We don’t hear about that concept much in churches today. In contemporary Christianity the language is anything but slave terminology. It is about success, health, wealth, prosperity, and the pursuit of happiness. We often hear that God loves people unconditionally and wants them to be all they want to be. He wants to fulfill every desire, hope, and dream. Personal ambition, personal fulfillment, personal gratification—these have all become part of the language of evangelical Christianity—and part of what it means to have a “personal relationship with Jesus Christ.” Instead of teaching the New Testament gospel—where sinners are called to submit to Christ—the contemporary message is exactly the opposite: Jesus is here to fulfill all your wishes. Likening Him to a personal assistant or a personal trainer, many churchgoers speak of a personal Savior who is eager to do their bidding and help them in their quest for self-satisfaction or individual accomplishment.

The New Testament understanding of the believer’s relationship to Christ could not be more opposite. He is the Master and Owner. We are His possession. He is the King, the Lord, and the Son of God. We are His subjects and His subordinates.

6. Verse 3. What is the tense of the verb? Why does it matter?

Notice that Peter is not telling us that everything we have need of pertaining to life and godliness will be given to us. No, he says everything we need to live an abundant, fulfilled life—and everything we need to live like Christ—has already been given to us.

This is radical because many of us don't have this understanding. We think we're still pursuing some key and if we can find it, then we'll be able to unlock the secret of life. We're looking for the combination on the padlock of godliness. But Peter says something wonderful when he says God has already given us all things—not most things, not a bunch of things—but all things that pertain to life and godliness.

A whole bunch of Christians read, search, look for what's missing in their faith, instead of simply taking God's Word at face value, which says His divine power has given us everything we need for godliness and all we need for abundant life. This understanding can save us a bunch of time and a lot of money. For instead of searching bookstores and infomercials to find the seven secrets of effective people, or the way to "awaken the giant within," we can simply grow in the knowledge that we've already been given everything we need to live abundantly and godly.

7. Verses 3, 4. What do we learn about growing in Christ from this passage?

Two great truths stand at the forefront of all that we have been given to finish well in life and godliness. The first is mentioned in verse 3, the knowledge of God. The second is hidden in verse 4, the promises of God. These are the fountainhead gifts that all followers of Jesus have in their possession—the knowledge and promises of God. Therefore, if you want to grow in godliness and gain eternal life, you need to grasp hold of what God has for us in Christ. You will need to cultivate your experiential knowledge of God and a willingness to hold on to his promises in this world that tempts you to grasp other things.

8. Verse 4. Exactly how do we participate in the divine nature?

The other thing we have already been given are the "very great promises" of God (v. 4). Peter tells us that through them we "become partakers of the divine nature." True knowledge of God is always attended by a fixed belief in God's promises. So often today people want to claim relationship with God while at the same time they abandon the words of the Bible. It is as if we want a God in our own making—one who exists under the authority of our own word.

This verse challenges such a notion. In fact, by the time we reach chapter 2 we will see that the entire letter is at odds with such a belief. Those who finish well in faith do so by holding fast to God's promises. According to Peter's gospel, there is simply nothing else strong enough to pull us home. Indeed, according to verse 4 it is by them that we escape the tug of "the corruption that is in the world." One can almost envision men, women, and children being pulled loose from the muck of this world and ascending to Heaven's skies solely by holding fast to the strong cord of God's Word. If we need rescuing from this world, that will require holding ever more tightly to the "very great promises" of God.

9. Is this something we do, or is it something that is done for us?

And how is this escape to come about? By putting forth our very best efforts—"applying all diligence," a good translation says—to add to our faith (our confidence in Christ) moral excellence or virtue. That is, to train ourselves to do what is good and right. Notice this is something we must do; it will not be done for us.

10. What kind of information must we have to grow in Christ?

Knowledge concentrates on practical knowledge or knowledge that is lived out. This kind of knowledge makes a distinction between what is true and what is not true. It is able to discern what is right versus what is wrong and what is encouraging versus what is hurtful.

A "godly" person is one who ceases to be self-centered in order to become God-centered. Christ became a man and, as a result of His earthly ministry, we see how God intended for humans to behave. Jesus is our unblemished example of godliness. Therefore, a godly person is a Christlike person.

Our goal as Christians is to become like Christ.

11. Exactly how do you train yourself to be godly?

Go back to a sermon you heard on gratitude. Instead of trying really hard to be grateful, train yourself to be grateful. Get a simple, blank, 100-page notebook. Commit to writing down three things you are grateful for every night before you go to bed. Do this for 100 days. By this time, you will have formed a habit. You will not be able to keep from thinking of three things you are grateful for before you go to bed. In fact you will think of things you are grateful for all the time. Gratitude will become a habit. Gratitude will become easy.

I have experienced this. My approach is this. I often think of twenty things I am grateful for before I go to bed at night. (Writing would be better. I compensate for this by thinking of twenty things instead of three.) I think of them in four categories:

- Family members I am grateful for. Wife, kids, parents...
- Other people I am grateful for. Friends. Church people. The mail man.
- Physical things I am grateful for. Air conditioning. Indoor plumbing. The Internet.
- Spiritual things I am grateful for. The Bible. The forgiveness of sins. Spiritual gifts. The hope of eternal life.

I have done this for several years. I don't do it every night, but I have done it enough time that it is a habit. It has shaped my thinking. The first thoughts that come through my mind in the morning are thoughts of gratitude. I put my feet on a little rug we have in front of the sink. I think about how warm that rug feels on my feet. Thank God for a little rug.

Thank God for air-conditioning. Thank God for godly parents. Thank God for kids. Thank God
Gratitude is easy. I have trained myself to be grateful.

12. What is your application from today's lesson?

13. Remember we are praying for you?

1 Peter 5

1. Overview. There is a lot of rich stuff in this chapter. Let's read through as if we were reading in our Quiet Time. What one verse stands out to you?

I can summarize Christian living as one habit: the habit of the Quiet Time. There is much that will come after this—service and evangelism and all kinds of character development. But, it all flows out of the time alone with God in prayer and in His Word.

There is no Christian living without the Quiet Time. There is no Christian living without prayer. There is no Christian living without being transformed by the renewing of our mind. (Romans 12:2) This is done through time in the Word.

2. We are called upon as Christians to care for one another. How can we do this effectively?

Giving care is part of the role of being a shepherd. God expects us to give the kind of care that He Himself would give to His flock. This is clear from Ezekiel 34:1–16, in which God rebukes the shepherds of Israel for not giving appropriate care to the flock. As you study the passage, you see that God desires shepherds to

- feed the flock
- lead them to rest
- seek the lost
- bring back the scattered
- bind up the broken
- strengthen the sick

Being a shepherd is an awesome responsibility.

3. Think about an actual shepherd. What could we learn about church life from a shepherd?

Shepherds lead their sheep to water and make sure they have food to eat. They protect their sheep from wild animals and from those who would love to cut them away from the flock and lead them astray. If a sheep is missing, the shepherd goes looking for it. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, was a great protector of His little band of disciples. He did not lose any of them except for Judas, whose betrayal was a fulfillment of prophecy (see Psalm 41:9). In the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus protected the disciples so the soldiers would let them go (see John 18:7–8).

Likewise, as shepherds of God's sheep, disciple-makers must also protect the sheep in our care. That means if we are teaching a class or leading a small group, we should follow up with those who are absent and do our best to ensure that everyone in the class is present. It requires work and commitment to chase the strays, bind up the hurting, and lead and feed those we are shepherding. True disciple-makers do all we can to guide those we disciple to safety and maturity.

4. 1 Peter 5.5 is a classic—especially the second half. Why does God oppose the proud?

If there's one thing, above all others, at the root of the ills of the human race, especially in these changing times, it's pride. Wise King Solomon penned what is undoubtedly the most well-known verse on pride in the Bible, and it speaks volumes about the damage pride can do:

Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall. PROVERBS 16:18

Look at that last word: "fall." When we read this verse, we usually think of a setback or someone getting knocked off a pedestal because of pride. But the word fall has a much more cosmic meaning when you think about the fact that pride was at the root of Satan's rebellion against God and his banishment from heaven. "I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High," Satan declared (Isaiah 14:14).

Satan's pride led to his downfall. Before God kicked him out of heaven, he was Lucifer, the chief angelic being. Evidently Satan didn't learn his lesson, because he used the same prideful tactic on Adam and Eve, telling them they would "be like God, knowing good and evil" (Genesis 3:5). Once again, arrogance led to a fall that had cosmic implications. Adam and Eve's fall was our fall; their pride is our pride. As James Montgomery Boice observes, "Nothing lies so much at the heart of the problems of the human race as this prideful desire to take over God's place or, which amounts to the same thing, to pretend that we can do without Him."

This desire to do without God, to rely on earthly rather than heavenly wisdom, is at the root of our proud attitudes in this dazzling digital age. The world is literally at our fingertips. The acceleration of knowledge and the expansion of human achievement continue to reinforce our belief that we can know it all and do it all.

5. Is pride always a bad thing? Can any good come from pride?

Certainly, a healthy type of pride can exist—it's not wrong, for instance, to be proud of our heritage, or our daughter's basketball team. Yet pride becomes sin when we think of ourselves as better than we are, or start believing we're the ones ultimately responsible for our success, or when we simply focus on ourselves as the center of the universe. This dangerous kind of pride can be insidious when found in our churches.

6. Is pride easy or hard to spot in the mirror? Do the proud know they are proud? Is it possible we are proud and not know it? How do we protect ourselves from being proud and not knowing it?

Pride can take the form of entitlement when we believe we deserve a certain success. It can take the form of overconfidence. It can subtly segue into an air of superiority where we begin to feel bulletproof. With a few successes under our belts, we can begin to think that whatever way we view a situation is the right way without question. It's easy to slide down the slope of unaccountability and aversion to correction.

7. What good things come to the humble?

Just as surely as God opposes the proud, He gives grace to the humble. Humility gets God's attention, primarily because His Son, Jesus, came to earth as a humble servant rather than as a conquering king in order to show us how to live. Not only does God delight in our humility before Him, but He also asks us to live in harmony and humility with one another, never too proud to associate with "people of low position" (Romans 12:16).

In fact, God offers to forgive us and heal us, both individually and corporately, if we simply humble ourselves before Him.

8. How would you define humility? What are some common misunderstandings about humility?

Humility is remembering who we are in light of who God is. As Christians, we have a vital assignment that we don't want to miss. It's easy to get caught up in many things and miss what we're supposed to be about. But we are called to serve God and called to pour our lives into significant matters. Sometimes what is significant can surprise us. Matthew 10:42 says that even a cup of cold water given in Jesus' name can be significant. Our invitation is

to represent and radiate Christ, to be an ambassador for Him, to think what He thinks, and to speak what He speaks. Our calling is to serve God in any way He asks.

9. Can humility be over-done?

On the other hand, humility is not about berating ourselves. It's about serving and exalting Christ. Practically speaking, humility comes when we discover that our greatest joy is in giving life away. Reward is not our applause, but rather the knowledge that we were able to serve Christ. This kind of humility is not gained easily. But it can be gained intentionally. The reason? Humility is not natural for us as humans. In order for it to be developed, acts of humility must be intentionally planned, then carried out consistently until they become natural.

10. Let's get practical. How do we develop humility? How do we kill pride?

One of the simplest ways to develop humility is by consciously doing acts of hidden service. In the eyes of God, there is something very healthy about doing an act of kindness and not taking credit for it. An act of quiet kindness is an act of partnering with God. We do the service, and then God can use it in people's hearts for life change. I think of the progression this way: Good deeds bring goodwill that one day enables people to be open to the good news. There are no accolades or trumpets, no ticker tape parades. Yet we can take joy in the simple fact that we get to do good.

11. What do we learn about God from First Peter 5:7? Is this how most people see God?

You know what? God personally cares about the things that worry us. He cares more about them than we care about them: those things that hang in our minds as nagging, aching, worrisome thoughts. First Peter 5:7 invites you to cast "all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you." He cares. You are His personal concern. He cares about those aching thoughts that are like heavy anchors dragging you down.

12. Let's get real. How has God helped you to worry less than you used to?

Worry is a synonym for anxiety. While some translations of Matthew 6:25–34 speak of anxiety, the New International Version uses the word worry. In popular usage, however, we tend to associate worry with more long-term difficult or painful circumstances for which there appears to be no resolution. These are the kinds of circumstances that tend to keep a person awake at night "worrying" about what to do while realizing there is nothing one can do.

For example, I have several friends who have mentally or physically dependent adult children. These friends can easily lie awake at night worrying about the future for their child after both husband and wife die. Even if finances were not a factor, which it is for all of my friends, the question remains, Who will care for my child?

These are indeed difficult circumstances, and I have to be careful here because I have not experienced any such seemingly intractable situation. So I do not mean to dismiss lightly these circumstances, but if we want to stick closely to Scripture, we have no choice but to seek to do what it says. And in the New International Version, Jesus says, “Therefore do not worry about tomorrow” (Matthew 6:34).

We do have the promises of God and the ministry of the Holy Spirit to help us in these difficult times. Recently, a friend, who is actually experiencing one of these long-term situations, called my attention to the Phillips Modern English rendering of 1 Peter 5:7, “You can throw the whole weight of your anxieties upon him, for you are his personal concern.” Though the Phillips version is usually regarded as a paraphrase, I believe its rendering of 1 Peter 5:7 accurately captures the meaning of the text. Jesus said that God does not forget a single sparrow (see Luke 12:6). How much more, then, is it true that you, His child, are indeed His personal concern?

It’s true, however, that oftentimes the situation at hand looms larger in our minds than the promises of God. We then find it difficult to believe the promises. In those times, I find the words of the father of a demon-possessed son encouraging: “I believe; help my unbelief!” (Mark 9:24). There is a vast difference between stubborn unbelief such as was demonstrated by the people of Jesus’ hometown, Nazareth (see Mark 6:5–6), and the struggling faith of the son’s father. God honors our struggles, and the Holy Spirit will help us. The important issue is that we seek to honor God through our faith, even though weak and faltering, rather than dishonoring Him through rank unbelief.

13. 1 Peter 5.8ff. What do we learn about the devil from this verse?

So the diabolical wickedness of Satan and his minions is clearly something for us to reckon with.

But we must remember that Satan is not co-equal with God. Satan is a created being, a fallen angel. He does not have ultimate power. He is limited in knowledge. C. S. Lewis put it well: “Satan, the leader or dictator of devils, is the opposite, not of God, but of Michael.”

True, Satan is “a roaring lion,” but I want to remind you that there is another Lion who is greater than Satan: Jesus, “the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David” (Rev 5:5). This is the Lion who has conquered sin and death and hell. John declares, “The Son of God was

revealed for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil” (1 Jn 3:8). And again, “The one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world” (1 Jn 4:4). James tersely admonishes us, “Resist the devil, and he will flee from you” (Jas 4:7).

I say all of this so you may be aware of Satan and his diabolical works of destruction, but also so you will not have an excessive fear of him or of his works. This awareness is important as we deepen in our understanding and experience of prayer. Satan and his minions do seek our destruction, and they will attack us even in times of prayer . . . perhaps especially in times of prayer. So whatever we can learn about Satan and his devious ways will fortify us against being tricked or fooled or drawn astray.

14. Verse 9. Exactly how do we resist the devil?

The Bible tells us to stand firm and hold out. James 4:7 promises us that if we resist the devil, he will flee. There is a variety of ways to see that delightful sight of the enemy hightailing it away.

First, we can take into our hands the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. That’s what Jesus did, if you remember His wilderness temptation with the devil. As I study that passage, I smile because Jesus fired Scripture at the devil—but He only used ammunition from Deuteronomy. He defended Himself with only one book!

The result of it, as the Scriptures tell us, is that Satan departed from Him. That’s another word for fled. Resist the devil and you’ll be treated to the sight of his back as he runs away. Recognize, request help, resist.

15. What are some things we need to avoid doing as we resist the devil?

When the Bible tells us to “submit to God,” and to “resist the devil” (James 4:7), it doesn’t mean we’re to go out and attack the devil. The devil will do the attacking. The word “resist” is essentially a defensive word meaning “to withstand an attack.”

Nor does the Bible say to “converse with the devil and he will flee from us” or to “consider all of the temptations the devil offers, then resist him, and he will flee from us.” Once you start messing with sin and with the devil, it’s only a matter of time before you get hooked. It’s like the free samples you’re offered when you walk though the store or the mall. You’re given just enough to whet your appetite, but not enough to satisfy it.

The devil has been at this for a long time. He’s no idiot, and when he tries to tempt you away from God’s path, he won’t present his full agenda. Instead, he will say, “Take just a little nibble. Just have a taste for the fun of it. It won’t hurt you. Just this one little time.” And you know the rest of that story. This is why the Bible tells us to resist the devil. Keep as

much distance from him as possible. Flee from temptation—and don't leave a forwarding address.

So where do we find the resolve and strength to resist? We need to submit to God as we resist the devil. "Submit" is a word used to describe a soldier under the authority of a commander and speaks of a willing, conscious submission to God's authority. It means to completely surrender yourself to the Word and will of God. That is your best defense.

And after you have successfully resisted the evil one, don't relax your guard. It's true that the devil may flee when resisted, but he'll be back! Satan and his demons will simply regroup and attack you from yet another angle. The lesson? For the rest of our lives, we must stay alert and vigilant, fully submitted to the will of God.

16. What do you want to recall from today's study?

17. Remember we are praying for you

1 Peter 2.11 - 25

1. 1 Peter 2.11 – 25. Let's read this passage as a whole, looking for any application we can find.

As a body, we are to do three things in light of our unity. First, we are to live in purity. Having talked about trials and persecution from without, Peter seems to shift gears here and address the potential danger from within. "I beseech you," he says. "I beg you. I plead with you. Hear the cry of my heart: Abstain from fleshly lusts that war against your soul."

In times of difficulty, people sometimes say, "Why should I refrain? Why should I abstain? I just can't take it anymore."

Peter answers, "Even as things get tough, whatever you do, don't give in to your fleshly lusts. Be careful. You're vulnerable." Perhaps better than anyone else, Peter knew what he was talking about, for he was one who succumbed to his fleshly lusts when things got tough.

2. What do we learn about ourselves from this passage?

As Christians, we must constantly remind ourselves who we are; and Peter did this in 1 Peter 2:11. To begin with, we are God's dearly beloved children. Eight times in his two epistles, Peter reminded his readers of God's love for them (1 Peter 2:11; 4:12; 2 Peter 1:7; 3:1, 8, 14–15, 17). In ourselves, there is nothing that God can love; but He loves us because of Jesus Christ. "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (2 Peter 1:17). Because of our faith in Jesus Christ, we are "accepted in the beloved" (Eph. 1:6).

Our "love relationship" to Jesus Christ ought to be motivation enough for us to live godly lives in this godless world. "If ye love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15). There is something deeper than obedience because of duty, and that is obedience because of devotion. "If a man love Me, he will keep My words" (John 14:23).

Not only are we God's beloved children, but we are also "strangers [sojourners] and pilgrims" in this world. We are "resident aliens" who have our citizenship in another country—heaven. Like the patriarchs of old, we are temporary in this life, traveling toward the heavenly city (Heb. 11:8–16)

We are also soldiers involved in a spiritual battle. There are sinful desires that war against us and want to defeat us (see Gal. 5:16–26). Our real battle is not with people around us, but with passions within us. D.L. Moody said, "I have more trouble with D.L. Moody than with any man I know." If we yield to these sinful appetites, then we will start living like the unsaved around us,

and will become ineffective witnesses. The word translated “war” carries the idea of “a military campaign.” We do not win one battle, and the war is over! It is a constant warfare, and we must be on our guard.

Most of all, we are witnesses to the lost around us. The word “Gentiles” here has nothing to do with race, since it is a synonym for “unsaved people” (1 Cor. 5:1; 12:2; 3 John 7). Unsaved people are watching us, speaking against us (1 Peter 3:16; 4:4), and looking for excuses to reject the Gospel.

If we are going to witness to the lost people around us, we must live “honest” lives. This word implies much more than telling the truth and doing what is right. It carries with it the idea of beauty, comeliness, that which is admirable and honorable. To use a cliché of the ’60s, we must be “beautiful people” in the best sense of the word.

3. How are foreigners and tourists similar? How are they different?

Christians are not living on this earth as carefree tourists. We are not vacationing our way to heaven. We are soldiers on raw, pagan soil. Everywhere around us the battle rages. The danger is real, and the enemy is formidable. Christ died not only to gain victory over sin’s dominion but to equip us for that fight—to give us the inner strength we need to stand against it. Therefore . . . we are to arm ourselves with the strength that Christ gives because our purpose in life is the same as His.

4. We are foreigner and strangers. What difference does it make? What is the application?

Unhappiness on earth cultivates a hunger for heaven. By gracing us with a deep dissatisfaction, God holds our attention. The only tragedy, then, is to be satisfied prematurely. To settle for earth. To be content in a strange land....

We are not happy here because we are not at home here. We are not happy here because we are not supposed to be happy here. We are “like foreigners and strangers in this world” (1 Pet. 2:11)....

And you will never be completely happy on earth simply because you were not made for earth. Oh, you will have your moments of joy. You will catch glimpses of light. You will know moments or even days of peace. But they simply do not compare with the happiness that lies ahead.

5. Note the word “abstain” in verse 11. What does it mean? What does it not mean?

Peter knows what he’s talking about when he says to the early believers, to you, and to me, “I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims. Abstain from the lust of this world.” Notice Peter doesn’t say, “Refrain temporarily,” or, “Know when to say when,” or, “Be sure you have a designated driver.” No, he simply says, “Abstain completely.”

6. We can’t live sinless lives. Why bother trying?

Only the holy will see God. Holiness is a prerequisite to heaven. Perfection is a requirement for eternity. We wish it weren’t so. We act like it isn’t so. We act like those who are “decent” will see God. We suggest that those who try hard will see God. We act as if we’re good if we never do anything too bad. And that goodness is enough to qualify us for heaven.

Sounds right to us, but it doesn’t sound right to God. And he sets the standard. And the standard is high. “You must be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect” (Matthew 5:48).

You see, in God’s plan, God is the standard for perfection. We don’t compare ourselves to others; they are just as fouled up as we are. The goal is to be like him; anything less is inadequate.

7. Verse 13. How should Christians feel toward the police, judges, senators, and the president? How is this different from the world?

One of the more theological rationalizations for rebellion I’ve heard is, “I just submit to Jesus. I don’t have to submit to any man!” The statement contains just enough truth to lead us astray, but on balance that isn’t what the Word of God says. The Word says to submit to every human institution (1 Pet. 2:13–25) and to your leaders in the church as those who must give an account for your souls (Heb. 13:17). There’s truth in that statement that I must submit only to Jesus and not to follow idolatrously and blindly after human leaders, but that’s not the whole truth. Let’s learn to apply the Scriptures in the Spirit and context God intended.

A third attitude of the heart reflected in mental rationalizations is, “Submission to authority diminishes me,” as though authority implied superiority. “He’s no better than I am. I don’t have to listen to him!” Our society as a whole seems to have bought into this superiority/inferiority deception. Multitudes are falling into it and living its destructive effects as though it were a contagious disease. It’s one of the roots from which we seem to be compelled to knock our leaders down.

Godly authority means that authority serves and lays down its life for those in its care. Authority has nothing to do with the value of persons but only with position and order and with anointing from the Lord by grace. We honor authority figures, therefore, as other sinners like ourselves, saved by grace. They are normal human beings who just happen to be called to occupy sensitive positions where mistakes stand out in bold relief. That at least deserves a little compassion!

8. How do you feel about submission? How should we feel?

Submission is not a dirty word; it is a liberating word. We are all under God's protective authority, and we can only be free if we seek it and submit to it. Coming under authority is your protection. Living free is your opportunity to be all that God created you to be.

There are two types of people who will never live up to their potential in Christ: those who can't do what they are told to do and those who won't do anything unless they are told. Don't wait to be told what you are already free to do. Step out in faith and live up to your potential in Christ. You can bring light into a dark world if you will allow Christ to shine through you. You don't need a greater position; bloom where you are planted. Stop waiting for the big opportunity and seize the one you have. Someone in your world of influence desperately needs what Christ can do through you.

9. Verse 16. What does it mean to live as free people?

Freedom is liberty within bounds: liberty to obey holy laws, liberty to keep the commandments of Christ, to serve mankind, to develop to the full all the latent possibilities within our redeemed natures. True Christian liberty never sets us free to indulge our lusts or to follow our fallen impulses....

10. Galatians 5.13, 14. What do we learn about freedom from these verses?

Unqualified freedom in any area of human life is deadly. In government it is anarchy, in domestic life free love, and in religion antinomianism. The freest cells in the body are cancer cells, but they kill the organism where they grow. A healthy society requires that its members accept a limited freedom. Each must curtail his own liberty that all may be free, and this law runs throughout all the created universe, including the kingdom of God....

The ideal Christian is one who knows he is free to do as he will and wills to be a servant. This is the path Christ took; blessed is the man who follows Him.

11. 1 Peter 2:23 - 25. What do we learn about Christian living from this verse? What is the application?

Someone you love or respect slams you to the floor with a slur or slip of the tongue. And there you lie, wounded and bleeding. Perhaps the words were intended to hurt you, perhaps not; but that doesn't matter. The wound is deep. The injuries are internal. Broken heart, wounded pride, bruised feelings.

If you have suffered or are suffering because of someone else's words, you'll be glad to know that there is a balm for this laceration. Meditate on these words from 1 Peter 2:23: "When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate. . . . Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly."

Did you see what Jesus did? . . . He left the judging to God. He did not take on the task of seeking revenge. He demanded no apology. . . . He, to the astounding contrary, spoke on their defense. "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34 NIV). —

12. What do we learn about Jesus?

When Christ was nailed to the cross, he took off his robe of seamless perfection and assumed a different wardrobe, the wardrobe of indignity.

The indignity of nakedness. Stripped before his own mother and loved ones. Shamed before his family.

The indignity of failure. For a few painfilled hours, the religious leaders were the victors, and Christ appeared the loser. Shamed before his accusers.

Worst of all, he wore the indignity of sin. "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness."

The clothing of Christ on the cross? Sin— yours and mine. The sins of all humanity.

13. Are you ever insulted? What do we learn from Jesus' example about how to handle such situations?

Every wrong ever committed ultimately will be paid for. It will be paid when the offender has repented of his sins and put his faith in Jesus Christ, who died on the cross for our sins. Or, it will be paid for at the final judgment for those who do not trust in Jesus for salvation. God will avenge all wrongs that have been done in this world.

Jesus gave us the example to follow. The Bible tells us: "'He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.' When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he

suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly” (1 Peter 2:22–23).

14. What do you want to recall from today’s study?

15. Remember we are praying for you...

Peter 4.12 - 19

1. Overview. What do we learn about abundant Christian living from this passage?

It was Phillip Brooks who said, “Character may be manifested in the great moments, but it is made in the small ones.”

Get used to the idea—there will be times in your life when your faith is tested, when you are challenged for what you believe. There will be multiple occasions when the temptation for you to go the wrong direction, say the wrong thing, or engage in the wrong activity will be very, very strong.

You might ask the question, “Will I be able to stand strong spiritually when this takes place?”

That’s entirely up to you. The stand you make today will determine what kind of stand you will make tomorrow. So you have to think about it now, because you are laying the foundation for the years that remain ahead of you.

2. Note the first word in verse 12. Let’s look at it in several translations. How does Peter address his audience? What is the lesson for us? What do we learn about ourselves from this?

Beloved (agapētos, cf. 2:11) is a common pastoral word conveying tenderness, compassion, affection, and care (cf. 1 Cor. 4:14; 1 Thess. 2:8). Such love provides a sweet pillow for believers’ weary souls to rest on in the midst of trials and persecutions. Severe suffering can tempt them to doubt God’s love and allow the same thought to enter their minds that once prompted Job’s wife to utter the despicable words: “Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die!” (Job 2:9). Thus the apostle sought to reassure his readers of his and God’s unfailing love.

3. 1 Peter 4.12. What is your natural reaction when trials come your way? What is your first thought?

“Why me?” we ask when fiery trials come upon us. The real question is, “Why not?” If suffering loosens sin’s grip on us and causes others to see us differently, if it places us in good company, keeps us focused on eternity, and frees us to participate in ministry—why wouldn’t we embrace it as a necessary part of our growth?

1 Peter 4.1 - 11

1. Verse 1. How does suffering in the body make us done with sin?

Because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin does not suggest that the believer, because he suffers for doing what is right, will never stumble or sin again. A Christian does not, through suffering, magically vault to the level of moral perfection. Verses 1-2 indicate that believers take seriously their struggle against sin and their commitment to obedience. By following this counsel, you demonstrate to others that obeying God is the most important motivation for your life, more important by far than avoiding hardship and pain. The Amplified Bible's rendering of this section clearly conveys the meaning Peter wished to communicate: "So, since Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same thought and purpose (patiently to suffer rather than fail to please God). For whoever has suffered in the flesh has done with (intentional) sin— has stopped pleasing himself and the world, and pleases God"

2. Verse 6. Who are the dead that are preached to?

Unbelievers who live immorally (4:3) and who say evil things about Christians (4:4) will one day have to face God. This gives believers great relief and confidence—they will receive justice. God will judge everyone, both the living and the dead. And judgment may come at any moment. That is why the Good News was preached even to those who have died. These words have caused debate among scholars, resulting in four main views:

1. Some tie this verse back to 3:18-20 and Christ's proclamation of salvation to the unbelievers who lived before he came. But an understanding of a "second chance" after death in this verse argues against everything else in Scripture, and would be unhelpful to Peter's readers who were being encouraged to persevere in suffering.
2. Others look back also to 3:18-20, but say that Christ was preaching salvation to those Old Testament people who had believed in God in the time before Christ preached on earth, offering them the gift he brought—eternal life.
3. Still others say that this verse refers to the gospel proclaimed by the apostles to those on the earth who were physically alive but spiritually dead.
4. Most likely, however, Peter was referring to those dead at that time of his writing who had heard and accepted the gospel. Many people in the early church had concerns about life after death. In Thessalonica, Christians worried that loved ones who died before Christ's return might never see Christ (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). They wondered if those who died would be able to experience the promised eternal life. Peter explained that these believers, although their bodies

were punished with death—that is, they died physically as everyone dies physically—will still one day live in the spirit as God does.

Peter's readers needed to be reminded that the dead (both the faithful and their oppressors) would be raised from the dead—the faithful to eternal reward, the unfaithful to eternal punishment. God's judgment will be perfectly fair, Peter pointed out, because even those dead from ages past had heard the gospel. The Good News was first announced when Jesus Christ preached on the earth, but it has been operating since before the creation of the world (Ephesians 1:4), and it eternally affects all people, the dead as well as the living.

3. Imagine you heard someone criticizing a friend. How would you react differently if you loved the friend being talked about versus if you did not?

Have you ever heard anyone gossip about someone you know?... What do you have to say?

Here is what love says: Love says nothing. Love stays silent. "Love covers a multitude of sins." Love doesn't expose. It doesn't gossip. If love says anything, love speaks words of defense. Words of kindness. Words of protection. — Lucado, M. (2004). *Everyday blessings: inspirational thoughts from the published works of Max Lucado*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc.

4. How often would you guess people offer hospitality?

How hospitable are we? The following responses to the question "How often do you entertain guests for dinner?" in a May 2019 survey are telling:

- once a week: 6 percent
- once a month: 21 percent
- more than once a month: 12 percent
- a few times a year: 37 percent
- rarely or never: 24 percent

5. Specifically, what is the command?

Offer. You can't control whether people come. All you can control is whether you make the offer.

6. Luke 14.12. Who are we to invite when we offer hospitality?

Once we get into the habit of inviting guests home for dinner, who should we invite? When we offer hospitality to one another without grumbling, who are we to offer it to?

Jesus answered this question for us, too: "Then he told the man who had invited him, 'When you invite people for lunch or dinner, don't invite only your friends'" (Luke 14:12a, God's Word Translation).

He's saying that on a regular basis—as a habit—we're to include outsiders.

7. Verse 10. What are some examples of Spiritual Gifts?

Spiritual gifts are God's way of sharing His grace with others....

For example, when a man loses his wife, it's comforting for him to know that he will see her again someday. But that is not nearly as comforting as having friends around to hold him and listen and pray. When believers with the gift of mercy gather around him to listen, when another with the gift of administration takes care of all the funeral arrangements, when a neighbor with the gift of hospitality invites him to spend several nights with his family, when these things happen, it is as if Christ Himself reaches down to take care of one of His own. — Stanley, C. F. (2004). *God's way day by day* (117). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

8. Does everyone have a spiritual gift?

Not everybody has spiritual gifts. Unbelievers do not. But every Christian person who is committed to Jesus and truly a member of His Body has at least one gift, or quite possibly more. The Bible says that every Christian has received a gift (see 1 Peter 4:10), and that "the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all" (1 Cor. 12:7). 1 Cor. 12:18 stresses that every one of the members is placed in the Body according to God's design. Possessing a spiritual gift is planned for every Christian.

9. Repeat after me: "God has gifted me with spiritual gifts." How does that make you feel?

This comes as good news to the average believer. It is pleasant to be reminded that God knows me, He loves me and He considers me special enough to give me a personal gift so I can serve Him. It is especially true in a society such as ours in America where many school districts establish special programs for "gifted children." The implication is that ordinary citizens are not gifted. Not so in the Body of Christ! God gifts us all.

10. How do you go about discovering your spiritual gifts?

One of the best ways of discerning your spiritual gift(s) is to get involved in a variety of ministry experiences.

As you explore the different ministry areas, you will soon discover if you are gifted for these ministries.

- LOOK FOR those ministries in which you feel the most fulfilled.
- LOOK FOR those ministries in which you seem to be the most effective.
- LOOK FOR those ministries in which others affirm your abilities. (People may not verbalize their appreciation. You may need to take the step of seeking counsel from those who will give you an honest assessment.)

Envelop the whole process in prayer. The Lord will lead you to an identification of your gift(s) if you allow Him to guide and direct you in all your endeavors.

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight. (Prov. 3:5,6)

If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. (James 1:5)

While labeling your gifts is helpful, using your gifts is more important. Do what you know to do even if you can't put a name to it. The benefit of being able to specifically identify your gifts is that it can make you more effective as you learn how to better develop that gift and relate to and understand others better.

11. What do you want to recall from today's lesson?

12. We are praying for you...

4. Should we expect suffering? Isn't that a bit negative?

George Whitefield, the great evangelist of the Second Great Awakening, knew early that trials would become part and parcel of his experience. Therefore, when they came, and they did in abundance, he was prepared! Upon graduating from Oxford he wrote:

I am now about to take Orders and my degree, and go into the world. What will become of me I know not. All I can say is I look for perpetual conflicts and struggles in that life and hope for no other peace, but only a cross, while on this side of eternity.

What a good lesson for us to learn. We should expect difficulty. The fact that we don't only indicates how little we have learned of Christianity's true center. As our text will soon say, our sufferings come precisely because we share in Christ's sufferings (4:13). We should not be surprised, because we are with him.

5. What should be our first reaction to suffering?

When the apostle Peter sat down to pen a letter to some churches that were facing persecution and trials, he had a word of counsel for them: "Don't let it surprise you."

He wrote: "Dear friends, don't be surprised at the fiery trials you are going through, as if something strange were happening to you. Instead, be very glad—because these trials will make you partners with Christ in his suffering, so that you will have the wonderful joy of seeing his glory when it is revealed to all the world" (1 Peter 4:12-13, NLT).

It's not unusual if you are being tempted or tested. It's not strange or bizarre if you find yourself going through the fire of trials. In spite of what you may have been taught, hardships and difficulties are a normal thing in the life of a committed follower of Jesus Christ.

6. What good things come to us when we suffer?

Suffering allows us to experience glory. Jesus gave us a wonderful illustration concerning suffering when He reminded us that after a woman endures pain and suffering to give birth, she forgets about the agony when her baby is born because the suffering is transformed into glory. The same baby who causes pain brings joy.

The heartache, setback, or difficulty that is causing you pain and agony will be the very thing that will ultimately bring joy. That which is breaking your heart right now will soon be the delight of your soul—watch and see!

How is suffering like a fire?

While the term rendered fiery ordeal (*purōsis*) portrays figuratively a painful experience of persecution, it is also used of a furnace melting down metal to purge it of impurities (cf. Ps. 66:10; Prov. 17:3; It may be that Peter is here drawing on his familiarity with Malachi's prophecy:

“Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, He is coming,” says the Lord of hosts. “But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner’s fire and like fullers’ soap. He will sit as a smelter and purifier of silver, and He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, so that they may present to the Lord offerings in righteousness.” (Mal. 3:1–3)

That text speaks of a purifying fire, in contrast to the consuming fire in 4:1, “ ‘For behold, the day is coming, burning like a furnace; and all the arrogant and every evildoer will be chaff; and the day that is coming will set them ablaze,’ ” says the Lord of hosts, “ ‘so that it will leave them neither root nor branch.’ ” Evidence that Peter was thinking of Malachi’s words is strengthened by the apostle’s reference to “the household of God” (v. 17), where such purifying judgment must come. Peter is saying that the persecution is the Lord refining His temple—His people.

7. Who are some Old Testament examples of saints who suffered?

This lesson is one that George Matheson, born in Glasgow, Scotland, in March 1842, put before us in elevated language. At birth Matheson’s eyesight was poor. By age eighteen he had nearly lost it completely. Robbed of physical sight, he nevertheless recognized spiritual truths with penetrating clarity and insight. Take the role of suffering in the life of a believer, for example. It never caught him by surprise. He never thought suffering for his Christian faith strange. And when, according to God’s will, he was asked to enter into it, he was never ashamed. He writes:

There is a time coming in which your glory shall consist in the very thing which now constitutes your pain. Nothing could be more sad to Jacob than the ground on which he was lying, a stone for his pillow. It was the hour of his poverty. It was the season of his night. It was the seeming absence of his God. The Lord was in the place and he knew it not. Awakened from his sleep he found that the day of his trial was the dawn of his triumph.

Ask the great ones of the past what has been the spot of their prosperity and they will say, “It was the cold ground on which I was lying.” Ask Abraham; he will point to the sacrifice on Mount Moriah. Ask Joseph; he will direct you to this dungeon. Ask Moses;

he will date his fortune from his danger in the Nile. Ask Ruth; she will bid you build her monument in the field of her toil. Ask David; he will tell you that his songs came in the night. Ask Job; he will remind you that God answered him out of the whirlwind. Ask Peter; he will extol his submersion in the sea. Ask John; he will give the path to Patmos. Ask Paul; he will attribute his inspiration to the light which struck him blind.

Ask one more!—the Son of God. Ask Him whence has come His rule over the world; he will answer, “From the cold ground on which I was lying—the Gethsemane ground—I received my scepter there.” Thou too, my soul, shall be garlanded by Gethsemane. The cup thou fain wouldst pass from thee will be thy coronet in the world by and by.

Isn’t that spectacular? Ask the saints, any of them, and the response is the same. They never thought glory could be gained in any other way. Peter makes the point powerfully in verses 12, 13.

8. What forms can trials take? Let’s make a long list.

Peter wants his early readers ready for what he calls “the fiery trial.” What is this “fiery trial”? We know that Peter has used this term trials before. He opened his letter with it (1:6), and it appears that he could be returning to his starting point. The “various trials” in that chapter could be “the fiery trial” in this one. We noticed then that the general use of the word trials in the New Testament matches the internal evidence of Peter’s letter with incredible precision. We mentioned then a few things about what Peter means by “trials.”

- He means there will be seasons in life when they will lack provision, power, position, protection, and a sense of permanence.
- He means that at times they will become recipients of verbal or physical persecutions that arise on account of the Word (2:12, 18–20, 23; 3:16; 4:1–6 [esp. v. 4], 12–16).
- He means to include the pain experienced by those who have loved ones whose bodies appear to be wasting away before their very eyes.
- He means the dark moments in life when we are asked to fend off the prowling attacks of Satan.

These trying difficulties may be temporal, occasional, and spasmodic (after all, 1:6 reads, “if necessary”). But in the end, for anyone who takes up with Jesus, Peter wants his readers to know that trials of some size and stripe are inevitable. We must go through the waters of woe if we are to arrive at our rightful inheritance; wandering and woe are the earthly lot of any who desire to enter into an eternal rest characterized by joy.

9. What are some reasons for suffering? Again, let's make a list. Some suffering, for example, is due to our own bad decisions. What are some other causes of suffering?

Peter is talking about suffering, and he says "the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God." Where is the house of God? My body. As a child of God I have no right to go through a dispensation of suffering without asking my Father the reason for it. It may be suffering because of a purpose of God which He cannot explain to you, but He makes you know in your inmost heart that all is well (see verse 19). Or it may be suffering for chastisement and discipline. An undisciplined saint is inclined either to despise the chastening† and say it is of the devil, or else to faint when he is rebuked, and cave in. The writer to the Hebrews says: "If you are a saint you will be chastened, be careful, see that you don't despise it." Or it may be suffering as Jesus suffered (see Hebrews 5:8; 2 Corinthians 1:5). In all these ways we have to learn how to let judgment begin at "the house of God."

10. Is suffering ever a matter of chance, or bad luck?

The verb translated were happening (sumbainontos) may mean "to fall by chance" and calls for Christians to understand that experiences of unjust suffering for Christ are not accidental, but inevitable because the message of sin, salvation, and judgment offends. In addition, these incidents occur by God's design and reveal whether professing believers' faith is truly regenerate

11. What kind of fiery trials did Peter's audience experience?

Following the burning of Rome, Nero capitalized on that anti-Christian sentiment and punished the Christians by using them as human torches to light his garden parties, by allowing them to be sewn inside animal skins to be devoured by predatory animals, by crucifying them, and by subjecting them to other heinous, unjust tortures.

12. Cross-reference. Can you think of other verses that speak to the theme of suffering? If you have a study Bible, it may have cross-references in the center column.

Not expecting to be so hatefully persecuted, the believers to whom Peter wrote were understandably surprised, troubled, and confused by their suffering. Perhaps they expected life to be full of blessing, benefits, and divine protection. However, believers' expectation for suffering is bound up in the words of Jesus, who told the apostles, "If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you" (John 15:18); Paul's admonition to Timothy, "All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Tim. 3:12); and the apostle John's warning, "Do not be surprised, brethren, if the world hates you" (1 John 3:13). For Christians, the confrontation with sin and the world often results in suffering,

which is part of the promised cost of discipleship (cf. Matt. 10:38–39; 16:24–26; John 12:24–26). Counting the cost is behind Jesus' words that no one builds a tower or enters battle without first calculating that cost (Luke 14:28–32).

13. James 1.2 – 4 is one good cross reference. Like today's passage, it speaks of learning to rejoice in suffering. Not just endure suffering, but rejoice. How do we become people who can rejoice in suffering?

Let's be very practical. Here is a baby step toward getting there: smile in traffic. Say to yourself next time there is a long line at Wal-mart: "This is great! Another opportunity to move me toward maturity. Practice on the small stuff. Grow that muscle.

14. Everyone wants to be happy. Why is it important? Why is it important that we rejoice?

One could argue this is the theme of much of the Bible. John MacArthur says, "It is an important New Testament theme." Christian maturity is largely about learning to rejoice in the Lord always. This is why Lewis said, "It is a Christian's duty to be as happy as you can be," John Piper has devoted much of his life and writing encouraging people to rejoice in the Lord.

Jesus' brother, James, picks up on this theme to begin his book: "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything." James 1:2-4 (NIV) If you can get joy right, the end result will be that you will be mature and complete, not lacking anything. Paul says a similar thing in Philippians 2:14 – 15. Note the phrase, "so that." Philippians 2:14–15 (NIV)

Do everything without grumbling or arguing, 15 so that you may become blameless and pure, "children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation." Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky.

How do you become blameless and pure? Start with spending a day without complaining or arguing. More on this later. This is not the cotton candy of the Christian faith; this is the meat and potatoes. I have often said that James 1.2—that ability to rejoice in trouble—is the pinnacle of spiritual maturity.

15. What good have you seen come from suffering your life?

Weakness can be turned into a powerful force for God. Satan seems to point out our weaknesses and tries to use them against us. Some are weak in their minds and can't make

decisions. Others are weak in the spirit and don't follow through with God. And some are weak in the flesh and give up too quickly. When we are weak spiritually, it's because we have been out of God's Word. The world tells us that everyone is so strong, but in reality we are all weak. I believe with all of my heart that God wants us to understand that it is our weakness that He wants. He wants to bring it into perfection; and when he has a weak vessel to work with, then He can strengthen us for His glory. He can heal and do miracles, but sometimes He chooses not to so He can manifest Himself and show the world how strong He is through our weakness. That's what God told Paul He was doing through Paul's physical weakness. In our lives, it's our weakness that drives us to despair, but as soon as we give it to God, His power is real. When we are empty, then He can fill us. I would rather choose weakness any day than to be full of myself and have no room for God's filling. So I choose today to be broken and weak, always looking for God—His touch and His power—in my life. Turn to God, He will fill you and strengthen the inner man, and people will be amazed that in your weakness His strength is made perfect.

16. Summary. Imagine you are discipling a new Christian. What would you tell him about suffering?

It would be nice if we could see the trials in our lives as options, as electives. It would be convenient if we could say, "I'm going to skip the trials course."

But the fact is, we don't have that option. Trials will come into the life of every believer. Notice that James says, "Count it all joy when you fall into various trials." The phrase, "various trials," could also be translated, "many-colored trials," or "trials of many kinds." In other words, no two trials or experiences are necessarily alike.

You will be tested. The question is, will you pass or fail?

We must remember that God never tests us without a reason. God's ultimate purpose is to conform us to the image of Jesus Christ. God wants to produce a family likeness in us. This means that some difficulties and testings will show us immediate results, while others will produce long term ones.

There are times when I can emerge from a trial, look back, and say, "I learned this when I went through that experience." But there will be other times when I come through a difficulty, and all I will be able to do is shake my head and say, "What was that all about?" I may not be able to tell you (at that moment) what I have learned.

But what has happened, maybe unnoticed by me, is that I have become a little bit more like Jesus. He has worked in my life to mold me and shape me into His own image. It may be hard or impossible to point to definitive results in our lives after a time of pressure, setbacks, or testing. Even so, we can know that God is in control. And we can know that His ultimate purpose is to conform us to the image of His own dear Son.

17. How could I respond to the lesson today and remember we are praying for you.

1 Peter 4.1 - 11

1. Verse 1. How does suffering in the body make us done with sin?

Because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin does not suggest that the believer, because he suffers for doing what is right, will never stumble or sin again. A Christian does not, through suffering, magically vault to the level of moral perfection. Verses 1-2 indicate that believers take seriously their struggle against sin and their commitment to obedience. By following this counsel, you demonstrate to others that obeying God is the most important motivation for your life, more important by far than avoiding hardship and pain. The Amplified Bible's rendering of this section clearly conveys the meaning Peter wished to communicate: "So, since Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same thought and purpose (patiently to suffer rather than fail to please God). For whoever has suffered in the flesh has done with (intentional) sin— has stopped pleasing himself and the world, and pleases God"

2. Verse 6. Who are the dead that are preached to?

Unbelievers who live immorally (4:3) and who say evil things about Christians (4:4) will one day have to face God. This gives believers great relief and confidence—they will receive justice. God will judge everyone, both the living and the dead. And judgment may come at any moment. That is why the Good News was preached even to those who have died. These words have caused debate among scholars, resulting in four main views:

1. Some tie this verse back to 3:18-20 and Christ's proclamation of salvation to the unbelievers who lived before he came. But an understanding of a "second chance" after death in this verse argues against everything else in Scripture, and would be unhelpful to Peter's readers who were being encouraged to persevere in suffering.
2. Others look back also to 3:18-20, but say that Christ was preaching salvation to those Old Testament people who had believed in God in the time before Christ preached on earth, offering them the gift he brought—eternal life.
3. Still others say that this verse refers to the gospel proclaimed by the apostles to those on the earth who were physically alive but spiritually dead.
4. Most likely, however, Peter was referring to those dead at that time of his writing who had heard and accepted the gospel. Many people in the early church had concerns about life after death. In Thessalonica, Christians worried that loved ones who died before Christ's return might never see Christ (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). They wondered if those who died would be able to experience the promised eternal life. Peter explained that these believers, although their bodies

were punished with death—that is, they died physically as everyone dies physically—will still one day live in the spirit as God does.

Peter's readers needed to be reminded that the dead (both the faithful and their oppressors) would be raised from the dead—the faithful to eternal reward, the unfaithful to eternal punishment. God's judgment will be perfectly fair, Peter pointed out, because even those dead from ages past had heard the gospel. The Good News was first announced when Jesus Christ preached on the earth, but it has been operating since before the creation of the world (Ephesians 1:4), and it eternally affects all people, the dead as well as the living.

3. Imagine you heard someone criticizing a friend. How would you react differently if you loved the friend being talked about versus if you did not?

Have you ever heard anyone gossip about someone you know?... What do you have to say?

Here is what love says: Love says nothing. Love stays silent. "Love covers a multitude of sins." Love doesn't expose. It doesn't gossip. If love says anything, love speaks words of defense. Words of kindness. Words of protection. — Lucado, M. (2004). *Everyday blessings: inspirational thoughts from the published works of Max Lucado*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc.

4. How often would you guess people offer hospitality?

How hospitable are we? The following responses to the question "How often do you entertain guests for dinner?" in a May 2019 survey are telling:

- once a week: 6 percent
- once a month: 21 percent
- more than once a month: 12 percent
- a few times a year: 37 percent
- rarely or never: 24 percent

5. Specifically, what is the command?

Offer. You can't control whether people come. All you can control is whether you make the offer.

6. Luke 14.12. Who are we to invite when we offer hospitality?

Once we get into the habit of inviting guests home for dinner, who should we invite? When we offer hospitality to one another without grumbling, who are we to offer it to?

Jesus answered this question for us, too: "Then he told the man who had invited him, 'When you invite people for lunch or dinner, don't invite only your friends'" (Luke 14:12a, God's Word Translation).

He's saying that on a regular basis—as a habit—we're to include outsiders.

7. Verse 10. What are some examples of Spiritual Gifts?

Spiritual gifts are God's way of sharing His grace with others....

For example, when a man loses his wife, it's comforting for him to know that he will see her again someday. But that is not nearly as comforting as having friends around to hold him and listen and pray. When believers with the gift of mercy gather around him to listen, when another with the gift of administration takes care of all the funeral arrangements, when a neighbor with the gift of hospitality invites him to spend several nights with his family, when these things happen, it is as if Christ Himself reaches down to take care of one of His own. — Stanley, C. F. (2004). *God's way day by day* (117). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

8. Does everyone have a spiritual gift?

Not everybody has spiritual gifts. Unbelievers do not. But every Christian person who is committed to Jesus and truly a member of His Body has at least one gift, or quite possibly more. The Bible says that every Christian has received a gift (see 1 Peter 4:10), and that "the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all" (1 Cor. 12:7). 1 Cor. 12:18 stresses that every one of the members is placed in the Body according to God's design. Possessing a spiritual gift is planned for every Christian.

9. Repeat after me: "God has gifted me with spiritual gifts." How does that make you feel?

This comes as good news to the average believer. It is pleasant to be reminded that God knows me, He loves me and He considers me special enough to give me a personal gift so I can serve Him. It is especially true in a society such as ours in America where many school districts establish special programs for "gifted children." The implication is that ordinary citizens are not gifted. Not so in the Body of Christ! God gifts us all.

10. How do you go about discovering your spiritual gifts?

One of the best ways of discerning your spiritual gift(s) is to get involved in a variety of ministry experiences.

As you explore the different ministry areas, you will soon discover if you are gifted for these ministries.

- LOOK FOR those ministries in which you feel the most fulfilled.
- LOOK FOR those ministries in which you seem to be the most effective.
- LOOK FOR those ministries in which others affirm your abilities. (People may not verbalize their appreciation. You may need to take the step of seeking counsel from those who will give you an honest assessment.)

Envelop the whole process in prayer. The Lord will lead you to an identification of your gift(s) if you allow Him to guide and direct you in all your endeavors.

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight. (Prov. 3:5,6)

If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. (James 1:5)

While labeling your gifts is helpful, using your gifts is more important. Do what you know to do even if you can't put a name to it. The benefit of being able to specifically identify your gifts is that it can make you more effective as you learn how to better develop that gift and relate to and understand others better.

11. What do you want to recall from today's lesson?

12. We are praying for you...

1 Peter 3.13 - 22

1. **Overview. Imagine you are reading this passage in your daily Quiet Time. What sections would you underline and why?**

No Spiritual Discipline is more important than the intake of God's Word. Nothing can substitute for it. There simply is no healthy Christian life apart from a diet of the milk and meat of Scripture. The reasons for this are obvious. In the Bible God tells us about Himself, and especially about Jesus Christ, the incarnation of God. The Bible unfolds the Law of God to us and shows us how we've all broken it. There we learn how Christ died as a sinless, willing Substitute for breakers of God's Law and how we must repent and believe in Him to be right with God. In the Bible we learn the ways and will of the Lord. We find in Scripture how to live in a way that is pleasing to God as well as best and most fulfilling for ourselves. None of this eternally essential information can be found anywhere else except the Bible. Therefore if we would know God and be Godly, we must know the Word of God—intimately. — Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1991), 28.

2. **Verse 15. "Heart" is a word we use a lot—inside and outside of church. What exactly does it mean?**

Your Identity. Your heart is the most important part of who you are. It is the center of your being, where the "real you" resides. "The heart of man reflects man" (Proverbs 27:19). As a person "thinks in his heart, so is he" (Proverbs 23:7 NKJV).

Your Center. Since your physical heart is in the center of your body and sends life-giving blood out to every living cell, the word heart has been used for centuries to describe the core starting place of all your thoughts, beliefs, values, motives, and convictions.

Your Headquarters. Your heart is the Pentagon of your operations. As a result, every area of your life is impacted by the direction of your heart. — Alex Kendrick and Stephen Kendrick, *The Love Dare* (Nashville: B&H, 2013).

3. **What exactly does it mean to revere Christ as Lord?**

Here the apostle again alludes to Isaiah 8:13, "Sanctify the Lord of hosts" (KJV). When believers sanctify Christ as Lord in their hearts, they affirm their submission to His control, instruction, and guidance. In so doing they also declare and submit to God's sovereign majesty (cf. Deut.

4:35; 32:4; 1 Kings 8:27; Pss. 90:2; 92:15; 99:9; 145:3, 5; Isa. 43:10; Rom. 8:28; 11:33) and demonstrate that they fear only Him (Josh. 24:22–24; Pss. 22:23; 27:1; 34:9; 111:10; 119:46, 63; Prov. 14:26; Matt. 4:10).

Sanctify (hagiasate) means “to set apart,” or “consecrate.” But in this context it also connotes giving the primary place of adoration, exaltation, and worship to Christ. Believers who sanctify Christ set Him apart from all others as the sole object of their love, reverence, loyalty, and obedience (cf. Rom. 13:14; Phil. 2:5–11; 3:14; Col. 3:4; 2 Peter 1:10–11). They recognize His perfection (Heb. 7:26–28), magnify His glory (Acts 7:55–56; cf. Rev. 1:12–18), extol His pre-eminence (Col. 1:18), and submit themselves to His will (Mark 3:35; Rom. 12:2; Eph. 6:6; Heb. 10:36; 1 John 2:17), with the understanding that sometimes that submission includes suffering.

This honoring of Christ as Lord is not external, but in the hearts of true worshipers—even when they must face unjust suffering. That submission to and trust in the perfect purposes of the sovereign Lord yields courage, boldness, and fortitude to triumph through the most adverse situations. — John F. MacArthur Jr., *1 Peter, MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2004), 200–201.

4. The NASB (and others) have the phrase, “sanctify Christ as Lord.” What does that mean?

What does it mean to be holy? . . . Stripped down to its basics, the term holy means “set apart” in some special and exclusive way. . . . In holy matrimony, for example, a man and a woman are set apart, leaving all others as they bond exclusively to each other. . . .

In Holy Communion . . . the bread and wine are set apart from common use and set aside to God alone. The same meaning lies behind the word sanctify in 1 Peter 3:15: “But sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts.” . . . We are to “set Him apart” as Lord in our hearts.

What a successful way to deal with the cosmos! To begin the morning by saying, “Lord, I set apart my mind for You today. . . . I set apart every limb of my body and each area of my life unto You as Lord over my life.” When we start our day like that, chances are good that temptation’s wink will not be nearly as alluring. — *Hope Again* / Charles R. Swindoll, *Wisdom for the Way: Wise Words for Busy People* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007).

5. Let’s dive a little deeper. What do our friends without Christ need to know about God? What misconceptions do they have about God?

There are many aspects of God’s nature that we could study, but He has three characteristics that are especially relevant in evangelism. The first one is that He is loving. Out of His compassion He made us and desires to have a relationship with us. Even though we’re sinners who have rebelled against Him, He continues to patiently extend His love to us.

Many people prefer to stop right here, but there's more that needs to be said. You see, God is also holy. This means that He is absolutely pure, and He is separate from everything that is impure.

Under normal lighting, our lives tend to look pretty good, with no serious moral flaws or blemishes. But then God comes and shines the brilliant light of His holiness on our actions, thoughts, and intentions, and what shows up is not pretty.

That leads us to a third characteristic of God: He is just. In other words, He's like a good judge who can't wink at a broken law: rather, He must mete out justice.

A number of years ago in Scotland, a man murdered a member of his family. But by the time he was brought to trial, the judge decided he'd already punished himself enough, and he let him go. It doesn't take a lot of imagination to guess how the public responded: "What? That's not fair! We want justice! Get that judge out of there, and replace him with a good one who'll uphold the law."

Well, God is a perfect judge who will dispense justice to everyone fairly.

6. What do they need to know about man? What are some misconceptions they have about man?

When God first created humans, He made us good, without sin. But we abused our freedom, rebelled against Him, and became evil.

Furthermore, as we've just seen, God's holiness exposes us for what we are and His justice deals fairly with the sin we've committed. Unfortunately, the seriousness of our sin requires God to pronounce upon us the death penalty. This means both physical death and spiritual death, which is separation from God in a very real place called hell.

And to cap off the bad news, we're helpless to initiate any action that can change our situation. I sometimes describe it as being "morally bankrupt," with nothing in our account with which to pay off our debts. Thankfully, the story doesn't end there.

7. What do they need to know about Jesus?

Jesus Christ was uniquely able to solve our dilemma because He was both God and man. As God, He had the power and authority to devise a plan for our salvation. As a man, He was able to execute the plan by taking upon Himself the punishment we deserved.

The central truth of the gospel is that Christ died in our place, as our substitute. He suffered the death penalty debt for us. In so doing, He expressed the love of God, upheld the holiness of God, and satisfied the justice of God.

He did all of that so that He could turn around and offer us His forgiveness, friendship, and leadership as a gift. We don't deserve it, we didn't pay for it, and we can't earn it. The only way we can receive it is to humbly bow before Him, admit our waywardness, and say yes to His incredible offer.

When we do that, our sin-debt is paid in full, and we receive the promise of eternal life in heaven. We also gain the ongoing companionship of the gift-giver Himself, who will be there to lead us, guide us, and lovingly bring us correction when we need it.

8. Why couldn't God just forgive our sins? Why did Christ have to come and die?

Let's look at a couple of questions people often raise about the role Christ played in gaining our salvation. First, some people ask why any price had to be paid at all. "Why couldn't God just forgive and forget, as we can?"

But suppose you had a brand new car parked in front of your home, and a neighbor accidentally ran into it. Though you can forgive him and release him from any responsibility, you'll still have a problem: who's going to pay for the dent? Since you let him off the hook, you're going to be left having to pay for the repairs yourself.

Similarly, we've done damage by sinning against God. And He, too, was willing to forgive us and restore our relationship with Him. It's ours for the asking. But He still had to pay for the damage. He was left holding the bill — the death penalty — which He paid by coming as one of us and dying on the cross in our place (Acts 20:28).

9. What exactly do people have to do to become Christians?

Jesus paid the price of salvation for the whole world, but only those who say yes to Him will actually receive His forgiveness.

It's perplexing to me that in spite of the Bible's emphasis that we must individually receive Christ and His gift of salvation, this is the most overlooked part of the message in a lot of churches today. Many people are left with the impression that if they go to church, or are born into a Christian family, or try to be moral and religious, then they are automatically made right with God.

But it's not true. Anyone who relies on their personal efforts to get into God's family is eventually going to experience the world's worst nightmare. Listen to the warning Jesus gave in Matthew 7:21 – 23: "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons

and perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’”

So for the sake of those who need to be reached, we’ve got to be crystal clear about the fact that a personal response is essential. Each of us has to receive the forgiveness and leadership of Christ individually. And when we do, the Bible assures us that the Holy Spirit will immediately take residence within us and begin to change us from the inside out.

We can’t make that decision for others and we shouldn’t push them to make it prematurely. But we’ve got to be sure they understand that there is no other way. Furthermore, we need to be prepared to help them take that step across the line of faith.

10. Verse 15 also speaks of the importance of gentleness and respect. Why do you think this is important?

Take your friend’s questions and objections seriously. Thank God that they’re interested and engaged enough to raise such important issues, and do your best to give them a worthy response.

When I see people challenging the Christian faith on intellectual grounds, I do two things. First, I try to help them realize the bankruptcy of the competitors to the faith — whatever they may be. Secondly, I try to help them see by contrast the superiority of the biblical position.

It’s easy to look on the surface of the alternative positions and be drawn to them. But the closer you look, the weaker they become. And the deeper you delve into the evidence for Christianity, the more your faith will grow. We must do our homework in order to firmly fix our own convictions. Then we need to do all we can to help our friends grapple with the truth and make it their own.

11. Why is the personal testimony such a powerful tool?

Your personal testimony of knowing Christ as Savior and Lord is an effective tool for evangelism and edification. To many, the Bible is antiquated and irrelevant. But people can relate to what God has done, and is doing, in your life.

Whether your conversion to Christ was a quiet living room or Damascus Road experience is insignificant. What matters is that you had an encounter with a personal God that changed your way of thinking and your life.

That encounter is a tangible means of personalizing and manifesting the reality of Christ and His Word—one that the Holy Spirit can use to authenticate the message of the gospel. Even

other Christians can be encouraged through your testimony. Many can identify with your struggle of unbelief and doubt. Still others can relate to your continuing discovery of God's truth as a growing Christian, motivating them to continue the race begun at salvation.

Never be shy about telling someone else what God has done for you. God may use it in ways you never dreamed. — Charles F. Stanley, *Enter His Gates: A Daily Devotional* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998).

12. What needs to be included in a personal testimony? What are the ingredients?

1. My life before receiving Christ
2. How I received Jesus Christ
3. How Jesus Christ makes my life meaningful

13. We want to be doers of the Word, and not hearers only. What do you want to do from today's study?

14. Remember we are praying for you...

1 Peter 2.1 - 10

- 1. Verse 1. Malice is not a word we use too much in everyday conversation. When is the last time you used the word malice? What does it mean?**

The Greek word translated malice includes evil of all kinds and not merely the limited usage we give to it. It is an entire disposition to injure others without cause. The word therefore introduces other specific evils. — Cleave, D. (1999). 1 Peter. Focus on the Bible Commentary (52). Ross-shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications.

- 2. What is the difference between envy and jealousy?**

The word for “envies” is phthonos. It refers to that feeling of ill will produced in the unregenerate heart upon hearing of someone else’s promotion or prosperity. Envy and jealousy are twins. Envy resents the advancement of someone or their acquisition of something; jealousy covets that advancement or acquisition for itself. Such behavior is contrary to the law of love (1 Cor. 13:4-8). — John Phillips Commentary Series – Exploring the Epistles of Peter: An Expository Commentary.

- 3. Slander is not a word we use too much in everyday conversation. What exactly is Peter warning against here?**

Slander means destroying another’s good reputation by lies, gossip, rumor-spreading, etc. Malice often manifests itself through slander. We should not treat fellow Christians the way the world treats us (3:16). — Life Application Bible Commentary – 1 & 2 Peter and Jude.

- 4. Verse 2. How are we to be like babies?**

But growth is also impossible without nourishment. Peter wants to remind his readers that, more than simply receiving spiritual nourishment, they should be ardently longing for it. They should not be like children who eat milk puddings—which they don’t really like—because they have been repeatedly told by their mother “It’s good for you,” but more like children who consume ice cream, with gusto. The newborn child does not interact much with its new environment, but right from the start it ardently desires milk. Christians should show the same eager desire for the spiritual equivalent. They should, to change the metaphor, be hooked on it. — Marshall, I. H. (1991). 1 Peter. The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (1 Pe 2:1). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

- 5. What do we learn about growing in Christ from this verse?**

As any parent knows, a new baby has a limited menu. He drinks milk or a gentle formula that’s just right for his developing digestive system. As he grows, he moves up to soft foods that have been specially mixed for easy swallowing. But it’s only when a baby cuts his teeth that the real joy of eating begins.

God designed the believer's "appetite" for His Word to work in much the same way. As a young believer, you begin the nourishment process with the milk of Scripture, the elementary principles that lay the groundwork for deeper truths to come. Then as you mature in your relationship with Christ, you're ready to learn more.

A baby who doesn't progress to more substantial foods doesn't keep growing. Something is wrong. It would be unnatural and unhealthy for the baby to drink only milk for an extended period of time. If you don't move beyond the basics of faith, you soon become spiritually malnourished and cease to develop as God planned.

Are you growing in the Lord? Commit yourself to feeding on God's Word each day, trusting Him to work His principles into your heart as you obey His direction. The more of His truth you absorb, the more you'll grow to be like Christ.

Father, help me to commit myself to feeding on Your Word each day. I want to grow strong in Your precepts. — Stanley, C. F. (2002). *Seeking His face* (178). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

6. What is spiritual milk?

But what does he mean by spiritual milk? The word spiritual shows that he is using a metaphor. Literally it means "belonging to the word or reason" (Gk, *logikos* from *logos*, "word"). This may mean "reasonable," as opposed to material, or "metaphorical," as opposed to literal. So the phrase may simply mean "the spiritual equivalent of milk." We are not making much progress! The answer must lie in the word milk itself, which was commonly used as a metaphor for religious teaching. It refers elsewhere in the New Testament to elementary teaching, as opposed to the "solid food" given to those who are no longer babies (1 Cor 3:2; Heb 5:12–13). Peter, however, is not thinking of this contrast but simply how Christians all receive nourishment from teaching. The Word of God that brought Christians to birth will continue to sustain them. Kelly holds that the writer could hardly use the word spiritual without intending to allude to the word, which figures so prominently in 1:22–25 (1969:85). — Marshall, I. H. (1991). *1 Peter*. The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (1 Pe 2:1). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

7. Would you say it is true of you? Would you say you crave Word like a newborn craves milk?

During their attempt to reach the South Pole, Ernest Henry Shackleton and his men were reduced to twenty ounces of food per man each day. This left them constantly hungry and continually craving food. They imagined meals of plenty and dreamed of giving banquets to each other. Neither the glory of great mountains towering around them nor the majesty of the glacier up which they moved had any appeal. "Man becomes very primitive when he is hungry and short of food," Shackleton wrote, "and we learned to know what it is to be desperately hungry."

Jesus offers special blessing to those who, through knowledge of their spiritual poverty, passionately seek God. They will be filled with the God for whom they hunger, he promises. And what a difference. When physically starved, we indeed become primitive, seeking only to save ourselves.

Yet when spiritually starved, we reach our highest level of development. We are at our best, not our worst, for we become like the God we seek. — Hurley, V. (2000). Speaker's sourcebook of new illustrations (electronic ed.) (107). Dallas: Word Publishers.

8. Ever feel the opposite? Ever feel like you are not that fired up about reading the Word? What are we to do in such times? How do we cultivate a thirst for God's Word?

Nothing is more perilous than to be weary of the Word of God. Thinking he knows enough, a person begins little by little to despise the Word until he has lost Christ and the gospel altogether. —Martin Luther, Galatians Commentary (on 2:14–16) / Larson, C. B., & Ten Elshof, P. (2008). 1001 illustrations that connect (24). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

9. My guess is that some of you are doing well these days in spending time alone with God in the Word.

Nothing has a greater impact on spiritual growth than reflection on Scripture. If churches could do only one thing to help people at all levels of spiritual maturity grow in their relationship with Christ, their choice is clear. They would inspire, encourage, and equip their people to read the Bible—specifically, to reflect on Scripture for meaning in their lives. The numbers say most churches are missing the mark—because only one out of five congregants reflects on Scripture every day. — Hawkins, Greg L.; Parkinson, Cally (2011-07-15). Move: What 1,000 Churches Reveal about Spiritual Growth (Kindle Locations 234-237). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

10. What keeps you from time in the Word?

Current research into the spiritual lives of seventy thousand Americans—of all ages, from nearly every corner of the nation—is proving something many Christians have doubted: There's power in God's Word. A majority of those we surveyed showed us that consistently engaging the Bible is the key to knowing God intimately, getting unstuck, and growing spiritually. Yes, it really works—despite what we may have been told! The sixty-six love letters from our Creator are far from irrelevant. To the contrary, getting God's words from our head to our heart (and eventually into our feet) can result in amazing changes that transform how we think, love, live, and serve. — Ross, Michael; Cole, Arnie (2012-05-01). Unstuck: Your Life. God's Design. Real Change. (Kindle Locations 204-209). Baker Book Group. Kindle Edition.

11. Is it possible to live the John 10.10 abundant Christian life without spending time in the Word on a daily basis?

Love for and delight in God's Word always marks the truly saved. Jesus said, "If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free" (John 8:31-32). The apostle Paul echoed those principles when he said, "I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man" (Rom. 7:22). The Old Testament saints also expressed a strong desire for the Word of God. Job declared, "I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my necessary food" (Job 23:12). The opening psalm declares that the godly man's "delight is in the law

of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night” (Ps. 1:2; cf. 19:9-10; 40:8). The prophet Jeremiah cherished God’s revelation in a difficult time: “Your words were found and I ate them, and Your words became for me a joy and the delight of my heart” (Jer. 15:16). — MacArthur New Testament Commentary – 1 Peter.

12. This verse reminds me of the saying, “You are about as close to God as you want to be.” Do you think that is true?

Before we can be filled with the Spirit the desire to be filled must be all-consuming. It must be for the time the biggest thing in life, so acute, so intrusive as to crowd out everything else.

The degree of fullness in any life accords perfectly with the intensity of true desire. We have as much of God as we actually want. One great hindrance to the Spirit-filled life is the theology of complacency so widely accepted among gospel Christians today.

According to this view acute desire is an evidence of unbelief and proof of lack of knowledge of the Scriptures. A sufficient refutation of this position is afforded by the Word of God itself and by the fact that it always fails to produce real saintliness among those who hold it. POM133

I have met Christians who have been wanting to be filled, in a vague sort of way, for many years. The reason they have not been filled with the Spirit is because they have other things they want more. QTB114 — Tozer on the Holy Spirit.

13. How is God described in verse 3? Do you think the world sees Him that way?

This is the great battle of Christian communication: to persuade people—starting with people in the church—that God is good. Following God is good. His ways are good. It is good for me to follow God. It is always in my best interest to live the Christian life. It is good for me. It is good for everyone around me. If everyone lived in the reality that God is good, this world would be a whole lot more like heaven and a whole lot less like hell.

14. There is an oxymoron in verse 4. What is it?

As unto a living stone. The allusion in this passage is to Isaiah 28:16, “Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner-stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste.” Isaiah 28:16. There may be also possibly an allusion to Psalms 118:22, “The stone which the builders disallowed, is become the head-stone of the corner.” The reference is to Christ as the foundation on which the church is reared. He occupied the same place in regard to the church which a foundation-stone does to the edifice that is reared upon it. Comp. Matthew 7:24,25. Romans 9:33, Ephesians 2:20, seq. The phrase “living stone” is however unusual, and is not found, I think, except in this place. There seems to be an incongruity in it, in attributing life to a stone, yet the meaning is not difficult to be understood. The purpose was not to speak of a temple, like that at Jerusalem, made up of gold and costly stones; but of a temple made up of living materials-of redeemed men-in which God now resides. In speaking of that, it was natural to refer to the foundation on which the whole rested, and to speak of that as corresponding to the whole edifice. It

was all a living temple—a temple composed of living materials—from the foundation to the top. Compare the expression in John 4:10, “He would have given thee living water;” that is, water which would have imparted life to the soul. So Christ imparts life to the whole spiritual temple that is reared on him as a foundation. — Notes on the New Testament Explanatory and Practical.

15. Verse 5. How is the church like a building?

In His first mention of the church, Jesus compared it to a building: “I will build My church” (Matt. 16:18). Believers are living stones in His building. Each time someone trusts Christ, another stone is quarried out of the pit of sin and cemented by grace into the building. It may look to us that the church on earth is a pile of rubble and ruins, but God sees the total structure as it grows (Eph. 2:19-22). What a privilege we have to be a part of His church, “an habitation of God through the Spirit.” — The Bible Exposition Commentary – New Testament, Volume 2.

16. Verse 5. Do we have priests in the church today?

We are a “holy priesthood” and a “royal priesthood.” This corresponds to the heavenly priesthood of our Lord, for He is both King and Priest (see Heb. 7). In the Old Testament, no king in Israel served as a priest; and the one king who tried was judged by God (2 Chron. 26:16-21). Our Lord’s heavenly throne is a throne of grace from which we may obtain by faith all that we need to live for Him and serve Him (Heb. 4:14-16).

In the Old Testament period, God’s people had a priesthood; but today, God’s people are a priesthood. Each individual believer has the privilege of coming into the presence of God (Heb. 10:19-25). We do not come to God through any person on earth, but only through the one Mediator, Jesus Christ (1 Tim. 2:1-8). Because He is alive in glory, interceding for us, we can minister as holy priests.

This means that our lives should be lived as though we were priests in a temple. It is indeed a privilege to serve as a priest. No man in Israel could serve at the altar, or enter the tabernacle or temple holy places, except those born into the tribe of Levi and consecrated to God for service. Each priest and Levite had different ministries to perform, yet they were together under the high priest, serving to glorify God. As God’s priests today, we must work together at the direction of our Great High Priest. Each ministry that we perform for His glory is a service to God. — The Bible Exposition Commentary – New Testament, Volume 2.

17. What does it mean, practically speaking, that we are priests to one another?

The Christian small group is a spiritual house of priests who offer themselves individually and as a group to be living sacrifices for the healing and reconciling of persons and society. Their priesthood is essentially their redeemed humanity and their restored community together. To be in pursuit of the wholeness of persons and relationships is to be a participant in ministry and to be a priest with Jesus, who is the great high priest of the ecclesia, the household of priests. The ecclesia were scattered communities of God’s priests in a pagan world full of idols and false gods.

The priesthood of Jesus defines the priesthood of each person in the small group. Hebrews 4:14–5:3 describes the great high priest as one who is able to sympathize with weakness, has undergone and overcome temptation, is able to give access to God, is able to offer sacrificial intervention for sin, is able to deal gently with the ignorant and straying, is able to admit weakness, does not take personal glory, offers up prayers and petitions with passion and emotion, and has learned obedience through suffering. These priestly characteristics were to be as true of the small group as of the individual. They are character traits of people who have been rebuilt in community with Christ. — Icenogle, G. W. (1993). *Biblical foundations for small group ministry: An integrative approach*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

This is the general message of 1 Peter: “though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold ... may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed” (1 Pet 1:6–7). The ecclesia were “like living stones ... being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood” (1 Pet 2:5). They were being built together as a sturdy community to weather a stormy world.

18. What do we learn about our purpose from verse 9?

“That you may declare the praises” gives the purpose of grace to men. “The praises” (aretai) often mean his “self-declarations” or his manifestations to men (cf. TDNT, 1:457–61). So then the church is to “advertise” (Selwyn, p. 167) the noble acts of God in history and thus make him known. Specifically, the Father (“him who called” [cf. 1:15]) is revealed by Jesus in his death and resurrection. Light-darkness is a common dualism in the Bible to describe God-evil, good-bad, revelation-ignorance, new age-old age (e.g., Isa 8:21–9:2; John 1:4, 8–9; Eph 5:8; 1 John 1:5–2:2). Christians are once again reminded of God’s action in bringing them out of darkness into his marvelous light (cf. Ps 34:5: “Those who look to him are radiant”). — Blum, E. A. (1981). 1 Peter. In F. E. Gaebelin (Ed.), *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, Volume 12: Hebrews Through Revelation* (F. E. Gaebelin, Ed.) (231). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

19. What do you want to recall from today’s passage?

20. Remember we are praying for you...