

Study/Devotional Notes on the First Letter of Peter

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These notes may be used in whatever way the reader finds profitable, in part or in full. I pray they will be edifying to the people of God in Christ and draw new people into His kingdom by faith.

Note: this document is searchable by chapter, verse, or word.

For those using a PC, press Control+F. For those using a Mac, press Command+F.

1 Peter 1:1-2

Getting Started

As we get started today, we'll follow the pattern that we've used each time we've started a new study, which is to look at some of the background and circumstances surrounding the writing of the book. With that in mind, our focus here at the beginning of 1 Peter is going to be mostly one of historical context.

1 Peter 1:1-2

1Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To God's elect, strangers in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, 2 who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance.

My dad was a history major in college, and I used to think that it was an incredibly boring subject. I couldn't understand why anyone would want to dig through the past and drum up a bunch of useless information with no practical value. As I grew older, however, an interesting thing began to happen along the way: I began to be drawn to history, fascinated by it, even excited by it. I came to understand that it wasn't history itself that was boring; rather, it was my presupposed and miscalculated notion that it was comprised of useless information. Actually, to Dad's credit, it turns out that history can be supremely interesting, and even more than that, history can be a powerful teacher. As we look at the book of 1 Peter, one of the most important things we can do before we start reading it is to understand its place in history. Once we do that, Peter's words to his readers take on a clarity, sense of urgency, and spirit of victory that isn't so readily evident on the surface.

So where do we start? Let's go back to the summer of 64 A.D., the summer of the great fire of Rome. This was no ordinary fire; the city literally burned to the ground. The person behind it was the emperor Nero, whose desire to put his mark on history and create a city of greatness could only be accomplished by getting rid of everything that was already there. The problem, though, was that in burning down Rome as it then existed, he also incinerated the spirit of the people, destroyed their culture, and left them bereft, broken, and extremely bitter. In fact, their bitterness was so extreme that Nero found himself in deep trouble. The people weren't blind; they

suspected him from the very beginning. The emperor, then, needed to act quickly to divert the blame, and what was his chosen scapegoat? The Christian church. The Christians were to blame for starting the fires, he said - and he sent word by every means possible to spread this "news" throughout the burnt-out metropolis.

What we want to understand here is that Nero wasn't lacking in the brains department. The Christians were the perfect people on whom to dump this off, because they were already a hated minority group. Number one, they were associated with the Jews, who had always been at enmity with Rome, and number two, they were seen as being hostile and intolerant of Roman culture, especially with regard to its pantheistic and immoral religious practices. However Nero went about spreading the rumors that Christ's people were behind the fire, it worked better than even he could have imagined. That very summer while the ashes were still smoldering, a great persecution arose against the church, one that quickly spread throughout the entire Roman Empire. Out of nowhere, Christians were suddenly under the gun, and their suffering was tremendous in scope.

1 Peter is written to these very people, most likely in the very recent aftermath of the great fire. The recipients are scared, scattered, tattered and battered, and quite frankly, they need some shoring up. God uses Peter to provide the hope that they need to carry on. What is it that they need the most? Poignant reminders about the hope they possess in Jesus Christ, and practical steps to take as they endeavor to navigate their way through persecution. With these things in mind, let's now look briefly to the opening verses of the letter.

Verse 1: Peter gets right down to business. Notice that even in his greeting, he doesn't mince words. He identifies himself and his office of apostleship in order to establish his authority, and immediately after doing so, he launches into the task of encouraging his readers. First, they are God's elect. Translation: "the first thing I want you to remember is that You belong to God." Next, they are strangers in the world. Meaning? "This world is not your home; the circumstances in which you find yourselves are temporary; this is not your destiny." Finally, they are scattered. Peter, in acknowledging this, shows that he understands their predicament, that he's not going to minimize it, and that he will speak directly to it in the verses to come. The places where these displaced Christians are scattered, by the way, are all locations that geographically speaking would be in modern-day Turkey. At the time of his writing, Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia were all part of the Roman Empire.

Verse 2: Peter continues his uncompromising message of encouragement in verse 2, and the tone of his words is almost like that of a military commander speaking to his troops in a time of crisis. "Here are the facts," he says. "Remember the reality of your position. Don't lose sight of who you are and what you're about." In this case, the facts of the matter and the reality of these peoples' position and the regiment to which they belong and the purpose for which they are there all find their answer in the authority of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (did you notice that?), who has chosen them, bought them with His blood, and set them apart, sanctified them, made them holy, for His own purposes. "To all of you, for whom these blessings are a present and certain reality, Grace be yours and peace be yours, and may they be yours in multiplied abundance." That's how Peter begins. That's the tone he sets for this letter. That's the confident power with which he speaks and which he imparts to a group of men, women and children who need the assuring voice of a shepherd at a time when their flock is being scattered.

Wrapping Up

Now - as always (and many of you know that I continually say this to you in the course of our studies), what we've just looked at has been an exercise in scratching the surface. You can go deeper than what I've presented here and I encourage you to go deeper. If you're new to Bible study, there are a million great products in your local Christian book store to help you grow in your knowledge of the Bible and of its background. Please go and explore them! But for now, this is a good start. And as we wrap up for the day, let me just say this: I know that there are a lot of you out there who, in varying degrees, readily relate to the things Peter addresses in today's text. If you're a person who is going through it and overwhelmed because of it, let this portion of God's Word speak to your heart. As you do, grace and peace will flood your heart in multiplied abundance. God is faithful and he is with you. Take care, and we'll see you back here tomorrow.

1 Peter 1:3-5

Getting Started

As we get started today, we continue on in the first chapter of Peter's first letter to the persecuted church. Our focus: a blessed inheritance!

1 Peter 1:3-5

3Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you, 5who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.

Last year, my grandmother went to be with the Lord. She was in her late nineties, her husband of 70+ years had preceded her in death, she had cancer and was in pain, and she was ready to go. It was a blessing for the family to gather and remember her legacy. Not too long after the memorial service, something unexpected happened. Not only had Grandma left us a legacy of the importance of faith and family, it turns out she left us another legacy as well: an inheritance. It wasn't a great amount of money, but it was significant, and the fact that we as her grandchildren were remembered in that way was special and touching. I think that in her mind, it was a tangible way for her to express her love for us.

In the text before us today, Peter continues to remind his brothers and sisters in Christ scattered throughout the Roman Empire, and enduring severe and increasing persecution in their lives, that they have not been forgotten by their Lord. In fact, using the vivid word picture of an inheritance, he lets these people know that Christ's love for them is in its essence a wonderfully tangible thing. The most beautiful thing is that as Peter talks about this inheritance, it's more than just a word picture; it's a present and future reality!

Verse 3: As we pick up at verse 3, notice that the first thing Peter does is to bless the Lord and proclaim His great, abundant mercy in the lives of His people. Peter speaks from experience, doesn't he! Having deserted Jesus, having denied Him three times, and then having been

restored and recommissioned to an apostolic, evangelistic ministry, the man writing this letter is one who has been a recipient of the Lord's mercy in an extraordinary way. The point, though, is that every sinner is an extraordinary recipient of this abundant mercy, including these people who, in the midst of severe affliction, might be tempted to forget that fact. Just how has that mercy been extended to them (and to us as well?) Through giving them a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. There it is right there: the Gospel of Jesus Christ in its most succinct expression! One thing that we all need to remember, no matter what it is that we may be going through, is that in His great love for us and in His great mercy toward us, Jesus Christ died for us, paid on our behalf the penalty demanded by our sins, and three days later rose again in victory over sin death and the devil - which victory is also our victory by faith in His finished work!

Verse 4: It's in verse 4 that Peter describes the nature of that wonderful victory with the language of inheritance. What is the nature of our inheritance in Christ? First, it is imperishable. That means that it is not subject to passing away; it is not vulnerable to decay. The Greek word here refers to something that withstands and is untouched by the ravages of an invading army. Next, Peter says that our inheritance in Christ is one that will not spoil. Some translations render this phrase as an inheritance "undefiled." The idea here is that the promise of eternal life in Jesus Christ is untouched by evil, unpolluted by attempts that the enemy has made to mar it. It is pure and inviolable. Finally, Peter says that our inheritance in Christ is one that will never fade. The allusion here is to flowers that, while beautiful for a certain period of time, ultimately wither and die. Grandma's inheritance was a beautiful thing, but it was an earthly inheritance that was ultimately used up rather quickly to help with some medical expenses. It served a blessed purpose, but its benefit was temporal rather than eternal. Our Christian inheritance, on the contrary, is one that will never decrease, never deteriorate, and never ever be used up. It will never fade.

Verses 4-5: To finish, at the end of verse 4 and into verse 5, Peter says one more thing regarding this inheritance that we have in Jesus Christ: it is being kept in heaven for us. Isn't that great? That's better than being insured by the FDIC any day! And who are we, by the way? Let's look at the passage: we are people who, through faith - which in and of itself is a gift that has been given to us by God - are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. What does that mean? Not only is our inheritance safe and secure, but so are we, because our Lord Jesus Christ holds us in His hand and He will let none of us slip from it, and He has promised that, having begun His good work in us, He will be faithful to bring it to completion in the day of His coming. Powerful words of truth, powerful words of confident hope, powerful, mood-altering, attitude-changing promises from God Himself. No wonder Peter began this section of verses by praising and blessing the Lord!

Wrapping Up

And as Peter began that way today, it's fitting, I think, for us to end that way. As we wrap up for the day, I'd like you to take a moment and read through these verses one more time, one by one. Why? Because I want you to take a moment to recognize, and then embrace, each one of the promises contained in them. Great mercy? It's been extended to you! New birth? Living Hope? An inheritance that will never perish, spoil or fade? In Jesus Christ it's all yours. And because He is holding it for you until He calls you home, you know it's safe and secure. Doesn't that do something to change your perspective on things a little bit in the here and now? I sure pray that it does, and as you take a moment to recognize in these things your inherent worth before the God who loves you and gave Himself for you, I also pray that you will be moved in

your spirit to worship and adore Him. Hang tough, keep the faith, and know that Christ is with you. We'll see you next time!

1 Peter 1:6-9

Getting Started

As we get started today, we find the apostle Peter continuing his words of encouragement to the persecuted church, speaking to them on the basis of a great theological truth: the imperishable inheritance that is theirs through faith in Jesus Christ. Our focus today: God's grace through times of trial.

1 Peter 1:6-9

6In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. 7These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. 8Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, 9for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

If I were to ask you whether you've ever been through a difficult time in your life, you'd slap me! Of course you have; we all have. Some of us have lost loved ones, some of us have had to contend with a debilitating illness or that of a family member, some of us have experienced trauma in our marriage and family relationships, some of us have struggled with employment issues, some of us battle addictions, the list goes on and on and on. The sobering reality that we must all sooner or later face is that we are a fallen people living in a fallen world, and that because of that, until such time that our Lord returns and makes all things new and forever incorruptible we will all experience trouble. Jesus said it Himself lest we think that the Christian life is some kind of a free pass exempting us from hardship: "In this world you will have trouble." Ah, but what else did Jesus say, directly following that first remark? "In this world you will have trouble... BUT, take heart; for I have overcome the world." It's true: by His perfect life, sacrificial death, and victorious resurrection from the dead on the third day, Jesus has indeed overcome the world, and that reality serves as both the foundation and the springboard for our study today. Do we have trials? Yes; but because of our Lord's victory over sin and death, He now takes even those things that are devastating in our lives and turns them into faith-strengthening, God-glorifying events, and He promises to work them for our good.

Verses 6ff: This is precisely what Peter is talking about as he exhorts his brothers and sisters in Christ to rejoice in the inheritance that they possess, even though they are currently experiencing great difficulties because of their faith. Just what kind of difficulties are we talking about here? Well, many of their number have been killed or thrown into prison; most have been driven from their homes, their property confiscated and other possessions stolen; some are constantly on the run, living in fear of being captured and tortured; and along with those things there is most likely the attendant reality of economic hardship, which has been brought on by being displaced. While Peter acknowledges these things and concurs that they have been many and have caused grief, notice what he also says about them: that they are temporary; only for a little while. This is the second mention of that truth. Remember, he has already reminded these

folks that they are strangers in this world, that this is not their true home, that they are pilgrims on a journey. In fact, as we go along through the letter, what you're going to notice is that he continues to say that in as many different ways as he can. For people going through life- or- death situations, people under the weight of severe trials or distress, the promise of heaven is a vitally important reality to hold before them. For those who already know God's grace we do that by reminding them of their hope, just like Peter is doing here in the text. For those who don't yet know Christ as their Savior, it has to start with the presentation of the Gospel.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap up for today, I want to stop here so that I can encourage you to stop and think. What trials are you experiencing right now? How are they impacting your life? What do you wish you could do about them? And finally, in light of what we've looked at today, have you looked at them at all through the lens of God's grace? Your heavenly Father may desire to minister to you, to teach you, to bring you to a new understanding of His love or His comforting Spirit, or to test and strengthen you through what you're facing right now. Ask Him to show you His way for you through this, and know that according to His good and gracious promise, you will come through it stronger and closer to Him than ever before. Take care, and the joy of the Lord be your strength!

1 Peter 1:10-12

Getting Started

As we get started today, we have a lot of material to cover in just a few verses. Our focus: The joy of promises fulfilled!

1 Peter 1:10-12

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

In the Sunday morning Bible class that I teach, I've been talking to folks about how to stand up for what they believe in. So many of us know what we believe, but we've never really taken the time to consider why we believe. Yet in this generation especially, knowing why we believe in the message of the cross is more important than ever. It is not our purpose today to launch into a study on Christian apologetics, but briefly, let me say this: when you are approached by skeptics with questions about the validity of your faith and the reliability of your Bible, there's a great acronym - MAPS - that will help you in giving an answer to their inquiries. MAPS stands for Manuscripts, which refers to the academically proven historical reliability of the Scriptures; Archaeology, which in hundreds upon hundreds instances has borne out the accuracy of both the Old and New Testaments; Prophecy, the fulfillment of which has been independently verified and which is stunning in its scope; and finally, Statistics, which refers to holding Scripture up to the science of statistical probability and seeing how it fares, the answer to which is incredibly

well. As we look at today's passage, it's the last two categories of MAPS that I'd like to focus on for a few minutes.

Verses 10-12, Summary: Peter, you'll remember from yesterday, has just finished talking about the glorious gift of salvation in Christ, a gift he has called his readers to embrace with everything they have in the midst of their persecution. After all, joy, as we learned from Peter's description of it in the text, comes not from focusing on our circumstances, but on our Savior! Now, in the three verses that we've just read, Peter talks about how that glorious gift of salvation has been both promised and delivered through the course of history. What he's doing is giving them the reassurance that what they are holding to is not some cleverly made-up scheme, but something that is firmly grounded in history, something in which they can put utmost confidence. To summarize, we can say that salvation in Christ was promised through the prophets, who spoke of the coming Savior, and it was fulfilled in the life and ministry of Christ Himself and through those who preached the Gospel post-resurrection. The operative in both the proclamation of the promise as well as proclamation of the fulfillment was the Holy Spirit. Peter further says that the very reason the prophecies were given was to serve as a blessing, encouragement, and assurance to God's people that what was promised would come to pass, that it would all prove itself out. That's what the text reflects in verses 11-12. The question for us is this: how do we know that everything matches up? Did all of what the prophets spoke regarding the coming of the Christ actually happen? And more specifically, can all of those things be verified as having had their fulfillment in the life of Jesus of Nazareth? Admittedly, the chance of that being so is almost a mathematical impossibility.

Let's do a pretend. Let's pretend we have eight uniquely different prophecies made by eight different men over a period of 800 years. The statistical probability of all eight of those prophecies being fulfilled in the life of one man at a set period in history is 1 in 10¹⁷. That's 1 in 100,000,000,000,000,000. To illustrate that, if we took 100 quadrillion silver dollars and dumped them in Texas, we'd have a pile two feet deep covering the whole state. Now, mark one of those silver dollars with an 'x', bury it where you'd like, blindfold your best friend, and give him or her one chance to pick up the one silver dollar that you've marked. The chance of your friend picking up the right coin in one try is the same chance that those eight independently made prophecies have of being fulfilled by one person.

If we pretend a little bit more and increase the number of unique prophecies to 48 and consider the probability that they would be fulfilled by one man at a set period in history, the chance of that happening decreases to 1 in 10¹⁵⁷, or 1 in 10 with 157 zeros after it. It's astounding, and it really goes beyond our ability to comprehend, doesn't it.

But here is the reality of what we have in the biblical record: the Bible is a document comprised of 66 books of several different genres written by 40 different human authors from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds over a period of 1600 years. In that document we have not 8, or 48, but over 300 specific prophecies concerning the coming of Christ, His life, His death, and His resurrection. What is the statistical probability that they would all be fulfilled in Jesus? Based on what we've just said, you do the math. But here is the staggering and historically verifiable fact: every single one of them bears out. We could go on and on, but the simple fact, and I fear I've belabored the point a bit, is that we can trust the Scriptures to be true. That's Peter's message to his brothers and sisters in today's passage, and it's his message to us as well. Considering the overwhelming evidence that we can bring to the table in asserting that the Bible

is divine rather than human in origin, - and we've just barely scratched the surface in our time today - no wonder even angels desire to look in to these things!

Wrapping Up

As we wrap up for the day, let me encourage you to begin a quest. Don't settle for just knowing what you believe; make sure you also know why. The evidence is there, and as scholar Josh McDowell would say, it demands a verdict. I hope that you'll begin thinking on these things. God bless you, and we'll see you next time!

1 Peter 1:13-16

Getting Started

As we get started today, having spent 12 verses at the beginning of his letter shoring up his readers with declarative statements about who they are and what they possess as children of God, Peter now moves into a section of prescriptive teaching. Our focus: gird yourselves up!

1 Peter 1:13-16

13Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed. 14As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. 15But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; 16for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."

We're getting ready to go on vacation; a driving vacation comprised of four people traveling in a four-door, four-speed, four-cylinder car for four days along - what else - Interstate 44. Because there will be many people with many things packed into a minimum of space and moving with minimal power, we need a plan. Enter the genius of my wife. She will consider every square inch, think of every conceivable configuration, organize every diverting activity, and orchestrate every start, stop, and emergency potty break along the way. Most impressive, she will at any given moment have the ability to implement or alter any part of the plan for any reason whatsoever. She's a woman ready for action.

I mention my wife and her amazing capacity for effective planning because in the Word of God before us today, Peter is calling for his audience to possess similar attributes in their spiritual lives as followers of Christ. Let's be clear: this is an energetic, urgent call to active Christian living in the face of difficult circumstances, yet it all hinges not on our own strength or abilities, but on a firm grasp of God's grace in Jesus Christ. Let's have a look at it!

Verse 13: Peter begins this section with the word "therefore." As we've seen in the past, this is always a sign for us to go back and recall the things that have previously been said. If we do that here, we'll remember that Peter has been talking about the greatness of our salvation in Christ, the beauty of our eternal inheritance which is being kept for us in heaven, and which is waiting to be revealed to us in its fullness at the second coming of our Savior. He's been encouraging us to focus on these heavenly promises in the face of our earthly trials, and he's given us remembrance in two different places of the fact that what we're going through right now will not last; that our suffering is only temporary.

So - in light of all of this, says Peter, God now calls on us to prepare our minds for action. In the Greek, this phrase translates out as “gird up the loins of your mind.” You can see why the NIV paraphrased a little bit here! Actually, to gird up your loins meant to gather up your robes, to hitch them up around your waist when you needed to move in a hurry. So when Peter says that we should gird up the loins of our mind, the picture that he’s giving us is one of being mentally ready and alert to act on a moment’s notice. We are to be aware of our spiritual environment and able to act at any time in accordance with our surroundings. What else does he exhort us to in this verse? Self-control, which is a reference to having a properly focused, rightly prioritized life not distracted by the trappings of the world; and perhaps most important, we are to fully set our hope on the grace that will be given to us at the coming of Christ. As people purchased with the blood of Jesus, we are already recipients of His grace. The reference here is to the ultimate fulfillment or final culmination of that grace when, at the second coming, we will be finally and permanently changed, given new and glorified bodies, and begin dwelling forever with Jesus in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness.

Verse 14: It’s as we do that - and did you notice that this is yet another call to focus on the promise of heaven? - it’s as we do that, our lives firmly fixed on the glory to come and our minds constantly attuned to the future reality that awaits us, that we will be better able to discern and reject the ways of the world which would distract us from our heavenly calling. Thus Peter exhorts in verse 14 that as obedient children, we no longer be conformed to the evil desires we once had prior to salvation, but rather, act in accordance with our new nature in Christ.

Verses 15-16: This is explained further for us in the next two verses as Peter holds before us the holiness of God as an example, and recalls the direct command of our Heavenly father from Leviticus that because He is holy, we also are to be holy. This passage is all about new obedience as new creations in Christ.

Remember, though... the way that this is birthed in us is not through external acts of righteousness or efficacy of human effort. Our righteousness, as Isaiah reminds us, is as filthy rags before the Lord. No, these things are wrought in us as we grow in our understanding of, and rest firmly in the promise of, God’s grace in Jesus; remembering that while we were yet sinners, Jesus died for us. Our growth in holy living, then, the very thing that Peter is calling for here, does not come through our efforts to gain the approval of God; it comes in grateful response to the fact that in Christ, we already have God’s approval! That’s why Peter is so intent that we set our hope fully on grace: it is the one true wellspring of spiritual growth and maturation in Christ.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap up for the day, I know that your desire, like mine, is to know the reality of this passage in your own life. And while it would be easy for me to speak spiritual platitudes, use the same old tired spiritual expressions, exhort you to revival or tell you to hunker down and get right with God, you know what? That’s not the way it works. Your growth in the grace and knowledge of Christ is a process, sometimes moving with great speed, sometimes seemingly at a snail’s pace, and yes, sometimes stalled out or even rolling backwards for a time. Though you are a new creation in Christ, you’re still contending with the old, sinful self that continually tries to rise up and wreak havoc. But take heart - as you press on, striving to take hold of that for which Jesus took hold of you, you are firmly in His hand, and He will not let you go. And because that is the case, He is also continually at work in you to carry on the good work that He has begun in you. As we say here many times, He will most certainly be faithful to bring it to completion! God bless you richly; we’ll see you next time.

1 Peter 1:17-21

Getting Started

As we get started today, Peter continues to write about our station in life as followers of Christ. Our focus: Living as strangers in a strange land.

1 Peter 1:17-21

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

I had a friend in high school who had a really cool dad. Whenever we'd get ready to go somewhere, my friend's dad would always say to him, "Hey! Remember who you are!" It was his way of saying a couple of different things: first, he was reminding his son that he loved him. Second, he was reminding his son that he was part of the family; that in all he said and did he was representing the family; and that rather than being dragged through the mud by poor choices and inappropriate behavior, the family name was something to be honored and respected. There was never a lecture, and the phrase was never uttered as a warning; it was just a cheerful reminder of an important principle.

Verse 17: In today's reading, Peter in many ways is giving us a "Remember who you are" talk. It's not a lecture, not said in warning or with any kind of implied threat; rather, it's a simple reminder of an overwhelmingly important principle: we are part of a Family. All we say and do in life represents the Family Name. And that Name is something to be honored and respected. Notice that Peter right away in verse 17 very purposefully uses the term "Father" when referring to our Almighty God. It's the third time in the letter that he has done so, and by using it, he is reminding us that we are our heavenly Father's children. The second thing we see is that even as we are called God's children, we are in the same breath called strangers here. In other words, Peter is reminding us yet again that this world is not our home. We are just passing through. And as such, one reason we are here is to leave an imprint on all with whom we come in contact; one that will reverently point to the love of God in Christ as our hope in this world and the world to come.

Verses 18-19: Verses 18 and 19 point us to another reason for a life of reverent fear and careful focus: it's the manner in which we have been redeemed. I love the word "redemption" because it's a rich concept, especially when applied to what our Lord Jesus did for us at the cross. The word is actually a technical term which refers to paying a price to release someone from the bondage of slavery or to buy back a prisoner of war. Jesus did precisely that very thing for us, but not with silver or gold; rather, He bought us out of bondage by paying the debt of our sin with His very own blood. It was His work at the cross that purchased our release and delivered us from behind enemy lines back home to our Father's house. Peter makes the point here that the price Jesus paid for us was so great, and our resulting freedom so precious, that anything less than a life of reverence and holiness and a focus on heavenly things cheapens the grace which has been lavished upon us. Oh that our lives would demonstrate a joyful, grateful response to God's love for us in His Son! That might sound like a law-based kind of a statement, but Peter is

very clear: as we live our lives here as God's people, we are always to do so remembering who we are, whose we are, and how we came to be there.

Verses 20-21: Finally, in the last two verses of this section, Peter by way of reminder tells us that Christ's sacrifice for us was all part of God's perfect plan to bring us back to Himself. Jesus, he says, was chosen before the foundation of the world to bring salvation to us, and He has been revealed to us in these last days to draw us to the Father, bring us to faith, and fill us with hope. This, of course, is something we know and for which we are eternally grateful – but it's always good to have it on the front burner of our minds.

Wrapping Up

Wrapping things up for the day, that's a comforting thought, isn't it? That God so loved you and me and the rest of the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have everlasting life! It's the verse we all know from the Gospel of John, stated for us here by Peter in another powerful way - the heart of the good news of the message of Jesus Christ. That's really what it all comes down to, isn't it. God bless you richly, and we'll see you back here next time.

1 Peter 1:22-25

Getting Started

As we get started today, Peter's exhortation to holy living continues. Our focus: loving deeply, from the heart.

1 Peter 1:22-25

22Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart. 23For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. 24For, "All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, 25but the word of the Lord stands forever." And this is the word that was preached to you.

Eternity is a concept that's hard to get your head around, isn't it! Things of eternal significance, things with eternal consequence, things eternal in their nature are just hard to grasp. Back in college someone described eternity to me as a great crystal mountain, taller than any mountain on the earth. Once every one million years, a dove comes and wipes the crest of its beak across the top of it, taking an almost imperceptible amount away from the mountain's height. When at some point in the very distant future the dove finally wears that crystal mountain to its base, that will be eternity defined. Of course, even that is an inadequate definition, because eternity has no end. It is forever!

In our reading today, Peter talks about things eternal. In fact, in a way it's a continuation of what he has talked about earlier: you'll remember that in verses 17-21 we were told that our salvation was procured for us not by perishable things such as silver and gold, but by something imperishable, incorruptible, something that came to us from eternity and stepped into space and

time to do for us what we could not do ourselves. That something was the love of God in Christ Jesus, who gave Himself for us as a sacrifice for sin, a spotless Lamb without blemish or defect.

Verse 22: Picking up with today's section of Scripture, Peter goes on with the same line of thinking, now applying that truth to the Word of God. In verse 22, we are told to love one another deeply, from the heart. On what basis and with what power? On the basis of the manner in which we have been born again. And what basis is that?

Verse 23: The answer is given to us in verse 23: we have been born again - catch the familiar language now - not of a perishable seed, but of an imperishable seed, which is the living and enduring Word of God, or as the New King James Version translates it, "The Word of God which lives and abides forever." You see, it's the Holy Spirit, working through the Word, who brings conversion; and likewise, it's the Holy Spirit, working through the Word, who sanctifies us and transforms us by the renewing of our minds, enabling us to love one another deeply. As Paul says in Romans 10: "Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the Word of Christ."

Verses 24-25: Peter continues to bring this truth home in verses 24-25 by quoting from the 40th chapter of Isaiah: "All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the Word of the Lord stands forever." Here on our little farm, that illustration has been powerfully brought home to me through the spring and summer months. We had a stunning wildflower season and our grass was lush all the way through early July. But now with the heat of August, the flowers are dried up and the grass is brown and brittle. That's a picture of our lives - but the Word of God, in contrast, has always and will forever endure. In fact, it is that very Word, Peter says, which has brought us to the knowledge of the truth and which has turned our hearts to Jesus; the Word through which the good news of Christ has been preached to us.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap up for the day, what comes through to me very clearly here, among other things, is the incomparable power of the living, active, eternal Word of God . It is the lifeblood of our walk with Jesus: how we learn of Him, how we hear from Him, how we are conformed to Him. It's the vehicle through which the Holy Spirit works in our lives; the sustenance by which we are fed, strengthened, and maintain endurance on our journey through this life. If that's the case, then you and I can't possibly have too much of it! Is God's word a major part of your life? Would you like it to be more so? Would you like to have a hunger for God's Word that drives you to it throughout each day and which becomes more and more a part of who you are as time goes on? That's the cry of my heart for my own life, and I pray that it will be so for you as well. Through E-DiBS, through your own personal study time, through your small-group Bible studies, and through the fellowship of your Bible-teaching church, May you become a person of one book: the Word of God, which lives and abides forever! I'm praying for you - you pray for me as well, won't you? God bless you, and we'll see you back here next time.

1 Peter 2:1-3

Getting Started

As we get started today, we continue to see a very prescriptive line of instruction coming to us in this portion of God's Word. Our focus: emptying out, filling up!

1 Peter 2:1-3

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

Here on our property in southwest Missouri, we have an old machine shed, which is essentially a big five-bay garage that's open on one side. It's made of rough-sawn solid oak that was harvested on the property, and for a building that was constructed to keep tractors and other equipment out of the elements, it's got some pretty cool architectural features. I have big plans for this shed...a combination rec room/summer pavilion/potting shed/outdoor canning kitchen. I've visualized it in my head, I've plotted it out on graph paper, and I've sketched it in my journal. But one thing has to happen before I can realize my goal: I've got to get rid of all the junk that's accumulated there over the years! Once it's clean, then I can renovate.

Today as we begin the second chapter of 1 Peter, that machine shed weighs heavily on my mind, because like that old shed, God's Word in the verses before us calls for a renovation to take place in our lives. We are people who have been purchased out of the slavery of sin, people saved by the grace of God, people who have been born again by the Holy Spirit working through the imperishable seed of the everlasting Word of God. In the closing verses of chapter one, Peter voiced the reality of our salvation in Christ in several different ways, didn't he! Now, in chapter two, he takes things to the next step. The building has been acquired; there are great plans for it, in fact it has been visualized and sketched and plotted out in the heart of God Himself. For those plans to come to fruition, now it is to be cleaned, gutted, and rebuilt. It can be a daunting task! Let's look briefly at the things we are to rid ourselves of:

Verse 1: Notice here in verse one that Peter leaves no room for so much as a spiritual dust bunny to be left in the corner. His language is absolute. First, we are to rid ourselves of ALL malice and ALL deceit. Deceit we understand, but what's this about malice? Malice is a word used almost a dozen different times in the New Testament, and it is used to describe wickedness that comes from within. Get rid of it, Peter says. Next he lists hypocrisy, envy, and slander, of what? Of EVERY KIND. Again, the language is absolute. Why such a stringent call? Why shoulder God's people with such a burden? And how, for heaven's sake, are we to do such a thing?

Verse 2: Left to our own strength and given over to our own devices for fulfilling this command, there is nothing in it for us but heartache and despair. There are many of you studying along today who have endeavored in your hearts over and over and over again to eradicate certain behaviors, attitudes, and actions from your lives. You've fought and fought, and on those rare occasions when you have gained what seemed like victory over certain things, in all likelihood you've also experienced them come roaring back with a vengeance twice as strong as they were before. How many of you know what I'm talking about? Here in verse 2, we see that the reality of this situation is that the battle can't be fought within our own strength. Instead, the key to ridding ourselves of one thing is to have our lives filled with something that will take its place. Not things of the world; not the philosophies of men; not the meditations of our own hearts,

because those things have proven themselves to be folly. No, the replacement must be alien to us, something that can be poured into us from outside of ourselves - something, frankly, that is divine rather than human in its nature.

And that, once again, is where the presence and the power of the Word of God comes in. We ended our last session by talking about how central it is in our lives as God's people, and here in today's passage, Peter confirms that very thing. What does he tell us? To crave pure spiritual milk, which is a reference to the Scriptures. It's as the Word does its work in us, always achieving the purpose for which it is sent and never returning to the Lord void, always having the power to accomplish what it says, and always proving itself to be useful for teaching, correcting, rebuking, and training in righteousness, that our lives are surely and gradually changed - conformed to the image of Christ. How can the Bible do this? Because it's God-breathed. It's inspired. It does not merely contain the Word of God, it is God's very Word, and it is sharper than any doubled-edged sword, able to pierce through to the center of who we are and effect supernatural change within the deepest parts of who we are. That's why Peter says that by it we will grow up in our salvation.

Verse 3: Verse 3 is a beautiful affirmation of the power of the Word in our lives. Though it comes to us mid-sentence, look at what it says and understand its implications. It is by the Word of God that we were first brought to faith and tasted the goodness of God's grace, right? Right! Now, Peter reminds us, it is by that same Word that we will grow to maturity as men and women in Christ. And because it was through hearing the Word that we first came to know the Lord, how exciting to know that it is through continuing in the Word that we will experience the ongoing renovation of our hearts that Peter speaks of in this passage! The Word is central to our growth in the grace and knowledge of Christ, central to having a connected relationship with Him, central to replacing the things of this world in our lives with the things of God.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap up for the day, what kind of an impact does this passage have on your thoughts about the Scriptures? What would happen in your life if, as Peter exhorts, God's Word became something that you craved with the same sense of need and intensity that a newborn infant has for a mother's breast? What would happen if you realized your Bible to be what it truly is: the one source of every spiritual nutrient that you need and the one thing that can truly satisfy your hunger? The possibilities are amazing to ponder, don't you think? What's to keep you from surrendering to that notion today? Maybe now is finally the time for you to take the leap and trust God in a way that you never have before. As you do that, here's what I know: God will absolutely prove Himself faithful to you through His Word, and as His Word begins to do its work in your life, you will never be the same again. Ask God to give you the craving. And let's see what happens. The peace of Christ guard your heart - we'll see you next time.

1 Peter 2:4-6

Getting Started

As we get started today, Peter talks about Christ our Rock, rejected by men, but chosen by His Father. Our focus: living stones!

1 Peter 2:4-6

4As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him — 5you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. 6For in Scripture it says: "See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame."

At the end of the road I live on, there is a rock quarry. Trucks go in and out every day carrying loads of limestone. Some of it is crushed, and will most likely end up on a country road somewhere; some of it is larger and will be used for rip-rap to stabilize a bank or a hillside; but every once in a while a truck leaves the quarry with huge, square-cut blocks, and those stones will be used to build something, something that, to my way of thinking, must be magnificent and stately. Sometimes I'm tempted to follow the drivers and see just where those blocks end up. They're so large and so solid that they'll surely be used for a cornerstone or as part of a foundation on a massive home or commercial project.

Today in the age of concrete, glass and steel, we don't very often think about building with stones, and when we do see stonework, it's usually quite beautiful, if not functional. In our text today, Peter speaks of a different kind of stonework, a kind of which we are actually a part, and we will be blessed in our consideration of his words.

Verse 4: Beauty, as we know, is often in the eye of the beholder - but so is function, as we see from the verses before us. As we come to Jesus, verse 4 says, we come to Him as a living Stone. Isn't there a wonderful irony in that description? Stones are not, by nature, alive, but dead and inanimate. Jesus was considered precisely that by His detractors, and yet by His resurrection from the dead He proved them all wrong. Jesus as the living Stone is a sly description on the part of Peter! But a living Stone Jesus is indeed, and though He was rejected by men, He was chosen by God the Father and precious in His sight.

Verse 5: Continuing on in verse 5, as we come to Jesus, the living Stone (and the idea in the Greek here is not simply coming to Jesus, but the act of remaining in Jesus), we ourselves are living stones as well. In other words, through our redemption by Jesus at the cross, we are now united with Him in such a way that our old selves, having been crucified with Jesus, have given way to the new creations that we are in Christ. It's as Paul says in his letter to the Galatians: "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." So wonder upon wonder, we are now, like Jesus, living stones also - and together we are being built by Him into a spiritual house. Stay with me here for a minute: That spiritual house houses us as a holy priesthood, where our purpose is to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

Now, why would God's Word call us part of a holy priesthood? Well, think about the nature of the priesthood in the Old Testament: to be a priest was an elect privilege; to be a priest meant you were one cleansed of your sin; to be a priest meant you were clothed and anointed for

service; to be a priest meant you were ordained to obedience and to honor the Word of God. As a priest, you were also called to impact people for God's kingdom and to act as His messenger, but perhaps the greatest privilege of the priesthood was this: as a priest you had direct access to God. You are part of a holy priesthood because in Jesus Christ, through His perfect life, His sacrificial death, and His victorious resurrection, all of those things now apply to you. Have you ever thought about it that way before? You need to think through the implications here, and I dare say, as you do you will be swept over with joy. Later on Peter will refer to us as a priesthood yet another time, saying that we are not simply holy, but royal as well – an even greater truth to fathom. We'll come to that later on in this chapter, but for now, let's move on and finish up our thoughts for today.

Verse 6: In verse 6, Peter comes back and reiterates the fact that Jesus is a living Stone, elect and precious to the Father. He does this by paraphrasing from the 28th chapter of Isaiah, which names the Messiah as the Cornerstone of the New Covenant. The full verse reads this way: "So this is what the Sovereign LORD says: 'See, I lay a stone in Zion, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation; the one who trusts will never be dismayed.'" So here we have it: in Jesus Christ we have our sure foundation, and more than that, we are being built up in Him as a spiritual house to exercise the blessing of a holy priesthood, serving Him with all that we are.

Wrapping Up

When we come together again on Monday, we'll look at the other side of the coin here. Jesus, for us, is the precious Cornerstone – but for others He is the Stone of stumbling and a rock of offense. How can He be both of those things at the same time? It's an issue of the heart. Remember, beauty is often in the eye of the beholder - but so is function. Have a terrific weekend of worship, fellowship, and family time; and more than anything, take some time to intentionally and joyfully exercise your priesthood as a person bought with the precious blood of Jesus! Take care!

1 Peter 2:7-10

Getting Started

As we get started today, Peter continues a thought that he began the last time we were together, and it's regarding Christ as our Rock. Our focus: A Cornerstone to some, a Stumbling Block to others.

1 Peter 2:7-10

7Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, "The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone," 8and, "A stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall." They stumble because they disobey the message—which is also what they were destined for. 9But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. 10Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

On hot days during the summer time, the kids and I like to go wading down at the Finley River a few minutes from the house. We put on our Crocs, grab a couple of buckets, and head for the water, hunting crawdads, frogs, and small fish. We also like to pick up pretty rocks that we find

in the river bed. Sometimes, though, the pretty rocks turn ugly when we stub our toes or clunk our ankles against them. In those instances, it doesn't matter how pretty they are – we usually pick them up and hurl them into the water in our momentary pain and anger.

Verses 7-8: In today's reading from 1 Peter 2, we find Peter telling us that Jesus Christ, our Chief Cornerstone, our sure Foundation, the Rock that has been tried and tested and proved, is not seen as such or embraced as such by all people. Rather, for some He has become the stone that has caused them to stumble and the rock that has caused them to fall. It doesn't matter how beautiful He is – His love, His mercy, His finished work at the cross – because there are people in the world who, regardless of His beauty, will cry out in pain and anger when they encounter Him, choosing to hurl Him away rather than stand fast on His promises. These are the people described for us in verses 7-8. They stumble, we are told, by being disobedient to the Word, which is what they were destined for.

Now, some theologians would render this passage in a way that gives way to the idea of double predestination – meaning that God, if He predestined some people to go to heaven, also predestined some to go to hell. I don't believe this is Scriptural, because the Bible is very clear that God desires all people to come to a knowledge of the truth and be saved. Instead I believe - and the majority of evangelical scholars hold this view as well – that this passage is talking about something different. The people being talked about in verses 7-8 are not appointed by God to disobedience and unbelief; rather, they are appointed to judgment because of their disobedience and unbelief. The Scriptures do tell us that judgment will be rendered for unbelief, and those people who exercise their free will to reject Jesus Christ and His saving work are subject to the outcome of their refusal.

Verse 9: Having talked about that unfortunate reality, Peter now, however, turns his attention back to his primary audience: the persecuted, scattered Christians to whom he is writing. “You who are in Christ,” he says, “are several things.” What kind of things? Let's look at the list, and due to time constraints we'll look at it briefly:

A chosen people: This means chosen for salvation!

A royal priesthood: Here's the term we alluded to last time. A royal priesthood is one which is kingly; in other words, one that not only belongs to and serves the King, but one which also exercises rule! The Bible says that when Jesus returns to take us to heaven, one of the things that we will do is reign with Him in His glory! This is what Peter is referring to here.

A holy nation, a people belonging to God: This is another Old Testament allusion that describes us as God's unique, special people, and coupled with the description is our stated purpose: that we may declare the praises of Him who called us out of darkness into His wonderful light.

This verse is rich with meaning and we could spend a long time going back and linking these concepts together with Old Testament events and practices which were just shadows of what was to come to fulfillment in Jesus. Let me encourage you to do some studying here later on your own, because your eyes will be opened and your heart will be blessed as you dig a little deeper.

Verse 10: As we move on though, Peter explains our designation as God's people further in verse ten: "Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy." When we were outside of a covenant relationship with God, we had no standing, no identity, and no hope. But now, having been brought back to God by the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, we are His dearly loved children, His people; people with a hope and a future by virtue of His mercy. In other words, there is nothing left for us to do; it's all been done for us in Jesus!

Wrapping Up

As we wrap up for the day, let me encourage you to spend some time thinking about the fact that your true identity, and with it your standing in life and your sure and certain hope for the future, are inextricably linked with the fact that God sent His one and only Son for you. Behold what manner of love the Father has given unto us, that we should be called the children of God! Take care, and we'll see you back here tomorrow!

1 Peter 2:11-17

Getting Started

As we get started today, we as God's people are reminded again of our status as aliens. Our focus: standing fast in a hostile world.

1 Peter 2:11-17

11Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. 12Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us. 13Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, 14or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. 15For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men. 16Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God. 17Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honor the king.

There are certain things I hate doing, but I do them anyway. Sometimes it's because they just need to be done, but other times it's because I need to be an example of integrity in the face of a difficult circumstance. When I was pulled over on the highway a couple of weeks ago for doing 75 in a 65, I didn't have my license or proof of insurance with me and I didn't even have my vehicle registration in the glove box. I was toast. The fleshly part of me was ready to make all kinds of excuses and offer any number of explanations to the officer who pulled me over. I was looking at about six points off my license and the hit I was going to take in my bank account and from my insurance agent was already making my stomach turn. But instead of trying to bargain or make excuses, I chose the road of integrity and admitted to my offenses. Why? Not only was it the right thing to do as a citizen and as a man of God, it was also the right thing to do as a father being an example to his son. See, Jacob was in the back seat watching all of this take place. We were on our way home from a Cub Scout gathering where he had just received an award for good citizenship. If ever I had the opportunity to back up my words with actions, this

was the time. I hated being there on the side of the road admitting my guilt – but it was the right thing to do.

As we continue to look at the first letter of Peter, we come to a section today in chapter two where he talks once again not only about who we are, but also how we are to show who we are. This is a conduct passage, and the gist here is that we are to order our lives according to godly principles not only for ourselves (though it is the right thing to do as citizens and as people of God), but we also do so as a witness to those on the outside in hopes of being God's instrument in their coming to faith in Christ.

Verse 11: Verse 11 gives us the overview, doesn't it: First of all, we are strangers and aliens in this world. This should be a familiar theme to us by now, because Peter has taken every possible opportunity to bring it to our remembrance, and we're not even halfway into the letter! Second, as people whose true home is heaven, we are to abstain from sinful desires, which war against our souls. This is wonderful counsel to us all by itself, but Peter has a specific reason in mind as he gives us this exhortation. What is it?

Verse 12: Verse 12 says it's so that our conduct will be so far above reproach in the eyes of unbelievers that even if they accuse us of evil and speak untruths about us now, in the time when their hearts are ripe for the Gospel, they will remember our lives among them and end up glorifying God as a result. For some this will come at the wonderful moment of their conversion while for others it will be at the terrifying moment of their judgment, when every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord; but either way, Peter says, let the manner in which we conduct our lives always be a testimony to the love of God in Christ. Let us walk the talk.

Verses 13-14: This, naturally, is going to manifest itself in several different areas of our lives, and the remainder of the verses in this chapter are going to flesh it out for us in some detail. Verses 13 and 14 tell us to submit ourselves to earthly authorities, whether to kings, or to governors as their representatives, who punish for wrongdoing and give praise for what is good. The one caveat here would be if an established earthly government commanded that we do something contrary to God's Word. In that instance, we must obey God rather than men. We'll look more into that subject when we study the book of Romans sometime down the line, but for now, we can once again note why we are to submit to these earthly authorities:

Verse 15: Verse 15 says that in doing this we are following God's will and silencing the ignorant talk of foolish men. In essence, in showing ourselves to be model citizens, we are giving testimony to the righteousness of God and the validity of our faith.

Verses 16-17: Peter sums this point up in the final two verses of our study today by saying the following: "Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God. Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honor the king." It doesn't really get any clearer than that!

Wrapping Up

As we wrap up for the day, why don't you take a few moments and consider your own life in the context of these verses. You're probably not facing life or death situations because of your belief in Christ, and it's not likely that people are calling you a radical and reporting you to the

authorities because of your faith, but some of you do face difficult situations in the workplace or in your families because of your belief in Christ. Does the manner in which you live your life act as a validation to the love and mercy of Jesus and the validity of the Christian faith, or does it cast shadows on the truth of the Gospel? No accusations here – just something very worthwhile to think about. May God give you the strength to be an ambassador for Him in a way that brings those around you to a joyful discovery of His grace. God’s peace!

1 Peter 2:18-21

Getting Started

As we get started today, we find Peter continuing to lay out the life which is good and acceptable to our Savior as we walk through this world. Our focus: Accepting authority – both the good and the bad.

1 Peter 2:18-21

18Slaves, submit yourselves to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh. 19For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God. 20But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. 21To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.

Do you remember your first job? I hated my first job. I was reminded of it in a recent comic strip. Zits, by Jerry Scott and Jim Borgman, does an ingenious job of portraying teen angst and adolescent struggles, and not too long ago, one of the characters, named Pierce because of all of his body piercings, came to his boss and said,

“I’m sorry, I have to leave early again this afternoon.”

The employer said, “What? This is the third time this week!”

“I know, said Pierce, but I wouldn’t ask if I didn’t have a really, really good reason.”

“And what reason is that?” asked the boss.

Pierce responded, “I really hate this job!”

Yesterday when we were together, you’ll recall that we were in a section of Scripture that exhorted us to live lives worthy of the Gospel of Christ. Not only is this God’s will for our own growth and edification, but it is also God’s will in the arena of our Christian witness. Today we find Peter continuing with that discussion, this time with reference to slaves and servants as they relate to their masters. Let’s be very clear that while Peter is speaking to the reality of slavery in the culture at that time, it is in no way to be considered a condoning of such a practice. Rather, Peter indicates here that slaves, as people under the authority of others, can be especially powerful witnesses to the Gospel by their conduct – especially when they are suffering for doing good. For most of us today, the best way to contextualize this passage is by thinking of our places of employment and considering those who are in authority over us in the workplace. Let’s look at what these verses have to say.

Verse 18: Verse 18 says that we are to submit to those who are over us with all respect. Why are we to do that? Number one, if it’s the established order, if it has to do with the exercise of

authority for the good of an organization, it is necessary in order that things run smoothly and that productivity be at its best. At my last church in California, my senior pastor released all of us on staff to go out and do the ministry we were called to do, but when he felt the need to step in or wanted us to do certain things that he felt were important in the overall scope of the ministry, we did what he asked of us. Why? Because it was his job to lead, and it was our job to recognize and submit to his leadership. The fact that he never lorded it over us and that he had a gentle leadership style made it easy. But look at the passage: our Bibles tell us that we are to act with submission not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh. Why is that the case?

Verse 19: Peter explains it to us in the verses that follow. In verse 19 we are told that it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God. In doing this he is exercising Christ-likeness, which we'll talk more about in a moment.

Verse 20: In verse 20, it is clarified further: what credit is it to us if we endure a punishment that we deserve? But if we suffer for doing good and endure it that is what is commendable before God.

Verse 21: Why? Because as the Scripture says here, that is our calling. It's our calling because it's the example that Jesus left us, and we are to follow in His footsteps. Does this passage call you to be milquetoast? No. Does it command you to be a doormat? Of course not. Jesus was neither of those things, was He! But in those instances where you run into difficulty through no fault of your own, in those times when you are persecuted for doing what is right, and in those moments when you find yourself being called out and belittled because your employer happens to be having a lousy day, there is a Christian response to the situation. Although I hate to use it because it's so cliché, a great way to size up the situation is to ask yourself, "What would Jesus do?" But there's something else I'd like you to think about:

Wrapping Up

As we wrap up for the day, an even better question is this: what did Jesus do? Because when you get right down to it, your actions as a man or woman of God don't have as much to do with you and your life as they have to do with Christ and the life He lived, the life He gave up, and the life He took up again three days later. It's on the basis of His finished work at the cross for you and me and for all people that we find our response to any situation in life, good, or not so good. Consider the wonder of that grace today, won't you? Take care, and the joy of our Lord Jesus be your strength!

1 Peter 2:22-25

Getting Started

As we get started today, you'll recall that Peter has just finished telling us that there will be instances in our lives when we will suffer, even for doing good. You'll also recall that he has held Christ up for us as an example of suffering, and that we are to be willing to follow in His steps. Our focus today: More than an example!.

1 Peter 2:22-25

22"He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." 23When 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. 24He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. 25For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

I just saw a picture online of a mother in court, crying as her young son was led away in handcuffs. He had just been convicted of vehicular manslaughter after killing an elderly woman while he was fleeing from the police. Tried as an adult, he was now going away to prison. The look on that mother's face as she watched her son disappear through the double doors of the courtroom made very clear what she was feeling: if there was any possible way for her to take his place and serve that sentence on his behalf, she'd do it in a heartbeat. If she could take his place, he wouldn't face the horror of imprisonment. If she could take his place, he would be saved, and his young life would be redeemed. She had done all she could do in providing him with a good home and a right example and a proper upbringing. But now he needed something more.

Any of us who are parents can readily relate to that woman's heart. We would die for our children. But the reality is sobering: we can only do so much for them, can't we...and after we've done all that we can do, there comes a time when we must leave them to deal with the consequences of their own actions in life.

In the brief section of verses that we have before us today, Peter is continuing to talk about Jesus as our example of suffering in this life. We are to follow in our Lord's footsteps, the Bible says here, being willing to suffer even unjustly when faced with difficult circumstances. But as he talks to us about the example of our suffering Lord, Peter is intent on taking things a step further. Launching into an explicit statement of Christ's suffering on our behalf, we are shown that far more than just an example of suffering, Jesus suffered as our substitute.

Verse 22: He begins in verse 22 by quoting from the 53rd chapter of Isaiah, one of the great Messianic prophecies given to us in the Old Testament. It proclaims our Lord's sinlessness, His innocence, thus showing Him to be the perfect example of patient endurance in unjust suffering.

Verse 23: Moving on to verse 23, we are reminded that when Jesus was reviled with insults and accusations, He did not retaliate, but rather entrusted Himself to His Father, the One who judges rightly. So far so good. We see quite clearly that indeed, Jesus did serve as an incredible example, the perfect example, of what it means to suffer in a godly manner.

Verse 24: However, when Peter makes the transition into verse 24, we need to sit up and take notice, because this is where a profound shift takes place: the shift from a pattern to follow to an action taken in our place. What does it say here? "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed." You know what? If there was any possible way for Jesus to take our place and serve out what was demanded by our sins, He'd do it in a heartbeat. And there was a way, so He did it: His perfect life, lived on our behalf; His substitutionary death, which paid the penalty of our sin; His resurrection from the dead three days later, in which He rose victorious over sin, death, and the devil himself. Why did Jesus do it? Think of His heart: if He could take our place, we wouldn't face the horror of eternal imprisonment. If He could take our place, we would be saved; our lives would be redeemed. In providing us with a way to understand suffering in this life and a

right example in how to go about it, Jesus did a commendable thing. But we needed something far more, so He gave it as well.

Verse 25: Peter explains it this way in verse 25: we were like sheep going astray; but now, through His gracious work for us at the cross, we have been enabled to return to Him as our Shepherd. And Jesus, speaking as our Good Shepherd, says this: “The Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.”

Wrapping Up

As we wrap up for the day, I know that the basic presentation of the Gospel is something that most of us have heard over and over and over again. Sometimes we even grow tired of hearing it! But may I give you a different perspective on that? I believe that we need to hear the Gospel in our lives every day! We can never hear enough the good news that Jesus was our Substitute; that Jesus paid a debt He didn't owe because we owed a debt we couldn't pay. Our hearts never grow or mature to the point that we don't need to be reminded of God's great love for us in Christ, and so whether Peter reminds of it the way he has in today's text or we hear it in one of the Gospel accounts or in one of Paul's letters, or even if we simply hear it spoken to us by a pastor or a brother or sister in the Lord, let me encourage you not to let it go in one ear and out the other. Instead, seize that moment, whenever and however often it comes, as a moment of joy and thanksgiving; a moment to say to your Savior, “Thank you, Lord Jesus, for your great love and mercy!” You are so precious to God that He died to bring you back to Himself. Don't ever let that become passé in your Christian life! God keep your heart and mind close to Him today, and we'll see you back here next time.

1 Peter 3:1-2

Getting Started

As we get started today, Peter's letter stays on the subject of submission. He has talked about submission to government and submission to masters and those in authority, and now he moves on to the subject of submission in the family. Our focus: Wives and their husbands.

1 Peter 3:1-2

1Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, 2when they see the purity and reverence of your lives.

As I write today's study, I'm blessed to be able to say that my wife and I recently celebrated our 16th wedding anniversary. Like many of you who have been married for any length of time, when I look back on those 16 years I'm struck by how, in one sense, my wedding day seems like it was eternity ago. On the other hand, looking at it from a different perspective I'm struck by how fast the time has gone by! If you were to meet my bride, you'd immediately see that she is a strong, confident, educated, joyful woman with lots of gifts and abilities. She far outshines me in intellectual capacity and far exceeds me in the everyday skills of life and living. She's also a more astute theologian than I am. For all of those things, I am a grateful husband and father. Now, our marriage is a partnership, and we work to make it work. There are areas where Linda assumes leadership and areas where I assume leadership, and there are other facets of our lives where we make decisions about things together. The fact that we are Christians means that there is a special manner in which we order the complexities of our relationship. What

manner is that? We order our marriage relationship according to the biblical principle of submission. We'll be spending not only today, but also the next two days talking about this subject, and I hope you'll be able to join us as we talk about the how the Lord has called men and women both to submission in marriage. Let's start today by looking at God's Word to wives.

Verse 1: Once again, let me point out as we begin that this issue of submission is being spoken of by Peter in the context of a larger framework, a framework on which a strong witness for the Lordship of Jesus Christ is being placed to proclaim His glory to the world and for the sake of bringing others to Him in faith. Such is our goal in submitting to established government (2:13-17), such is our goal in submitting to those in authority over us (2:18-21), and now, such is our role in the home. It's very clear that the main thing on Peter's mind as he writes here is that the act of submission on the part of wives in the home be for the eternal benefit of their husbands who are not yet believers. It's Christian witness at its most powerful. Why? Because it's a method of evangelism not based on words, but on conduct. It was St. Francis who said, "Preach the Gospel at all times; if necessary, use words," but let's be clear where he got the concept from! The calling here for all of you godly women out there is not to preach sermons, but to be living messages of God's grace by who you are and what you do. That, more than anything else, will win your husband for the Gospel. In my first church I had a woman who shared with me that she had been praying every day for seven years that her husband would come to Christ. She never preached, never nagged; she simply did her best to demonstrate Christ's love in the home by serving her husband as Jesus had served. I'll never forget the day that man showed up in church, and I'll also never forget the joy of God's victory that that woman felt when her husband confessed Christ as his Savior.

Now, if you're a woman whose husband is already a believer, the principle of submission still applies, because by your actions and your example you are giving public witness to the headship of Christ over the church, and at the same time you are serving to strengthen your husband in his walk with Jesus (which, by the way, is the best thing that could ever happen to your marriage!). Biblical submission is not the picture of a beaten down, cowering woman afraid of her spouse; biblical submission is the picture of a woman of strength who through her actions blesses the church, honors the Lord and builds up her family all at the same time.

Verse 2: How does all of this begin to be put into motion? Verse 2 says it happens when your husband sees the purity and reverence of your life; when he looks at you and, though he may not realize it yet, sees Jesus. There's power in that...power to change a life for all eternity.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap up for the day, I pray that you dear sisters in Christ will find encouragement in today's text; that by what it is saying you may realize the godly authority and the joy inherent in the biblical role of submission; and that especially for you Christian women out there who may have unbelieving husbands, you'll find hope and a sense of purpose in this teaching, that your husbands may be won for Christ through your actions. For you men out there today, your role is to see today's teaching as one part of a whole, for you also are to submit to your wives and to love them as Christ loved the church. We'll have more to say about that down the line a bit, but for now, know that as your wives are called to graciously and lovingly submit to your leadership in the home, you likewise are to graciously and lovingly receive it from them in the most honorable way. I look forward to talking more about this the next time round. Until then, God richly bless you as you walk in His ways!

1 Peter 3:3-6

Getting Started

As we get started today, we continue with the same topic that we began to tackle last time: Submission in the family. Our focus: more on wives and their husbands.

1 Peter 3:3-6

3Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. 4Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight. 5For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful. They were submissive to their own husbands, 6like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her master. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear.

When I fell in love with Linda back in our early dating days, I won't lie to you by saying that my initial attraction to her was her gentle spirit or her kindness. She was a traffic stopper! If you were to look up the definition of physical beauty in the dictionary, Linda's picture would be there. It was only as we got to know each other that I came to learn that her beauty was more than skin-deep. Not that she had a gentle spirit (it was more sassy than gentle and still is!), but she was kind. And she was emotionally strong. And she had a vibrant faith in her Savior and a heart to serve Him with her whole life. In short, while her outward beauty was stunning to me, it was her inner beauty, the beauty of her spirit and its inclination toward the things of God, that made me know I wanted to spend my life with her. In today's reading, Peter's ongoing instruction to Christian wives is that rather than focusing solely on their outward appearance, their ultimate goal should be the cultivation of inner beauty, which has the power to make an eternal, rather than merely temporal difference in both their lives and the lives of their husbands.

Verse 3: As I said when we were together on Friday, it's important for us to understand that Peter's instructions regarding submission as God's people have a deeper aim than mere social order or meekness of heart for meekness' sake. Rather, the aim of submission is always to be seen in light of the cross, and more specifically, pointing people to the cross as the source of much needed salvation in their lives. Here in verse 3, Peter continues to speak to Christian wives about how their submission to their husbands brings about a blessing of eternal significance. Addressing the issue of beauty, he says, "Don't focus only on the outward trappings!" Now why would he say that? Remember, let's look at the context: a woman is most likely to win her husband to the Lord by her conduct and the content of her character rather than by her words. The text here doesn't teach that it's wrong for a woman to care for herself or to give attention to her external attractiveness; what it does teach is that to focus solely on outward adornment to the exclusion of developing inner beauty doesn't serve the purposes of God in her life, especially with regard to her unbelieving spouse.

Verse 4: That's why in verse 4 Peter goes on to say that the focus of a Christian woman should be, for the most part, on her inner self, the "unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight." Isn't that a lovely description? I'll tell you right now that as a man of almost 40, I can vouch for the truth of this passage. As much as I am still attracted to my wife's physical beauty, I am attracted more to her heart; to her loving nature and her kindness and her companionship. I love her, and I love that she loves me, because that's a pretty amazing feat to pull off, let me tell you! Again, don't get me wrong: I love the way she walks and

the way she arches her one eyebrow at me (she has two eyebrows; I mean that she just arches one of them!). I love how she looks in a sun dress, and when she wears her ratty old sweats and puts her hair up in a ponytail she's prettier than ever. But nothing is better than when she sits on the couch next to me, tells me about her day, and asks me about mine. Nothing is more peaceful than sitting out in the front yard with her, drinking iced-tea and looking at the countryside. Nothing makes me feel more secure than to know that she prays for me and the children every day, and that for 16 years she has continually held me up to the Lord through thick and thin, even as she has looked to me to be the leader of our home. If I weren't already a follower of Jesus Christ, I'll tell you this: my wife's inner beauty and her quiet, yet evident devotion to the Lord would bring me to faith more surely than a thousand invitations by Billy Graham.

Verses 5-6: Verse 5 tells us that this has always been the pattern of godly women through the ages; that the Scriptural concept of a wife's submission to her husband is a sacred and beautiful thing that benefits husband and wife together, and by extension, the entire family. Sarah, in fact, is held up as an example of just such a blessing, and all who follow in her footsteps, who do right and who do not give way to fear, are called her daughters; a title of great honor.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap up for the day, if you're a woman of God and your desire is to grow in inner beauty, then praise the Lord! He will give you the desire of your heart in this matter, for it is His good pleasure to grant you godliness of character and growth in the grace and knowledge of His Son. There's so much out there today that beckons you to focus on the externals that it can be discouraging at times to swim against the stream. Don't lose heart, and don't give up! Remember that your inner beauty is something very precious to God, and it will be precious to your husband as well. Husbands out there, get in the habit of taking the time to recognize and rejoice in those incredibly beautiful inner qualities your wife possesses by the grace of God. Then, once you've recognized them for yourself, point them out to your wife and build her up by letting her know how much those things mean to you. It might seem like a little thing to do, but it will have a big impact on your marriage. Have a great day, and we'll see you next time!

1 Peter 3:7

Getting Started

As we get started today, we're still chugging along on the issue of submission in the family. Our focus: as the last two sessions were on wives with their husbands, this session is husbands with their wives!

1 Peter 3:7

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

It's not a fair blanket statement, and it certainly isn't godly in its attitude, but one of the bumper stickers that I readily relate to as a pastor who counsels people in broken marriages is this one, usually found on the cars of divorced women: "The more I know men, the more I love my dog." Now guys, before you write me nasty letters, hear me out. I'm a guy too, I'm with you, I understand you, I'm for you! But hang with me for a minute: Yes, it takes two to tango; yes, there

are many marriages in trouble precipitated primarily by the behavior of the wife; yes, there are many good, loving, faithful men who treat their wives with honor and respect. But in many cases, especially in Christian marriages going through difficulties, it is often the male in the party who is the most egregious in his sin as well as the most clueless about his behavior. And often, the troubles start with a misplaced idea about the concept of marital submission. You'll notice that our reading is just one verse in length today. Let's talk about husbands and their responsibility to submit to their wives.

Verse 7: Notice how this verse starts out: "Husbands, in the same way..." We've said it already, but let's say it again so that the point is clear: submission is a two-way street in the marriage relationship. In the same way that your wives submit to you as the leader of the family, in the same way that they exhibit Christ-like character and a servant heart in order to be obedient to God's Word and in order to bless you as their spouse, you are to look upon your wives with the same Christ-like character and servant heart. Why? In order to be obedient to God's Word and in order to bless your spouse! Remember those four words and you will go far: In The Same Way.

In the next portion of the verse, husbands are told to be considerate as they live with their wives, treating them with respect. And by the way, this is your calling whether your wife is a believer or not. Just as a believing wife powerfully and effectively evangelizes her unbelieving husband and points him to Jesus, if you are a Christian husband whose wife is not yet a believer, the very same principle applies to you. You, by the manner in which you live with your bride, can do more to point her to Christ than anything or anyone else. How does the text call you to treat her? First, by being considerate. What is considerate? Here are a few synonyms: thoughtful, kind, caring, understanding, selfless. As a man of God ordering your life according to the truth of God's Word, being considerate toward your wife means nothing less than subordinating your needs to her own and considering her as more important than yourself. If you have a problem with that, you might take time to remember that that's the Lord's expectation for all of His people, as Paul teaches us in Philipians 2.

Next, you are to treat your wife with respect, and the text adds something more here, doesn't it. We are to treat our wives with respect as the weaker partner. What does this mean? It's simply a reference to her physical stature. It has nothing to do with her character, her personality, her abilities, her standing in life, or her standing before God. In fact, in the very next phrase Peter reminds us that in Christ, our wives are co-heirs with us of the gracious gift of life. In other words, our wives are equal to us in the eyes of God; and they should be so in our eyes as well. Never succumb to the Neanderthal belief that because she is a woman, your wife is inferior to you. That idea comes straight from the pit of hell. To treat your wife with respect as the weaker partner means that you love her, cherish her, protect her, and provide for her.

Since we've already talked about the standing of our wives as co-heirs with us of eternal life, let's move on to the last portion of the verse. Verse 7 closes off by saying that we are to do all of these things as husbands in order that our prayers will not be hindered. Some scholars say that this refers to a husband praying for his unbelieving wife, and if that is indeed the case, it makes great sense doesn't it! If you're a man who longs for your wife to know the joy of salvation in Christ, you can pray and pray and pray all you want, but if you're a habitual jerk and treat her like she's dirt, all the prayers in the world aren't going to do any good. It's like Ralph Waldo Emerson said: "Who you are speaks so loudly I can't hear what you're saying." On the other hand, some scholars believe that this reference to prayers not being hindered is general in

nature, and that makes sense too. If your relationship in the home is not a good one; if you're treating your wife in a manner that is not godly and which does not honor her; I guarantee that things are going to be spiritually off track for you as well - and by the way, vice-versa is true also. In summary then, as the Lord loves us, so we are to love our wives. As the Lord is tender and compassionate, full of mercy, always there for us and ever faithful, so are we to be for the women whom God has graciously given us. It's good for them, and it's also good for us!

Wrapping Up

As we wrap up for the day, it's my heartfelt prayer that all of you men out there will take some time to truly meditate on God's Word to you in this passage. The spiritual implications here are very deep, as are the practical implications for your married life. May each of us strive with our whole hearts to love and honor our wives just as Jesus loved the church and gave Himself for it, care for them with love and tenderness, and provide for them in a way that will let them know they are cherished. God bless you as you show yourselves to be real men after God's own heart!

1 Peter 3:8-12

Getting Started

As we get started today, Peter now shifts his exhortation and encouragement from the family unit, which he has dealt with over the course of several verses, to the church family as a whole. Our focus: a reminder of our calling!

1 Peter 3:8-12

8Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble. 9Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. 10For, "Whoever would love life and see good days must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from deceitful speech. 11He must turn from evil and do good; he must seek peace and pursue it. 12For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil."

Have you ever been on the receiving end of an out-of-the-ordinary, extra-special blessing? As I was getting ready to come up to the office the other night after tucking the kids into bed, my son rushed downstairs with something in his hand. It was a piece of paper that had been elaborately folded. With a very serious expression on his face, he said, "Dad, I want you to have this note." I thanked him and started to put it into my pocket, but he said, "I want you to read it right now." So I unfolded it, and I began to read. "Read it out loud," he said. So I read it out loud. It was a note thanking me for a journal that I had given him. In the cramped, pained penmanship of a nine year-old boy who hates to write, he took an entire page to let me know that he liked the gift, that it was very special to him, that I also was very special to him, that I had taught him most of what he knows in life, and that by the way, he loved me very much. If ever I had wondered whether I was getting through to my child, that unsolicited note was a straight-forward affirmation to me of our bond as father and son. I'll probably carry that note in my wallet for the next ten years!

One of the things I love about the Bible is how straight-forward it is in so many places and how it is an affirmation of the bond our heavenly Father has with us as His children. Yes, sometimes it can be difficult to understand, necessitating deeper study, but other times - most of the time, in

fact - it is crystal clear in what it says to us. In today's passage as Peter closes off his conversation about the place of submission in our lives as followers of Christ, he wraps things up by talking once more about the nature our overall conduct as God's people, especially toward one another in the church. We'll want to especially note the gracious promises connected to this passage, so let's go ahead and jump into what's before us.

Verse 8: Just as living successfully in a hostile world requires the right ordering of relationships in civil society, the work place, and the family, so also does it require the right ordering of relationships in the church. This is Peter's focus as he writes here in verse 8, and in essence it's a repeat of things he has already said in a general kind of way. Now, however, his focus is specifically on the life of the body of Christ, and he is quick to emphasize the importance of our relationships with each other. As people of God, we are to be of the same mind, be sympathetic and have compassion for one another, love each other, and be humble. Are we always going to do that perfectly? Of course not!

Verse 9: That's why in verse 9 he reminds us that in order to keep things from escalating when there is conflict and in order to cultivate peace, we are not to repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but rather with blessing. Why? Number one, it's what we have been called to, and number two, in blessing others we ourselves inherit a blessing.

Verses 10-12: To bring home that point, Peter quotes to us from Psalm 34, and there are wonderful things expressed in this passage. First, we see that we have been granted the legacy to enjoy our lives. Isn't that a beautiful thought? Now, how will we do that best? By pure and honest speech, verse 10; the hating of sin and the pursuing of peace, verse 11; and by walking in the ways of righteousness, verse 12. As we do those things, guess what? Our Bibles say that we're going to love life and enjoy our days. We're going to know the reality of peace. We're going to have an intimate relationship with our heavenly Father, characterized by Him watching over us and hearing and answering our prayers. But you say to me "Pastor Paul, how can I know those blessings when I continually fall in my attempts to be holy?" The answer to that is Grace. Remember how you learned it shorthand? God's Riches At Christ's Expense. The great news is that though we are unable to fulfill these things within our own strength, in Jesus Christ, who loved us and gave Himself for us, they are a reality for us by His gracious, forgiving, renewing presence in our lives. He has given us words from His very own heart in order to remind us of that. So we read them. We read them now. We read them out loud. And we treasure their implications.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap up for the day, I'm thinking once again about the power of our Christian witness in life...and especially about the fact that we are witnesses at all times, whether for the good or the bad! The way we order our lives in the church, the way we treat each other and interact with each other, says much about who we are and what we stand for. Oh that we would be motivated to love, if for no other reason than to be a light in the darkness for those who are outside of the faith. Isn't it wonderful that we have a gracious God who loves us and who gave Himself for us, and isn't it even more wonderful that we can rejoice in His continual, gracious, forgiving presence in our lives! May we continue to love because He first loved us, and may we be equipped by Him through His Spirit to build each other up, that we may bless and be blessed as a result! God's rich peace be on you all; we'll see you next time.

1 Peter 3:13-17

Getting Started

As we get started today, Peter once again takes up the issue of suffering. This is now the third time he has addressed the subject, and so it is the third time we will address it as well. Our focus: the principle of suffering restated.

1 Peter 3:13-17

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

When I was a small boy, there was a bully in my neighborhood who always picked on all the kids on the block. I don't remember his name; I just remember that whenever he showed up, most of us went inside as quickly as we could. Sometimes, though, we would be trapped and subjected to his meanness. One day he showed up with a slingshot and a pocket full of rocks, and he began taunting us and shooting us. After we had been hit several times and having nowhere to run, one of the kids in our group spoke up in defense of the rest of us. His words had something to do with an older brother who wouldn't be very happy to learn what was happening, and they finished off with the confident assertion that what was happening wouldn't be tolerated by the higher ups either, namely, our parents. As you might imagine, in that moment of our fear his words did the trick, and for the time being at least, we were left alone. Our friend's belief in deliverance by the "higher ups" and his confident expression of that fact saved the day. In today's reading, we are given encouragement by Peter always to be ready to point to our hope of deliverance in life - especially in times of suffering. Let's see how that truth plays out in our lives and gives us strength in times of difficulty.

Verse 13: The first thing we see in this passage is that it is a continuation of what Peter has just been talking about. As believers, as the church of Jesus Christ, we are called to be salt and light; called to be a shining witness to the love of God in Christ; called to show, by virtue of the lives we live and the blessedness of the relationships we share, that we belong to a God who is loving, merciful, and kind. As we do that, people will be won for the Gospel. And as we do that, we will also be reviled by those who hate God and reject His Son. In some cases, we will even suffer because of it. This is what Peter is now addressing.

Verse 14: Though it seems illogical that we would suffer for doing good, the context of Peter's remarks lets us know that we should expect it. Yet the good news here is that even if we do suffer for doing what is right, we are blessed, because our heavenly Father knows our circumstances and we know that He will care for us through whatever affliction we might face for Jesus' sake. That's why Peter encourages us with the words of Isaiah 8: "Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened." Well, if we are not to fear in the midst of suffering persecution, what are we to do instead?

Verse 15: That brings us to the heart of the passage in verse 15. First, over everything else, we are to set apart Christ as Lord in our hearts. The heart, as you know, is the true sanctuary of

worship in our lives. We may go to a building to worship with other believers, but it's in our hearts that Jesus resides, in our hearts that we honor Him, it's where our hearts are that our treasures are. To set apart Christ as Lord in our hearts means that Christ is our everything; that He is our treasure.

As we set apart Christ as Lord in our hearts, we are then to give ourselves over to a very important kind of preparation. What does the passage say here? "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have." It's especially when people see us going through hard times that they notice our faith, did you know that? It's those times of grace under pressure that so often show the true power of the Lord Jesus in our lives. And in those times when people ask us the reason for our hope - when they say "How in the world are you surviving this?" - God wants you to be ready to give an answer. The Greek word here means to give a ready defense. It's where we get the English word apologetics, which is a term that describes the defense of our faith. Being ready to give an answer as to the reason for your hope is one of the most important things you can do for yourself, and especially for anyone who asks that question of you.

Verse 15-17: Verses 15-17 wrap up this passage by telling us the manner in which we are to give that all-important answer: with gentleness, respect, and with clear conscience. First of all that is what is fitting for the Gospel; second, if we are reviled for our answer and suffer because of it, the shame is not on us, but on those who persecute us. And once again, it is better to suffer for doing good rather than evil.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap up for the day, can I ask you a question? Are you a person who is ready to give an answer to anyone who asks the reason for the hope you have within you? Can you express, in a simple way, the fact that you have hope for this life and the next because Jesus died for you and forgave your sins and now lives in you and, even more, is preparing a place for you to be with Him for all eternity? If not, why not take some time to write out your story? Practice it! Rehearse it! Get comfortable with it! You know, most of us have trouble with this issue not because we don't know the answer to the question, but because we've never really thought about how to answer it. Before you hit the sack tonight, let me challenge you to begin formulating your answer to that all-important inquiry. Before you know it, God will place you in a situation where you'll have the opportunity to speak out. May He bless you as you prepare!

1 Peter 3:18-22

Getting Started

As we get started today, Peter continues to talk about the reality of suffering in the lives of God's people. Our focus: Jesus again as the paragon of, and great victor over, suffering!

1 Peter 3:18-22

18For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit, 19through whom also he went and preached to the spirits in prison 20who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, 21and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the

resurrection of Jesus Christ, 22who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand—with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.

I had a colleague once who, at a critically important period in the life and ministry of his church, came down with Shingles. He was in a great deal of pain, and the worst thing about it was that there was really nothing he could do to alleviate it. His doctor told him to be still and get some rest, but being a person who was always on the go, that prescription wasn't an option for him. Besides, because of all that was going on in his ministry - land acquisition, expansion, the casting of new vision - he didn't feel that he could afford to be sidelined for any significant period of time. So instead, he toughed it out. He came to the office, he worked through the pain, he got things done. By and by, his condition gradually subsided, and in the end, he got through the illness and managed, with the Lord's help, to accomplish all that he needed to get done in spite of his affliction. In the passage before us today, Peter reminds us that though Jesus experienced incredible suffering in His crucifixion and death, He too toughed it out and worked through the pain. Nothing was able to stop Him from accomplishing all that was needed to redeem the human race from sin. Let's see how Peter fleshes that out in a summary of today's verses.

Verses 18-22, Summary

If you've been following along throughout the course of this study in 1 Peter, then what we've just read together will probably sound quite familiar to you by now. This is now Peter's fourth explicit reference to our Lord's suffering and death, in which He took our sins upon Himself to bring us forgiveness and new life. It's not the last time we will encounter this theme either, and we have to ask ourselves why. To a scared, scattered, suffering people, the power of the Gospel is the greatest power of all, and Peter's audience needs all the power it can get. It is also important for a suffering people to know that Jesus, the suffering Servant, readily identifies with them. He is not an impersonal, uninvolved God who cannot understand their pain and predicament; He is the One who has experienced all that they are now experiencing, and because He is loving and compassionate, He will not leave them without comfort and help in their time of need.

As a reminder that Jesus not only suffered and died, but rose victorious over sin and death, Peter in verses 19 and following recalls for his readers the fact that Jesus declared His victory over hell by going there and preaching to the disobedient spirits who had been imprisoned there since the days of Noah. This occurred between our Lord's death and His bodily resurrection, and through that proclamation, Jesus showed that not even death could hold Him; indeed, nothing could defeat Him in His plan to bring salvation to the world!

His remarks about the disobedient spirits from the days of Noah provide Peter the perfect springboard to use the example the flood, which saved Noah and his family from death, as a symbol of baptism under the New Covenant, which now saves us. There are several differing interpretations of this passage, and they all hinge upon how a person views baptism. Is baptism simply an ordinance of the church, an act of obedience in response to the command of Christ, an outward expression of an inward change... or is it all of those things and more? Is there divine spiritual motion taking place in baptism? Is God active through water and His Word in baptism? Is the Holy Spirit given in baptism, and does new birth take place when baptism is administered? Perhaps the biggest question of all is this one: who is actually doing the baptizing – man or God? Obviously, the way you answer those questions determines to a very large degree how you render these verses. But lest we go off on a baptismal romp today and forget

the main point of the text, let's for now conclude by returning to our Lord's suffering, His death, and His resurrection.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap up for the day, what a wonderful privilege we have in rejoicing in the victory of Jesus, and how much more wonderful it is to know that through faith, that victory is ours as well! May your life, as a result of your Lord's finished work at Calvary's cross, be one lived as an exclamation rather than an explanation. And through your rejoicing, may others be drawn to the foot of the cross as well, that they also might taste and see that the Lord is good. We'll have much more to say about baptism at a later date, so be sure to stay tuned in as we study God's Word together! May His joy continue to be your strength!

1 Peter 4:1-3

Getting Started

As we get started today, chapter four begins with an ending of sorts. Having spent quite a bit of time speaking to his readers about the issue of suffering, Peter caps off the matter by talking once more about the purpose of our suffering as God's people. We'll talk about this both today and next time around. Our focus: Living for God's will!

1 Peter 4:1-3

1Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin. 2As a result, he does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God. 3For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do—living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry.

I don't do it very well very much of the time, but as a child of God who is always aware of the great price Jesus paid to bring me back to my heavenly Father, I, in a spirit of thankfulness and in response to God's great grace, have a great desire to live my life not for myself, but for Him. I am incredibly blessed by the fact that Jesus was willing to die in my place, that He was willing to do for me what I could never do for myself. Because of this salvation that has come to me, I want to spend the rest of my days, however much time God may give me, in sharing the good news of that salvation message with others. And though it is difficult, though I often find myself in battle, though most of the time I feel unworthy and some of the time even feel like giving up, I stay at it. Why? Because I can't help but share the hope that I have...that while I was yet a sinner, Jesus Christ died for me and for all people everywhere. It's the one driving force of my life.

In many ways, this is the gist of today's reading: that having experienced the reality of God's grace in our lives, having been brought to faith by the gracious work of the Holy Spirit, we have not only been called out of the darkness and into His marvelous light, but we have also been called to a new life, one markedly different than that which we lived prior to our salvation. Is it a constant struggle? Yes. But here in this section of God's Word we are given encouragement in the midst of that struggle.

Verse 1: Peter begins, as he almost always does when he starts a new section of teaching, by pointing us to Christ. In light of the triumphant suffering and death of Jesus, culminating in His

resurrection victory, we also, as people purchased with His blood, should be willing to suffer in the flesh. In fact, we are to arm ourselves with the same attitude which Jesus had in His suffering for us. It's a term that entreats us to see the reality of the battle before us. The person who has suffered in the flesh, Peter says, is done with sin. What exactly is he talking about? Well, the verb tense here in the Greek is in the perfect tense, which means that the reference is alluding to a permanent condition free from sin. Most scholars, then, render it this way: the worst that can happen to a believer who is suffering in his or her body is death, which is actually the best thing that can happen from the eternal perspective. Why do we say that? Because death for the Christian means complete and final deliverance. So if a believer is armed with the goal of being delivered from sin, and that goal is ultimately achieved through death, death becomes precious. Besides, the greatest weapon that the devil once had over us, which was the threat of death, now has no sting to it! That is why the Christian who has suffered in the body – again, to the point of losing his or her life– is done with sin.

Verse 2: But what about those of us who suffer, yet not to the point of physical death? In verse 2 we are told that our goal, being the same, will prompt us to live the remainder of our days not in the grip of evil human desires, but for the will of God. This may bring us more suffering, but should that be the case, see verse 1.

Verse 3: Verse 3 simply connects the dots to verse 2, doesn't it: "For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do—living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry." As people who know this world is not our home, who know that we have been delivered from sin and who know that the ultimate fulfillment of that deliverance will come when we are with the Lord in our heavenly home, our temporal agenda now changes from the way of our former life in our former world to embrace the way of our new life, which will find its full and perfect expression in the new world of heaven!

Wrapping Up

As we wrap up for the day, It's my heartfelt prayer that each one of us will come to an ever greater sense of awe over God's love for us in Christ, and that as we do that, growing in our Lord Jesus and our understanding of His gracious work in our lives, we will become stronger and stronger as the new creations that we are, living more and more according to the newness of life and less and less according to the old manner of things. May you find great joy in living for Jesus more and more, knowing that your life is found totally and completely in Him. God bless you richly, and we'll see you next time!

1 Peter 4:4-6

Getting Started

As we get started today, Peter talks about one of the many ways suffering and persecution comes our way as believers. Our focus: A different focus!

1 Peter 4:4-6

4They think it strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation, and they heap abuse on you. 5But they will have to give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. 6For this is the reason the gospel was preached even to those who are now dead, so that they might be judged according to men in regard to the body, but live according to God in regard to the spirit.

As I grow older, I find an interesting axiom manifesting itself in my life. When I was younger and still in school, I used to agonize about being part of the Crowd...because I so much wanted to be and usually wasn't! Now, as my daughter begins middle school, I agonize about her being part of the Crowd – and hope that she won't be! The Crowd is cool to be sure, but the Crowd can also corrupt, as I learned the hard way from the few instances I found myself in the midst of it over the years.

Verse 4: It's hard to not go along with the Crowd, isn't it – especially when what the Crowd is doing appeals to your basest instincts and desires. Try and be strong, try and choose the right, and it gets even worse: then you get ridiculed by the Crowd! I think that all of us would admit to the powerful allure, the powerful pull of the Crowd. Have you ever experienced that tension in your life? As I mentioned a moment ago, I certainly have, and occasionally still do. What Peter writes to us in today's passage is something that most of us know to be true not only in principle, but through personal experience as well. When we as God's people make a conscious choice to refrain from a life of worldliness, the world thinks it to be strange, and if they cannot wear us down to do as they're doing, they will beat us down instead. Welcome to the sometimes difficult world of principled Christian living! If you're not struggling from within, chances are you're getting assaulted from the outside. This is what Peter is referencing here in this passage as he continues to talk about the reality of suffering in the Christian life. It takes many different forms, and in some instances it comes our way when we don't go along with the status quo; when we refuse to go along with the Crowd.

Verse 5: God's word, though, has something to say about those who would heap abuse on us because of who we are in Christ. The reality is that they will have to give an account to the One who is coming to judge both the living and the dead, and that One is Jesus Himself. Does this fact make our suffering any easier? Not necessarily, but it does put it into perspective, it does spur us on to endurance, and it does give us an instructive, comforting and very important reminder: when we are ridiculed because of our faith, it is not for us to take offense or become angry or cast dispersions or pronounce judgment. No, we leave all of those things to the Lord, who is both our Advocate, the One who knows us and knows what we are going through, and who is also the Judge, who will mete out judgment upon those who come against us. We can be in no better hands, nor can we realize any greater justice or more perfect resolution than what our Lord will render as the One who loves us gave Himself for us.

Verse 6: As we move into verse 6, Peter explains that, in part, this truth is already at work among the people to whom he is writing. Remember, many of these scattered believers are suffering bitter persecution and are continuing to suffer it even as Peter writes. Because of that persecution, some have lost their lives; they have made the ultimate confession of faith through their martyrdom. Their deaths, Peter says, are a witness to the powerlessness and a judgment against the ones who persecute. Though these Christians had been judged in the body by men – that is, were martyred because of their faith in Christ – they now in the presence of Jesus in heaven are fully and forever alive in their spirits, and in the resurrection they will be given new and glorious bodies as well! “For this is the reason the gospel was preached even to those who are now dead, so that they might be judged according to men in regard to the body, but live according to God in regard to the spirit.” In every case, even when things are carried to their most extreme by opponents of the Faith, the Gospel gives witness to its power, gives promise to its people, and puts its persecutors on notice.

Wrapping Up

Wrapping up for the day, we might do well to do a little bit of a heart check. Where are we at right now? Are we striving to be part of the Crowd, or have we realized that true joy and contentment are found in Christ? You might say it to yourself this way: Is it Christ or the Crowd? Next, if we are living for Christ, are we equipped in our hearts and minds to deal with the ridicule and the persecution that will surely come with it? Remember, we are in the Lord's hands, so we don't need to take things into our own! Finally, have we taken steps to assure that we remain strong in the Lord when times get tough? Don't forget that the Gospel is your power and your promise in the face of persecution. Arm yourself with that truth, and it will help you to stand firm in the day of difficulty. Take care everyone – we'll see you back here tomorrow!

1 Peter 4:7-9

Getting Started

As we get started today, Peter gives his readers some important counsel in light of their circumstances in life. Our focus: maintaining heavenly perspective in the midst of earthly life.

1 Peter 4:7-9

7The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear-minded and self-controlled so that you can pray. 8Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. 9Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.

Did you ever have a teacher who had a knack for saying the same thing 100 different ways? For some educators, if there's the slightest opportunity to drive a point home in multiple ways they'll milk it for all it's worth. It's a great methodology when you think about it, because different people have different learning styles, and the more approaches, analogies or illustrations you can use to deliver your message, the better chance you have of reaching the largest number of people. I had a professor who used to say that people should be able to explain what they know or what they believe from at least three different perspectives in order to be confident in their knowledge base and able to explain themselves to people who might question them.

I mention these things at the start of today's study to point you to what Peter is now saying for the umpteenth time in this brief letter to persecuted believers. The truths being spoken here are so foundational, so important, so integral to his readers' lives that he is taking multiple opportunities and using multiple examples to get them across. What truths are we talking about here?

Verse 7: First of all, the end of all things. We see it throughout the New Testament, from Jesus to Paul to right here in 1 Peter, where Peter has taken every occasion possible to make it clear: As God's people, aliens and strangers in a place that is not our home, our focus is not to be on the temporal things of this world, but rather on the eternal things of heaven. Part of that mindset entails embracing this very specific teaching of Scripture: that the return of our Lord Jesus Christ is imminent, and that we are to be both looking and living through that lens of reality. This isn't a pie-in-the-sky mentality or a rose-colored glasses kind of worldview; it is something we hold to because God's Word has told us that we are in the last days, Jesus Himself has told us that He is coming back soon, and our sure hope and expectation is that God will remain true to His Word in this case just as He has remained true to His Word throughout history. If we simply look at God's track record there is no reason to doubt Him.

The next thing that Peter says in verse 7 is that in light of the fact of the imminent coming our Lord, we are to be clear-minded and self-controlled in order that we can pray. The idea here is that rather than being carried away by the world and its passions, or conversely, by a fanatic attitude that paralyzes us and keeps us from functioning on a normal level, we are instead to be sober in our thinking, have an appropriate eternal perspective on things, and conduct our lives in a manner that, while anticipating the future, is purposeful in the now. That would indicate a focus on our relationship with Christ, which is why Peter exhorts us to continually pray.

Verse 8: In verse 8, Peter moves to the realm of our relationships with one another. We are, above all, to love one another deeply, because love covers a multitude of sins. The Greek here carries the idea of fervency, which refers to something being strained or stretched. It's the same word that is used to describe a runner who is moving at full speed and whose muscles are fully engaged and working at their limit. It's in this way that we are to love one another, pouring every ounce of our strength and effort into showing Christ-like grace, mercy and peace to our brothers and sisters in the faith. As we do that, conflict and hurt have less of a chance to take root between us, and even when it does occur, our choice to love one another minimizes its impact, helps us to let go, and works in us a ready spirit of mercy and forgiveness that restores a right relationship.

Verse 9: Finally, we are told in verse 9 to offer hospitality to one another. There is a condition here, isn't there! We are to do so without grumbling! This is a practical matter in the life of the Christian. Though the Greek word here carries the thought of a willingness to love and serve strangers, Peter uses it in the broader context of life in general. As God's people, part of what we do is to offer hospitality to anyone who might have need of it. That might mean opening our homes to strangers, but it might also mean opening our home for a Bible study or church service, housing and serving traveling pastors or missionaries who are passing through, or simply caring for someone who is needy. We do all of these things knowing first of all that all we have belongs to the Lord and is to be used to serve Him, and second, we do it as an expression of Christ's love. Tempered by those thoughts, it becomes much easier to offer hospitality with joy rather than with a feeling of being put out or inconvenienced.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap up for the day, I'm excited to be able to share these things with you as fellow sojourners on the way to heaven. May we joyfully remember that as the end is near, that as our Lord is coming back just as He has promised, we have a wonderful opportunity in the meantime to fellowship with Him in worship and prayer and share His love with those around us – not in an ivory tower kind of way, but by good old-fashioned practical love in action! May you be blessed as you live these things out as God's child! Take care, and we'll see you next time.

1 Peter 4:10-11

Getting Started

As we get started today, we come to a brief word about the use of our spiritual gifts as God's people. Our focus: if you've got it, use it!

1 Peter 4:10-11

10Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. 11If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.

Back in my graduate school days I worked for the YWCA as an after-school day camp director. Our program created a safe environment for latch key kids, helped students with their homework, and provided recreational activities for everyone until their parents came to pick them up. One Christmas, among the cards and cookies that were brought in as thank-yous by the moms and dads, I received a small box with a gold colored coin in it. The coin was engraved with the name and picture of one of our local department stores, and it looked like a commemorative item or a keepsake of some kind, something to be displayed. So that's what I did with it. I wrote a note to the family who had given it to me, told them how nice their gift was, and thanked them for thinking of me. That gold coin sat in its box on my desk as a paper-weight for two months before one of my buddies came into my room one day and said, "Wow! Who gave you the gift coin from Famous Barr?" When it became obvious that I didn't understand what he meant, my friend popped the coin out of its velvet case and showed me the back side of it. Imagine my surprise when I saw "\$100" stamped into it! It turned out that the coin was actually a gift card for the department store...yet all that time I thought it was just a shiny trinket. It was a great gift; too bad it was so long before I put it to use!

Verse 10: In our text today, Peter is talking to us about gifts of another kind: spiritual gifts, which are given to us by God for the building up of the body of Christ. The interesting thing about spiritual gifts is that though the Bible teaches very clearly that ALL Christians have been given spiritual gifts, very few of us really understand what they're about, what our own particular gifts might be, or how we're to put them to use. It's like that coin sitting on my desk as a paper weight: I had it, it was out in the open, but because I didn't understand what it actually was I had no idea of its true value. When we talk about spiritual gifts, then, a good way to package them up is by the use of three words: Discover, Develop, and Deploy. Keep that in mind as we go along today.

Now, what we see here in our reading is by no means an exhaustive list of the gifts that the Holy Spirit gives to men and women of God – you can find the specific catalog in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12, respectively. Rather, Peter's mention of the gifts here is a breakdown of the two main categories of gifts: speaking gifts and serving gifts. What, specifically, are we told about the exercising of them? Perhaps the best thing to do in this case is simply outline the verse:

1. Whatever gift we have received, we are to USE.
2. In using the gift, we are to use it to SERVE OTHERS.

3. In using our gift to serve others, we are fulfilling God's design by **FAITHFULLY ADMINISTERING GOD'S GRACE** in its various forms.

Verse 11: As we move into verse 11, Peter illustrates what he's talking about, and what's important for us to notice here is the strength or power with which we are to use what we have been given. For example, if we are people with one of the speaking gifts, we are to speak as one speaking the very words of God. If we have received one of the serving gifts, we are not to exercise it within our own strength, but how? With the strength that God provides. Spiritual gifts, then, are not only given to us by the Holy Spirit; they are also empowered in us by the Holy Spirit. Why? So that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ; to him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.

Certainly, the gifts of the Spirit are vital to the body of Christ in every place and every time. It's part of the structure of the church, part and parcel of how God both designed and equipped it to function. But think about the situation of Peter's readers: if ever God's people needed to faithfully deploy their gifts so that God's grace might be ministered in its various forms among them, it would be in a time of fiery testing and severe persecution. Surely, it's in that context that Peter is speaking these words of encouragement in this letter.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap up for the day, perhaps you're one of those "paper weight on the desk" people when it comes to the subject of spiritual gifts! Do you know what your gifts are? Have you ever sought to develop them more fully? Have you deployed your gifts for the edification of God's people and the building up of His church? If you've never thought about any of this before, let me encourage you to start by taking a brief Spiritual Gifts Inventory online. There are dozens of them available, and some are a bit different than others, but a good basic one can be found at www.christianet.com/bible/spiritualgiftstest.htm. It will only take you about 10-15 minutes to complete, and I guarantee that you'll learn something about yourself and the way God has blessed you to be a blessing in the life of His family! It may just be the first step in a great personal study of discovering God's design for your life! If you have questions about your results, drop me a note and I'll be happy to talk with you about them. God bless you richly, and we'll see you next time.

1 Peter 4:12-14

Getting Started

As we get started today, Peter moves back once again to the issue of suffering. It's a thread woven throughout this letter, because suffering is so pervasive among the people to whom he is writing. We readily see that the plight of these dear people is heavy on the apostle's mind. Our focus: rejoicing in the midst of persecution.

1 Peter 4:12-14

12Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. 13But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. 14If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.

I still remember the first time I ever got a penicillin shot. I was six or seven and I had gotten a bad case of strep throat or tonsillitis...something that made it hurt to cough, hurt to swallow and hurt to talk. It just plain hurt. So Mom took me into the doctor and the doctor said that I needed this shot. Don't worry, he said, it's just a little pin prick, it's going to be in your backside, it will be over before you even realize what's happening. This man was a smooth talker, because I believed him. Though the details surrounding that day are fuzzy these 30-plus years later, what remains clear as a bell is the moment that needle went into my behind. I knew immediately that I had been had, and the pain surprised me so much that you could hear my scream all the way to the waiting room.

That's the way life is, isn't it....sometimes things surprise us by how painful they are. Whether it's that first bee sting that makes you swell up like a balloon, that first break-up that makes your heart feel like there's a 900-pound gorilla sitting on it, or the first time your child lies to you and you want to cry, you are surprised by the pain.

Verse 12: In today's reading, Peter continues to speak words of encouragement to men and women of God who are enduring persecution because of their Christian faith. For all of them it has been terribly difficult, and for many of them it has been even worse than terribly difficult. And for people who have become followers of Jesus Christ, who know by faith that they have been made new creations, that they possess immeasurable spiritual blessings, and that they have a glorious and eternal future to look forward to in the presence of their Savior, the fire that they are going through in the now quite understandably has been something of a shock. To live for Christ has meant suffering for Christ. It has been a surprise; and it has been painful. Peter, though, gently and lovingly now says that this season of trial and the accompanying pain is not something that should surprise them in the least; that instead it is to be something expected, and even more, something embraced. Notice that Peter doesn't minimize things here. Throughout the letter he has been very upfront in validating the pain and suffering of his readers due to their temporal troubles, and the same thing holds true here. Yet what he now includes in his remarks is different than what has come before...a call not simply to endure trials, but to rejoice in them.

Verse 13: That's the focus of verse 13, isn't it: Rejoice in the fact that you are participating in the sufferings of Christ, because rejoicing now not only sustains you and tempers your attitude and sharpens your focus on your life in Christ in this temporal world, but in time, when Christ's glory is revealed, your joy will become "over-joy"...because it's at that time that the inheritance promised to you by God will come to its fruition and you will realize that all you have suffered is not worth comparing to the glory in which you find yourself enveloped!

Verse 14: Peter sums up that point in verse 14 by restating the point: You are blessed when you are insulted for Jesus, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. The reference here is to something we can see in many places throughout Scripture, as well as in many instances of Christian history where persecution has been present: when a believer suffers, God's presence rests in a special, sustaining way upon him or her, bringing a strength and endurance that goes beyond the physical dimension. So - while suffering is something we should expect as God's people, it is also something that by His grace we can rejoice in, something that we know will ultimately bring us to a place of eternal and boundless rejoicing, and something in the midst of which He promises to bless us in a special way.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap up for the day, let me first say that we'll come back to the issue of suffering for our faith again on Monday, because Peter has much more to say on the topic. But for now, as we move into the weekend, my prayer for you is that you will remain strong in the Lord and in His might; that you'll both have and take the opportunity to worship with God's people in your local Bible-teaching church; and that you'll find rest over the next couple days, knowing that the Lord is with you through thick and thin. Call out to Him and let Him minister to you. Jesus be your peace and your joy, and God willing, we'll see you back here on Monday!

1 Peter 4:15-19

Getting Started

As we get started today, we continue to talk about the issue of suffering, something we've been doing a lot of in this letter! Our focus: suffering that is righteous.

1 Peter 4:15-19

15If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. 16However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name. 17For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? 18And, "If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?" 19So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.

Linda and I just had the downstairs of the house painted. It's something we could have done ourselves, but number one, we wanted things to look nice when the job was done, and number two, we want to stay married, and so we knew to stay away from that kind of a cooperative venture! The gentleman we hired to do the job was extremely pleasant. He wasn't a contractor; just a guy who had been painting for 30-some years as a side business, and it was obvious that he knew his stuff. The one interesting thing about him was that he insisted on using a specific brand of paint. To him, the name meant quality; it was something he trusted, and to use something cheaper would be a compromise of his commitment to provide us with the best product and the best workmanship. In fact, in telling us that he would only use this particular brand name, he said, "You'll feel good knowing that this paint is covering your wall."

I want to talk a little bit with you today about your brand – or more specifically, the name you bear. Why? Because it's a testimony to an amazing commitment to quality and workmanship. It's a name you can trust. And what's more, when you get right down to it, you can feel good knowing that it covers you. I'm talking, of course, about the fact that you bear the name of Christ.

Verse 15: Peter, talking about suffering, continues in verse 15 by reiterating something he has addressed earlier in the letter. There is suffering for doing wrong and suffering for doing right. God's people, he says, are not to live in a way so as to suffer for doing wrong. If you're a murderer or a criminal or a busybody, meddling in affairs of other people, you're going to get what's coming to you. In those instances you deserve it. For the believer to engage in such activity is not only reprehensible, it is also a mark against his or her witness and by extension, a mark against the church as a whole. God's people are to walk by a different standard.

Verse 16: On the other hand, if you suffer persecution and judgment and mistreatment specifically because you are a Christian, there is no shame in it; in fact, Peter says that on the contrary, we should be glad that we bear the name of Christ. You'll want to remember that at this point in the history of the church, "Christian" was still a very negative term meant to insult those who followed Jesus. Far from a label of honor, it was meant to inspire shame and derision. But look at how Peter turns it around: if you're called a Christian and you suffer for living the life of a Christian, praise God that you bear that name!

Verses 17-18: Moving into verse 17 and following, we see that connected to this issue of right or righteous suffering is the issue of judgment. The time has come for judgment to begin, and it begins, Peter says, in the house of God. What is meant by these words? Well, let's understand that Peter is not referring to condemnation here, but rather, as we see from the context, the testing, purifying, and chastening of the church by God's loving hand. In other words, it is far better and far more important for the building up of God's kingdom that we endure suffering as God purges and strengthens us than to endure the eternal suffering of the unbeliever in hell. Verse 18 drives that point home as it quotes to us from the book of Proverbs in the Septuagint, which is the Greek translation of the Old Testament: if the justified sinner is saved only through great difficulty and the experience of pain and suffering, then what will be the end of the ungodly?

Verse 19: Peter closes off this section in verse 19 with words of encouragement to stay strong and keep going: "So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good." The word 'commit' here is actually a banking term which means to deposit something for safe keeping. Isn't that great? As we journey through this life, celebrating the good and patiently enduring suffering for Jesus' sake, we commit ourselves, body and soul, to the One who has created us. He will keep us safe, and He will guard our account!

Wrapping Up

As we wrap up for the day, let me encourage you, if you are in a period of suffering because of your faith, to commit yourself fully to your Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier: God the Father Son and Holy Spirit. Rejoice in the fact that you bear His name, that you have been washed in His blood, and that as His child, His power to work in you and through you for His glory is incomparably great. And in the midst of it all, may you experience the peace and joy that comes from God guarding your heart in Christ Jesus. We'll see you back here tomorrow.

1 Peter 5:1-4

Getting Started

As we get started today, Peter, having spoken in general terms throughout this letter to the church as a whole, now turns his attention to the leadership of the church, namely, its pastors. Our focus: be shepherds of God's flock.

1 Peter 5:1-4

1To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: 2Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your

care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; 3not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. 4And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.

If you had asked me 20 years ago what I was going to do with my life, the last thing I would have told you was that I would be a pastor. Church work wasn't even on my radar screen when I started college, and when people first started suggesting to me that I had gifts in that area, I brushed it off. I wanted to be a psychologist. God has a funny way of working things out though, and sometime between my last year of college and my first year of graduate school, my heart began to change, and so my focus changed as well. Instead of going on with a master's program in social work like I had planned, I ended up at the seminary. The rest, as they say, is history; for the last decade or so, I have been a shepherd of God's flock. Looking at my life now, I can't imagine doing anything other than what I'm doing. I have been richly blessed by the privilege of caring for and serving God's people, and one of my greatest joys – even though for me it comes only with great difficulty – is sharing the truth of God's Word with people, whether in the pulpit, in the classroom, or over the Internet. Because I'm a pastor, I especially resonate with the words here in today's text...but you don't have to be a church worker to get something out of your Bible today!

Verse 1: In verse 1, Peter appeals to the elders of the church – that is, the overseers, or pastors – as a fellow elder himself. Not only is Peter a pastor in the greatest sense of the word, being one of the pillars of the entire Christian church, but he is also one who has personally witnessed the life, death, and resurrection of the Lord. Finally, he is one – along with all believers in Christ – who will partake of the glory to be revealed when Jesus Christ returns. On the basis of these truths and the authority which he possesses, Peter entreats the spiritual leaders of the church to action.

Verse 2: Specifically, he tells them to be shepherds of God's flock, and there are several things wrapped up in that concept, including feeding, leading, caring, and protecting. There's a great book by Phillip Keller called *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23* in which he talks in detail about life as a shepherd and applies it to Scripture. If you want to learn more about Jesus as our Good Shepherd and about the work of pastors as undershepherds, it's a great read and I highly recommend it.

As the pastors shepherd the flock of God under their care, notice that they are to do it not because they have to, but because they want to – because they are willing. There is no room for laziness as a shepherd; energy and commitment and vigilance must be the order of the day in order to keep the flock together, healthy, and safe. With that, Peter begins to list several other character traits or qualities necessary for the pastoral office. First, along with the willingness to serve must be a lack of greed. In other words, a pastor is to be free from the love of money and motivated to serve not by what he can get out of his people, but by what he can give to them by way of service. Now – Scripture is clear that churches should pay their shepherds well, but whether they do or don't is really not to be the motivating factor on whether or not the shepherd gives them his very best. I can't speak for every pastor out there, but the older and more mature in my faith I've become, the more I've learned that as I simply focus on serving, I don't need to worry about how I am cared for, because God is in charge of that part of my life as much as any other part, and He has shown me over and over and over again that He really will supply all my needs according to His riches in Jesus Christ.

Verse 3: As shepherds are to serve willingly and without greed, Peter also says that shepherds are to serve with a servant's heart, or as the text puts it, not lording it over the flock entrusted to their care. Sometimes in their zeal, younger pastors especially can be caught up in this error. But rather than leading with an iron fist or an attitude of power and authority over their people, pastors are to lead by example.

Verse 4: And finally, though pastors do not do it for the purpose of gaining a reward, Peter says that there is that involved as well! Verse 4 tells us that when the Chief Shepherd appears (a reference to the second coming of our Lord Jesus), faithful pastors will receive a crown of glory that will never fade away. Crowns, you'll remember, were given as awards and in recognition of great achievement in New Testament times, and so Peter's word picture here would have been very clear to the pastors he was speaking to.

Wrapping Up

Well, in wrapping up for the day, how might you look at this passage if you're a layperson rather than a shepherd? To be sure, there is life application in the general sense, but I'd like to suggest that you use this passage in another way; one that will build up the shepherd who oversees your flock. Pray for your pastor, that he would be a person who serves willingly rather than by compulsion. Pray that he will be well cared for by his people, but also that, rather than being enslaved to a spirit of greed, he will be graced with an attitude of contentment and thanksgiving in whatever he receives from his flock. Pray, finally, that your pastor will be a person who is constantly growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ and who, rather than lording it over his flock, will lead the flock lovingly and by the example of his own godly life. Remember, pastors are regular folks in need of grace and patience and forgiveness just like everybody else in this world. As you pray for his strengthening in the areas we've mentioned today, he will be richly blessed. Take care, and we'll see you back here next time.

1 Peter 5:5-7

Getting Started

As we get started today, Peter moves back to the topic of relationships in the church. Our focus: conducting ourselves with humility.

1 Peter 5:5-7

5Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." 6Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. 7Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. As many of you know, I have three dogs. Lydia the Beautiful Beagle thinks she is a queen and conducts herself as one who expects only the best at all times. Maggie the Scoundrel is just that – a scrappy girl who, because she is the smallest, takes what she can get whenever she can get it. She is loyal only to my wife, who spoils her rotten. Then there is Robin. Robin is the youngest but the biggest, arguably the prettiest, and inarguably the humblest of our three canine companions. She is the only one who has managed to make friends with the goats, the only one the geese don't goose, and the only one with whom the chickens will hang out on any given day. Robin is the peacemaker of the three dogs, the one who always settles an argument first, the one who makes sure everybody gets a piece of the treat. And when it comes to her interaction with us, Robin is the only one who treats all of us humans in the family with equal respect and

obedience. She's a peach. As such, she is a fine example of what the Word of God speaks to us today!

As we come to this particular passage in 1 Peter, I want you to know up front that there are two distinctly different interpretations regarding it. Depending on the way it is read, both may be considered valid, and both are certainly supported by other passages of Scripture. Both views have to do with proper respect and humility of heart, so the issue here isn't one of doctrinal truth; the issue is simply that of context and focus. Let's briefly look at each one of them in our time together today.

Verse 5: Verse 5 begins by telling young men, or young people, as some translations render it, to submit themselves to their elders. Notice that the NIV translates it as follows: "Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older." The rub here is how to translate the Greek word for elder. In the original language it is πρεσβυτεροισ, which would seem to indicate a reference not to those who are older, but to the pastors of the church, of whom Peter has been talking about in the immediately preceding verses. So depending on how you take it, this passage is either calling the young people of the church to submit to the church leaders as is fitting in the Lord, or, in the broader sense, to submit to those who are older. Regardless, however, the overarching principle still stands: we who are younger are to submit to those who are over us in the church, in the home, and in society in general, for this is pleasing in the sight of God our heavenly Father. Next, Peter extends this teaching to include not just those who are younger, but all people. Just as he has instructed us on the subject of submission at an earlier point in the letter, Peter now returns to it, reminding us that in reverence for Christ, we should all be submissive to one another, clothing ourselves in humility. Just what does it mean to put on humility? Literally speaking, humility means lowly-mindedness. To clothe ourselves with such an attitude means that we don't act like we're too good to serve or associate with others.

Verse 6: Since, in verse 5 we see that God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble, we see in verse 6 that far more than simply serving one another with an attitude of humility, our ultimate act of humbling ourselves is to be before God Himself. What is the promise connected to this command? That as we humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God, acknowledging Him to be Lord over all, presenting ourselves to Him not on the basis of our own merits but in accordance with His mercy, in due time – that is, in His own perfect time – He will lift us up.

Verse 7: And directly connected to that is what we find in verse 7: This same mighty God, to whom we bow and before whom we humble ourselves, is the One who deeply cares for us. Even as we humble ourselves before Him, we are invited to cast our anxieties upon Him as well.

Wrapping Up

Now, if you're like me, the most profound and most hope-inducing portion of the verses we've looked at today is the very last section. I don't know anyone who isn't anxious about something! I also don't know anyone who couldn't deal with a little bit of repositioning and reprioritizing in their lives when it comes to the way they view God. Would you join me today in sincerely, truly humbling yourself under the mighty, powerful hand of the living God of the universe? And as you do that, would you also join me in casting your anxieties upon Him? He cares for us. He loves us. He sent His Son to save us. He will not leave us adrift on the journey from here to there. Let's trust together that He knows our circumstances, He knows our needs in the midst of those circumstances, and faithful to His Word and promise, in due time – in His perfect time – He will lift us up. God bless you; we'll see you back here tomorrow.

1 Peter 5:8-11

Getting Started

As we Get started today, Peter begins to close off his letter, and he does so with a call to vigilance and the pronouncement of a blessing. Our focus: The mighty strength of God!

1 Peter 5:8-11

8Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. 9Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings. 10And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. 11To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.

I'm showing my spoiled nature by admitting to this, but as much as I love living in the country, one of the things I miss about city living is the ubiquitous presence of the neighborhood Starbuck's. In southern California where I used to live, you can find a Starbuck's on almost any given corner. For me this was always a very good thing, because not being a morning person, I need a strong cup of coffee to get my day going. To be alert and focused and ready to function, a little bit of caffeine helps me out, and though I can certainly get that from my own coffee maker, there's just something about a Venti Soy Mocha or an Extra Hot Double-Caff Carmel Macchiato that jumpstarts my brain! These days I'm over a half-hour's drive from the nearest Starbuck's, so I've had to make do at home; but when I do go into town, I never miss the opportunity to go in and savor my favorite drink! In today's reading, Peter calls us to be focused and alert and ready to function as people of God living in a fallen world. There is an enemy about who seeks to do us great harm, and so we must be on our guard. Caffeine, however, will not help us in jumpstarting our way to this vigilance; it will require something far stronger.

Verse 8: In verse 8, Peter shares with us the reason sober-mindedness and vigilance is needed: our adversary, the devil, is prowling about like a roaring lion, and what is his goal? To find someone to devour. Now, if you've never heard it before, the word devil means "slanderer," and the word adversary actually refers to a legal opponent in a court of law. These terms give us an idea of how Satan operates in his quest to unseat us: he constantly accuses, constantly attempts to overwhelm and discourage us, and continually argues that we are unworthy, undeserving, and unlovable in the eyes of God. And of course, being the father of lies he is not above bending the truth as much as he needs to in order to make his case. If we are believers who are weak and alone, not aware of spiritual truth, not on our guard against attack, then we are an easy lunch for the enemy.

Verse 9: Peter raises this issue so that we will be aware of the danger, and he also gives us the proper strategy for dealing with the devil's schemes. Verse 9 tells us that we are to do three things in particular. First, we are to resist him. That means to vigorously stand up against him, and the way to stand up against him is by, number two, remaining steadfast in the faith. Over the years people have tried all kinds of things to keep the devil away. They've worn amulets or eaten certain kinds of food or memorized formulas, but the bottom line is this: it is in knowing the truth of Scripture and embracing the sound doctrine contained therein that you and I are able to recognize and resist the attacks of the enemy, and actively live in the peace and presence of Jesus, who is our righteousness. That's one reason why it's so important for you and me to know what we believe and why we believe it. The third thing that Peter mentions here in verse 9 is this: we are to remember that far from being alone in this kind of warfare, every

man and woman in the entire world who belongs to Christ is subject to this kind of spiritual danger and endures this kind of spiritual warfare. That means that all of us who are in Christ can comfort and encourage one another in times of weakness and in the process thwart the desire of the enemy to defeat us. As we've said before, the fellowship of God's people is vitally important in so many ways, and this is another example of that.

Verses 10-11: Finally, Peter says that there is one more thing for us to remember as we journey through this short earthly life and face the challenges and difficulties that come with being a Christian. What is it? That the God of all grace has called us to His eternal glory in Christ, and that after we have suffered a little while, He will Himself restore us and make us strong, firm and steadfast. Indeed, that is worthy of a great doxology: to him be the power for ever and ever. Amen!

Wrapping Up

As we wrap up for the day, I'd like to take a moment and encourage you in your walk with the Lord Jesus Christ. Whenever the subject of spiritual warfare comes up, some people get squeamish and uncomfortable at the thought of supernatural reality, while others panic and look for a demon under every rock and leaf. Neither response is very helpful. Instead, know today that as you endeavor to live for Jesus and keep your eyes focused on the prize for which God has called you heavenward, you are in very good hands! Jesus is your Mighty Warrior, the One who has already obtained eternal victory over the enemy for you by virtue of His life, His death, and His resurrection. Greater is Jesus Christ, who is in you, than Satan, who is in the world – and the clear promise from the Word of God is that as you resist the devil, he will flee from you. Rest in that peace today, and take joy in the fact that this life will soon give way to the eternal glory we have in Christ. God bless you richly, and we'll see you back here tomorrow!

1 Peter 5:12-14

Getting Started

As we get started today, we see Peter ending his letter with some personal greetings, each of which is instructive for us. Our focus: never alone!

1 Peter 5:12-14

12With the help of Silas, whom I regard as a faithful brother, I have written to you briefly, encouraging you and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand fast in it. 13She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you her greetings, and so does my son Mark. 14Greet one another with a kiss of love. Peace to all of you who are in Christ.

I've said it before, and I want to say it again today at the beginning of our study time together: people today have a misconception about what the life of the church is all about. Too often we go in, hit the pew, do our time, and get out again without ever a thought about extending things beyond the four walls of the sanctuary. Church to so many of us is an activity, and engagement, or an appointment to be kept, when in reality, our coming together to worship on a given day is actually designed to be a culmination of what has been going on throughout our week and will continue to go on once we leave the building. Church is not an institution; church is an organism, a living thing established by Jesus Christ and made up of His people, who are to be immersed in its life as the living entity that it is. In other words, church is who we are as much as what we do and where we go, and in fact, who we are actually informs what we do and where we go. I say these things as a way to both introduce the verses before us today as well as close

off the overall teaching of this first letter of Peter. Why? Because in his farewell remarks, he presents for us a picture of how the church rightly functions as the body of Christ.

Verse 12: As Peter begins to say his goodbyes to his readers, he gives us, in verse 12, a summary of the entire purpose of his letter: it's all about encouraging them in Christ in the face of trial, and testifying that what he has said is the true grace of God. Attached to that is a firm command: stand fast in that grace! Peter also lets us know in verse 12 that he has had help in the writing of this letter, namely from Silas - and this is what I'd like to focus on for a moment. This is the same Silas that travelled with Paul and who is so often mentioned in Paul's letters. We know from elsewhere in God's Word that Silas is a prophet and a faithful servant of the work of Christ, and in this case he has most likely acted as Peter's amanuensis, or secretary, writing down what Peter has dictated. He is also most likely the one who then delivers this letter to its intended recipients. Notice that Peter calls him a faithful brother. This is a statement of fellowship and partnership in the Gospel, something which is of critical importance in Peter's life and ministry. As empowered by God as he is, as gifted by the Spirit and as authoritative as he is in his leadership of God's people, he can't do it alone. He needs his brothers and sisters in the faith as much as any of the rest of us do in order to fulfill his God-given purpose in life.

Verse 13: In verse 13 we see this point further emphasized: not only is Silas with Peter, but "she who is in Babylon" sends greetings as well - a reference to the church in Rome, the city where Peter is residing. Peter's spiritual son Mark, the writer of the Gospel that bears his name and the one who has also worked with Paul and Barnabus, is also with him. What's the point here? The point is that Peter is not an island, but rather part of a rich spiritual fellowship of believers in Jesus Christ from whom he undoubtedly receives encouragement and with whom he carries on the work of the Gospel and the expansion of the church. These people are a sustaining strength for Peter; his family in the faith and his support group in the midst of a difficult life, which will ultimately end in his martyrdom. Just as Peter has exhorted his readers to encourage one another and to be there for one another in times of trial, here at the end of the letter he exemplifies and models that practice in his own life.

Verse 14: Finally, as he comes to the end, he concludes his letter in verse 14 in a typical Christian fashion: exhorting his readers to greet one another with a kiss of love and pronouncing peace on all those who are in Christ.

Wrapping Up

As we wrap up for the day, for the week, and at the same time wrap up this book, I can't think of a more perfect way to close things off than to encourage you in the same way that Peter has so faithfully encouraged us throughout these five chapters. Are you a person who knows the joy of a loving, supportive, Bible-believing church family who is there for you in good times and bad, who lifts you up and prays for you, who ministers to you and with you in the name of Jesus Christ? If you're not, then this weekend is the best time ever to begin searching out a place where you can worship Christ in community with other Christians. The body of Christ is just that: a body with many parts, one of which is you - and you were designed to be with other followers of Jesus to help them and to be helped by them. It's how God provides you with the support you need while you're on this journey called life. If you need help in this area, let me know and I'll be happy to help in any way that I can. May our Lord Jesus richly bless you and bring you into true biblical community in the days ahead. God willing, we'll see you back here on Monday. Take care!