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# JANUARY

## Dispelling Discouragement (1 Peter 1:1–5)

We all have times when life is tough. The trouble might be a health problem, a financial crisis, a relationship problem, etc. When life is tough over the “long haul,” we all get discouraged. That’s why we need the book of 1 Peter. It tells us how to have a “journey into triumphant living,” even when life is tough.

The apostle Peter was a fisherman from Galilee when Jesus called him to be a disciple. He identifies himself as *Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ* (1:1a). The word *apostle* means “one sent forth with a message.” The first time we meet Peter in the New Testament, he is called *Simon* (Mt 4:18), which is his given name. However, what does Jesus tell him in John 1:42c?

The Aramaic name *Cephas* (PETROS, pet'-ros, in Greek) translates “Peter,” which means stone or rock. Peter is called by four names in the New Testament: Simon, Cephas, Peter, and Simon Peter. In the lists of disciples, Peter’s name is always first, indicating he was the leader of the Twelve. We also know Peter had a mother-in-law (Mt 8:14; Lk 4:38). What does 1 Corinthians 9:5 tell us about *the brothers of the Lord and Cephas*?

Peter writes to encourage ... *those who are elect exiles of the dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia* [cap-uh-doe'-she-uh], *Asia, and Bithynia* [bih-thin'-ih-uh] (1:1). Because of severe persecution, Christians *scattered* from their original homes and fled to several provinces in northern Asia Minor, which is modern Turkey. The infamous Roman Caesar, Nero, burned Rome in A.D. 64, publicly blaming Christians. In the persecution that followed, Christians were arrested, tortured, beheaded, crucified, and fed to wild animals as a spectator sport in the coliseum.

The word translated *exiles*, or “strangers,” means “resident foreigners” or aliens. Since as *exiles* we have morals and values that seem “strange” and archaic to non-believers, we should still expect persecution in various forms today. They don’t understand our convictions about premarital sex, homosexuality, abortion, marriage, family, and other issues. Our culture is becoming more and more godless and hostile toward Christians because we seem “strange.” What did our Lord say about persecution in John 15:20c?

For that reason, we all need this passage from *1 Peter*, which gives us **three** ways to dispel discouragement

### Remember who chose you (1:2–3)

We are the *elect* ... *according to the foreknowledge of God the Father* (1:1, 2a). The word translated *elect* (EKLEKTOS, ek-lek-tos') means “chosen,” or “selected” (Eph. 1:4). The word translated *foreknowledge* (PROGNŌSIS, prog'-no-sis) is where we get our word “prognosis.” We use

it today to refer to a medical opinion as the likely outcome of a disease. In verse two, the word means God not only knows the future but also has a plan for our lives before we are ever born (Jer. 1:5, Acts 2:23), and that plan includes living through some tough times.

Verse two also reveals all three members of the Trinity are involved in our salvation. Not only did *God the Father* foreknow us, but our salvation is *in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood* (1:2b). This basically means *God the Father* foreknew us, *God the Spirit* sanctifies us (sets us apart for service to God), and *Jesus Christ* cleanses us.

Peter also writes of the cause and effect of our salvation: *May grace and peace be multiplied to you* (1:2c). *Grace* is the cause of our salvation, while inner *peace* is the effect or result.

All three members of the Trinity are involved in our salvation through God's *great mercy* (1:3b). The word *mercy* refers to God's unmerited favor toward us, despite the fact we are sinners. *Mercy* means we receive a salvation we don't deserve. How does Titus 3:5a–b express this great gift?

God's *mercy has caused us to be born again* (1:3c). The phrase *born again* means God has chosen to give us a new start in life and stresses the change that takes place at conversion. We are *born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead* (1:3d). The word *hope* doesn't mean wishful thinking, but a firm persuasion or confident expectation. The word *living* means our hope is based on the *resurrection of Jesus Christ*. Therefore, we will outlive all our problems and pain.

To dispel discouragement, **remember who chose you** and ...

### **Reflect on your *inheritance* (1:4)**

In Christ, we have *an inheritance* (1:4a). In the Old Testament, the word *inheritance* describes the Promised Land, the place the Israelites were anticipating as they wandered in the wilderness (Num. 32:19). As Christians, we look forward to a different kind of *inheritance*. A part of that *inheritance* is what Christ will do when He returns. How is it described in Philippians 3:21a?

We will receive glorified bodies that are not susceptible to disease, age, and the limitations of our physical bodies. Christ's *glorious body* enabled Him to pass through walls—appearing and disappearing any place at will (Mk 16:14). In our glorified bodies, I believe we will also be able to do the same. Won't that be great?

Another part of our *inheritance* is what God will do. How is it described in Revelation 21:4, when *the former things* pass away?

Peter describes our *inheritance* as *imperishable, undefiled, and unfading* (1:4). The word translated *imperishable*, or “incorruptible” (APHTHARTOS, af'-thar-tos), means our *inheritance* will never perish or disappear because it is eternal. Also, it is *undefiled*, which means free from contamination. Nothing will ever infect or pollute heaven. It will always be pure and holy because no one who is impure, shameful, or deceitful can enter (Rev. 21:27a–b). Therefore, according to the last phrase of Revelation 21:27, who are the only inhabitants of heaven?

The word *unfading* means the beauty, holiness, splendor, joy, etc. of our *inheritance* will never fade in the slightest. All earthly possessions are subject to constant change, or fading, but our *inheritance* in heaven is eternally the same, or *unfading*.

Next, Peter lists the most important characteristic of our *inheritance*. It is *kept in heaven for you* (1:4). The word *kept*, or “reserved” (TĒREŌ, tay-reh'-oh), is a perfect passive participle. It refers to something that began in the past but continues in the present. God has been keeping and will continue to keep our *inheritance ... in heaven*. Passive means it is being kept for us; we are not keeping it ourselves. So, no matter what happens to us on earth, our *inheritance* is kept safe by God.

To dispel discouragement, **remember who chose you; reflect on your *inheritance***, and ...

### **Rest in God's power (1:5)**

Peter knows some believers might wonder whether or not they will be able to endure and remain faithful to Christ if the persecution intensifies. To reassure them and us, Peter explains God is not only keeping our inheritance, He is also doing something else for us now. Peter explains it like this: *who by God's power are being guarded* (1:5a). The word translated *guarded*, or “kept,” is a military term that means “to keep with a garrison.” How does Jude 24 describe how God guards us?

When life is tough, we all sometimes wonder if we can remain faithful. We shouldn't trust in our own abilities or spirituality but in God's *power* to keep us. That's God's part in our *salvation*. Our part is *faith* (Eph. 2:8–9), through which God is protecting us until we receive full *salvation ready to be revealed in the last time* (1:5b).

There are three parts to our *salvation*. The initial stage is called **regeneration**, which is immediate and instantaneous (Tit. 3:5). The second stage, called **sanctification**, is progressive and takes a lifetime. This process takes place as we read, study, and apply God's Word (Jn 17:17).

The third, and final, stage of salvation is called **glorification** (Rom. 8:17). Therefore, our *inheritance* is **regeneration** (salvation from the penalty of sin), **sanctification** (salvation from the power of sin), and **glorification**, (salvation from the presence of sin). God never starts anything He doesn't finish. We have what spectacular promise in Philippians 1:6b?

To dispel your discouragement and be triumphant, **remember who chose you, reflect on your *inheritance***, and **rest in God's power**.

# FEBRUARY

## The Benefits of Trials (1 Peter 1:6–12)

There are some misconceptions about trials. For example, some people believe trials are God's way of punishing us, but that's not true. Trials are a part of our preparation for heaven. Life is a classroom in which God prepares us for eternity with tests we sometimes call "trials." To benefit from trials, we need to know **three** facts about them.

### **Trials purify our *faith* (1:6–7)**

God knows we don't change until the pain of continuing as we are exceeds the pain of change. Therefore, He allows us to have trials—sometimes very painful ones—to motivate us to change. As someone has said, "We don't change when we see the light; we change when we feel the heat." How does Psalm 119:71 express this fact?

That's why Peter writes we should *rejoice* because *now for a little while* we must endure *various trials* (1:6). The word *trials*, or "temptations" (PEIRASMOS, pe-ras-mos'), refers to tests. These tests challenge our faithfulness to God's way and God's will for our lives. During a severe trial, we are tempted to take the path of least resistance or that is least painful. This is seldom God's way. However, Peter says we can *rejoice* because we know our trials are just *for a little while*, compared to eternity. Our trials last only a nanosecond compared to the joys we will have for eternity in heaven. How does Psalm 21:6 declare this truth?

Peter states that the testing of the *genuineness of our faith* is *more precious than gold*, which will perish even *though it is tested*, or refined, *by fire* (1:7a–b). God doesn't cause our suffering and pain, but He loves us too much to allow them to be wasted. Peter uses the analogy of *gold* being refined by *fire*. When *gold* is heated and melted, all the impurities come to the surface so they can be skimmed off. That's what trials do for us. They cause the impurities in our lives—the flaws and defects in our *faith*—to come to the surface so they can be removed.

One purpose for God allowing our trials is so they may *result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ* (1:7c). Nothing will bring us *praise* from God like faithfully enduring our trials and growing through them.

**Trials purify our *faith* and ...**

### **Trials proliferate our *joy* (1:8–9)**

Peter had seen the Lord, talked to Him, and lived with Him. He had seen Him walk on water, perform miracles, and had personally seen the resurrected Lord. However, Peter writes, *though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him* (1:8a–c). Peter understands the persecuted believers to whom he is writing had not known Jesus as he had. Yet, they *love him* and believe in him. Like Peter's original recipients, we have *not seen* Christ

in the flesh, which puts us in line for an even greater blessing. This is because of what words of our Lord to Thomas in John 20:29?

Since we can't see Jesus, how do we get to know Him so we can *love him* and believe in him? There is only one way—through the written Word of God. That is what faith is all about. How does Hebrews 11:1 describe faith?

Our *conviction*, or “evidence,” is based on what we read in God's Word, not what we see. Therefore, *faith* is accepting what is written in the Bible. When our *faith* in God's Word grows, we can *rejoice with joy that is inexpressible* (1:8d). The word *inexpressible*, or “unspeakable,” means words do not have the power to describe it. We can also be *filled with glory* (1:8e), which means our *joy* is glorious. This *joy* and *glory* are *inexpressible*. God's Word teaches there is a purpose and a perfectly-matched Bible promise for every problem we will ever have. That brings us *joy that is inexpressible*!

In the midst of all our trials we are on a journey to the *outcome*, or goal, of our *faith*, *the salvation of our souls* (1:9). Though now we have *salvation* in principle, the full outcome will be living in the presence of Christ and God the Father for eternity. Then, pain and suffering will be no more. Our trials are part of preparing for that time. The night before His crucifixion, Jesus tells His disciples one of them will betray Him, Peter will deny Him, and He is leaving them (Jn 13 & 14). Finally, what does He tell them in John 15:11?

Enduring trials is just part of God's plan for our lives, as it was for Jesus, and enduring them causes *full, eternal joy*.

**Trials purify our *faith*, proliferate our *joy*, and ...**

### **Trials produce angelic assistance (1:10–12)**

Next, Peter writes, *Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully* (1:10). This means the *salvation* we are enjoying is the very *salvation* the Old Testament prophets *prophesied* about but never fully understood. Peter is talking about the blessing of living “A. D.” rather than “B. C.”

Because the prophets lived before Christ, they *searched and inquired* about puzzling prophecies. The prophets were puzzled at their own inspired writing, *inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories* (1:11). The phrase *Spirit of Christ* means the Holy Spirit, who testifies about Christ (Jn 15:26). In other words, they wondered what time the Holy Spirit within them was talking about when He told them in advance about Christ's *sufferings and subsequent glories*. This affirms the Holy Spirit worked in Old Testament writers to write down God's infallible Word. The prophets did not fully understand all the Holy Spirit inspired them to write. Therefore, what does Peter declare in 2 Peter 1:21?

Even though they did not fully understand what they were writing, through divine inspiration the prophets wrote about Christ's *sufferings* and *glory*. Peter continues: *It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you* (1:12a). The prophets understood their prophecies would not be fulfilled during their lifetimes; therefore, *they were serving not themselves*. They knew the prophecies were for another era. The prophets wrote about Christ but never had the understanding about Him we do today. Yet, the prophets faithfully endured suffering and trials. That fact should move us to a deeper commitment during times of trials.

The prophets wrote about *things that have now been announced to you* (1:12b). The key words in this phrase are the words *things* and *now*. *Things* refers to the *sufferings of Christ* that bring salvation through grace. The word *now* means all the prophecies the prophets didn't fully understand are now being *announced*, or revealed, to us. In other words, what was concealed in the Old Testament is revealed in the New Testament.

It is revealed *through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven* (1:12c). Just as the Holy Spirit inspired the prophets in the Old Testament, He inspired the apostles and authors of the New Testament. How does Paul express this fact in 2 Timothy 3:16a?

The phrase *things into which angels long to look* is very interesting. The word translated *to look* (PARAKYPTŌ, par-ah-koop'-toe) means to stoop down and *look*. It is the idea of being willing to be inconvenienced to gain a better view. It is as though the angels crowded around the doors of heaven *to look* out and see the Son of God dying on the cross for the sins of the world. The angels have always been involved in God's plan for our salvation, and now, for our trials. The angel Gabriel announced Christ's birth to the Virgin Mary (Lk 1:26–35). Angels stood by the grave when Jesus rose from the dead (Mt 28:2–7). Two angels attended our Lord as He ascended into heaven (Acts 1:10–11). Angels will also gather the elect at Christ's return (Mt 24:31).

Because trials precede our glory, angels are watching and helping us now. The angels serve as God's messengers and agents (Psa. 91:11a). How does Hebrews 1:14 describe one ministry of angels?

God also commands angels to guard us in all our ways (Psa. 91:11b). Because of our trials, God sends His angels to deliver us from our spiritual enemies and assist us in reaching our final destination and ultimate glory. The ministry of angels includes protecting us and ministering to our needs. It's one of the benefits of our trials.

There are at least three benefits to our trials: **trials purify our faith**, **trials proliferate our joy**, and **trials produce angelic assistance**.



# MARCH

## How To Be Holy (1 Peter 1:13–25)

As we discovered in our last lesson, God’s plan of salvation through the Messiah was foretold by the prophets, but they didn’t fully understand it. The angels also longed to fully understand it but couldn’t until after the crucifixion and resurrection. Now, because we understand and benefit from the Gospel, we have a responsibility to live up to its privileges. Therefore, as Christians, we are called to be holy, which requires we take at least **three** actions.

### Sanitize our minds (1:13–16)

Peter puts it like this, *Therefore, preparing your minds for action* (1:13a). The word *therefore* refers to what Peter just wrote in the previous verses. The word translated *preparing*, or “gird up the loins,” pictures a Middle Eastern man wearing a cumbersome, long-flowing robe. To walk fast or run, the man must gather up his robe and tuck it into his belt. Today, we would say, “Roll up your sleeves.” So, to prepare our *minds*, we must remove from our *minds* things that encumber us spiritually. If we are not very careful, the world will encumber our minds. Therefore, we need to practice what principle found in Psalm 101:3a?

Also, we are to be *sober-minded* (1:13b), which means we are to be in full control of our words and conduct, in contrast to living an uncontrolled life. We are not to be intoxicated with the ways of the world. To do that Peter writes: *set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ* (1:13). *Grace* often refers to saving grace, but here it refers to all the blessings that will be complete when Christ returns. If we focus our minds on that, we will be motivated to live holy lives. How does 1 John 3:3 express the results of this *hope*?

If we sanitize our minds, we will be *obedient* and not *conformed to the passions* we had when we lived in *ignorance* before becoming Christians (1:14). Before coming to Christ, we lived in *ignorance* and made ignorant decisions by giving in to our sinful *passions*. We still have the sinful *passions*, but the first step in not letting them dominate us is to sanitize our minds. Instead of giving in to our former *passions*, Peter writes, *but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct*,<sup>16</sup> *since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy”* (1:15–16). We are to emulate our heavenly Father, who called us to be *holy*. The word *holy* (HAGIOS, hag'-ee-os) means “consecrated” or set apart from sin to be used by God. It basically means we are “different” from the world. To be different, we cannot go out into the world as mental “streakers.” We must sanitize our minds by daily putting God’s Word into our minds and hearts. This is practicing what principle in Psalm 119:11?

The word translated *stored*, or “hid” (SĀPAN, saw-fawn'), means to hoard or memorize. Nothing combats sinful *passions* like storing God’s Word in our hearts, so it is ready to be a sharp, two-edged sword against the *passions* that attack our minds (Heb. 4:12).

To be holy, we must **sanitize our minds** and ...



## Analyze our lives (1:17–21)

Peter puts it like this: *And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds* (1:17a). God judges *impartially*—not on the basis of outward appearance, but on the basis of the reality or reason for our *deeds*. *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ* (2 Cor. 5:10a). Why, according to 2 Corinthians 5:10b?

Therefore, we must *conduct* ourselves *with fear throughout the time of our exile* (1:17b). We must have a reverent *fear* of God. It is not *fear* of a ruthless master. It is a healthy respect for our all-powerful, all-knowing, holy God, before whom we must give an account of our lives. It also means we have a tender conscience that is very sensitive to sin.

We must also remember we are now living in a time of *exile*, or “sojourning.” We are strangers, or tourists, who don’t have a permanent residence in this world. Have you ever noticed how tourists stand out because they are different? As Christians, we are different because we don’t live by the world’s shifting, declining morals or by political correctness, but by the unchanging standards of God’s Word.

Peter reminds his Jewish readers they *were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from their forefathers* (1:18a). The word *ransomed*, or “redeemed,” means to free by paying a ransom price. *Ways inherited from your forefathers* refers to the worthless religious traditions followed by the Jews of Peter’s day (Mt 15:9).

The ransom price was not *perishable things such as silver or gold* <sup>19</sup> *but ... the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot* (1:18b–19). If we are to be different from this world, we can never forget the ransom price paid to free us from the slavery of sin was *the precious blood of Christ*. Jesus gave Himself to redeem us from every kind of sin and purify us (Tit. 2:14a). Why, according to Titus 2:14b?

Jesus *was foreknown before the foundation of the world* (1:20a). This means the fall in the Garden of Eden did not take our omniscient, or all-knowing, God by surprise. He already knew what He would do to cleanse the world of sin and through whom He would do it. Christ’s death on the cross was not an afterthought. Sin did not paint God into a corner and force Him to send Jesus to die on the cross. It was His plan before He created the world.

This plan was not completely revealed to the prophets or angels *but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you* (1:20b). God’s entire plan of salvation was *for the sake of you* and me.

It is through Christ alone that we become *believers in God* (1:21a). We can’t *believe in God*, nor can we know Him, apart from knowing about the death, resurrection, and lordship of Christ. Apart from Jesus, no one can *believe* in the one true God or know Him because Jesus is God (Jn 10:30).

One of our greatest present blessings is God *raised Jesus from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God* (1:21b). *Faith* enables us to trust in the God who can see us safely through all the struggles and adversities of life. *Faith* is for the present and enables us to confidently say what words with the psalmist (Psalm 56:11a–b)?

*Hope* enables us to be confident about the future. The word translated *hope* (ELPIS, el-piece’) means to anticipate with pleasure. It is not wishful thinking. It is not hoping something will happen, but

may not. In the Bible, *hope* refers to a confident expectation about the future that is as sure, or certain, as if it has already happened.

To be holy, we must **sanitize our minds, analyze our lives, and ...**

## **Utilize God's Word (1:22–25)**

Now, Peter gives us the acid test of a real Christian and what really makes us different from the world. He writes: *Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love* (1:22a). The real test of being holy is how we *love*. We are to *love one another earnestly from a pure heart fervently* (1:22b). The litmus test of a holy life is how we *love*. This is because of what truth in Romans 13:10?

The most difficult thing in the Christian life is to *love* as the Bible commands. However, we can obey this command because we have been *born again* (1:23a). The word translated *have been born again* is a perfect, passive participle, which (as stated before) means it happened in the past with continuing results in the present. We are *born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable* (1:23b). *Seed* represents the source of life. God initiates our spiritual birth with the *imperishable seed* of His Word (Lk 8:11; Jas. 1:18a).

Peter uses two words to describe God's Word. First, the Bible is *living*—it is active in our lives (1:23c). As we read, hear, memorize, and apply God's Word, it makes us more and more like Jesus Christ. Second, God's Word is *abiding*—it endures (1:23d). It is, therefore, a reliable source of truth because as Peter writes, quoting Isaiah 40:6c, 8: *for "All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls."* (1:24). Still quoting *Isaiah*, what does Peter write in verse 25a?

This eternal *word is the good news that was preached to you and me* (1:25b). In this life, we have a living and abiding book that gives us *faith and hope* (1:21c). However, to receive its benefits, especially when life is tough, we must do more than read or hear it (Jas. 1:22–25). How does Jesus express this truth in Luke 11:28?

The word *keep* (PHYLASSŌ, foo-las'-soh) means to observe or obey. To do that, we must **utilize God's Word** in all our decisions and actions.

To be holy, we must **sanitize our minds, analyze our lives, and utilize God's Word.**

# APRIL

## How To Grow Spiritually (1 Peter 2:1–10)

**H**ave you ever heard someone say, “Why don’t you grow up?” This is something often said to someone behaving immaturely. As Christians, we must grow up spiritually. Peter has already reminded us we *have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God* (1:23). Now, in this chapter he gives us **four** steps to grow spiritually.

### Eliminate sin (2:1)

The first step is to eliminate five specific sins: *So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander* (2:1). *Malice* means “evil intent.” It is a desire to inflict hurt or harm. The word translated *deceit*, or “guile” (DOLOS, dol’-os), means to bait or snare. It is the idea of trickery and fraud.

Third in the list is *hypocrisy*, which means playacting or pretending to be something we are not. *Envy* is an evil desire to have what belongs to someone else. When the crowd screamed for the notorious Barabbas to be set free and shouted for Jesus to be crucified, Pilate knew the reason (Mt 27:15–23). What does Matthew 27:18 reveal was the reason?

The word translated *slander*, or “evil speakings,” means backbiting or defamation. It is harming another’s reputation with gossip, rumors, or lies.

It should be noted the sins of adultery, stealing, and murder are not listed. This is because those are not the sins of which Christians are most often guilty. The sins in this list have been called “the sins in good standing” because Christians are so often guilty of them. However, to grow spiritually requires eliminating sin, including those in “good standing.” Next ...

### Investigate God’s Word (2:2–3)

Eliminating sin takes supernatural help. Therefore, what does Peter write in 1 Peter 2:2?

As newborn infants crave milk, we are to *crave pure spiritual milk*, which is the Word of God. The word *pure*, or “sincere,” means there are no dilutions or perversions of what God’s Word teaches. Peter is not contrasting milk with meat or solid food. He is contrasting *pure* food with contaminated food. We must *long for* God’s Word, without the contamination of human opinions or distortions to conform it to political correctness or modern culture.

It is sad that many so-called worship services today are nothing more than religious entertainment, with a few scriptures thrown in. This will draw a crowd, but only the well-prepared preaching and teaching of God’s Word produces spiritual growth. Many so-called Christians today *will not endure sound teaching* (2 Tim. 4:3a). Instead, what do they do (4:3b)?

Quoting Psalm 34:8, Peter writes, *you have tasted that the Lord is good* (2:3). As we investigate God's Word through reading, studying, hearing, and applying it to our lives, we will find that it is good. The only time it does not taste good is when we are guilty of sin. Have you ever heard someone who is sick say, "Nothing tastes good"? When we are spiritually sick, nothing in God's Word tastes good because sin destroys our appetite for God's *pure* Word. However, if we are spiritually healthy, what does Jeremiah 15:16a–b reveal we will say?

As we investigate God's Word, we get to know the author, the Lord Himself, and learn He is *good*, so obeying His Word brings *joy* and *delight*.

To grow spiritually, **eliminate sin, investigate God's Word, and ...**

## **Participate in ministry (2:4–5)**

To describe spiritual growth, Peter now uses the metaphor of a building. Jesus is the source not only of our spiritual birth but also our spiritual growth. Peter writes: *As you come to him* (2:4a). This doesn't refer to our initial salvation but to our continual drawing near to Christ in abiding fellowship.

The One to whom we should come is *a living stone* (2:4b), who is the resurrected, *living*, giving Son of God. He was *rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious* (2:4b). Therefore, we can take heart in the knowledge that, though we also are rejected by men, we are *chosen* and *precious* to God.

When we receive Christ, we become part of a spiritual building program of which Peter writes: *you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house* (2:5a). When someone comes to Christ, a new stone is added to God's *spiritual house*. Because our ministry is to add spiritual stones to God's *spiritual house*, we are to be a *holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ* (2:5b). As priests, our ministry is *to offer spiritual sacrifices* to God in two areas: attitudes and actions. How does Ephesians 5:2 describe what should be our attitude of sacrifice?

Our *walk*, or lifestyle, is the basis of our ministry and is to be characterized by Christ's love. The second *spiritual* sacrifice is in our actions: *to do good and to share* with those in need, *for such sacrifices are pleasing to God* (Heb. 13:16).

To grow spiritually, **eliminate sin, investigate God's Word, participate in ministry, and ...**

## **Celebrate God's calling and mercy (2:6–10)**

Quoting from Isaiah 28:16, Peter writes: *For it stands in Scripture: "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious"* (2:6a–b). God is building His *spiritual house* with Jesus as the *cornerstone* and we are called to be *living stones* (2:4–5). In a masonry or stone building, the *cornerstone* keeps everything plumb and square.

Jesus is the *cornerstone* with which every other *living stone* in the building must line up. Jesus is also the *foundation* (1 Cor. 3:11) that ensures God's *spiritual house* never cracks or collapses. Peter also writes about the *cornerstone*: *"and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame"* (2:6c). The word translated *shame*, or "confounded," means being disappointed or having cause to

regret. Many people in life will disappoint us but Christ never will. We will never have any reason to be ashamed of following Christ. Why, according to Hebrews 13:8?

Because everyone doesn't accept the *cornerstone*, Peter writes: *So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,"* <sup>8</sup>and *"A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense"* (2:7–8b). Peter quotes three passages from the Old Testament (Isa. 28:16; Psa. 118:22; & Isa. 8:14) to prove Christ's rejection was predicted by the prophets and was therefore no surprise to God. The *builders* in verse 7 are those who reject Christ as the *cornerstone* of their lives, and as a result, *they stumble because they disobey the word* (2:8b). They *stumble* and fall into judgment *as they were destined to do* (2:8c). All who reject Christ are *destined* to judgment. What does Jesus declare about those who do not believe in Him (John 3:18b)?

As *living stones*, we are a *chosen race* (2:9a). I went to a very small high school in Caddo, Oklahoma. We were so small we didn't have football; therefore, basketball was the main sport. I will never forget when I was chosen by Coach McCorkle to be a starter on our team. It was a "dream come true." But there is a much greater thrill than being chosen to be on any ball team, or anything else; it is to be *chosen* by God to be a part of His *race*, or people.

In Christ, we are also a *royal priesthood*, which means we have direct access to God. In the Old Testament, people could not approach God directly but used a priest as an intermediary between them and God. However, all believers are part of a *royal priesthood*. Therefore, *with confidence* we can *draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need* (Heb. 4:16).

Next, Peter writes believers are a *holy nation* (2:9c). The word translated *nation* (ETHNOS, eth'-nos) is the word from which we get our word "ethnic," which means "sharing distinctive cultural traits as a group." So, we are God's *holy*, distinctive, ethnic group—unlike any other on earth

As believers, we are God's *own possession*, who are to *proclaim the excellencies of him who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light* (2:9). In the Bible, *darkness* symbolizes spiritual blindness and the influence of Satan. *Light* represents God's truth and revelation. We should continually celebrate the fact God has called us *into his marvelous light*. How does Colossians 1:13 express this fact?

Peter concludes this section: *Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy* (2:10). *Mercy* means we don't receive the judgment we deserve.

To grow spiritually, **eliminate sin, investigate God's Word, participate in ministry, and celebrate God's calling and mercy.**

## MAY

### Influencing People for Christ (1 Peter 2:11–25)

Next to our salvation, nothing is more important than our influence. People are watching us every day to see if we just “talk the talk” or if we really “walk the walk.” We are called to *proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light* (2:9). We *proclaim* the Gospel most effectively by the way we live. A person whose life proclaims the Gospel and influences others for Christ has at least **three** qualities ...

#### Live differently (2:11–12)

Peter explains we are *sojourners and exiles*, or “pilgrims,” in this world (2:11b). We are aliens here on divine work visas as we work for the Lord. To do what God wants during our temporary residence in this world, Peter writes: *abstain from the passions* (sinful desires) *of the flesh* (2:11c). We are to *abstain* from anything that would feed our sinful passions, which includes what we read, watch, with whom we associate, etc. How does Galatians 5:24 express this kind of lifestyle?

We have *crucified* our *flesh* with its sinful *passions* in the sense we are no longer slaves to them (Rom. 6:6–7). However, our sinful desires still *wage war against* our *soul* (2:11d). The word translated *soul* (PSYCHĒ, soo-kay’) is the word from which we get our words “psyche” and “psychology.” It refers to the mind, will, and emotions. Sin originates in the mind because every sin begins with a thought that produces a desire (Jas. 1:14). Then, what does James 1:15a declare is the result?

The Evil One knows the truth of the old saying: “Sin will take you farther than you want to go, keep you longer than you want to stay, and cost you more than you want to pay.”

Because the world is watching, we must keep our *conduct among the Gentiles honorable* (2:12a). Then, when they *speak against* us as *evildoers*, they will be proven wrong in light of our *good deeds*, or exemplary conduct (2:12b). We are to have such good reputations that no one would believe slanderous gossip about us. Because we have impeccable reputations and lifestyles, some will see our *good deeds* and *glorify God on the day of visitation* (2:12c). Because of our *good deeds*, some unbelievers will be saved and *glorify God* for putting us into their lives. *The day of visitation* probably refers to the *day* when God visits the unbeliever with salvation. Jesus said we are to let our lights shine before other people so they may see our *good works* (Mt 5:16b). Why, according to Matthew 5:16c?

To influence people for Christ, **live differently** and ...

#### Live submissively (2:13–20)

Peter makes clear our responsibilities to government: *Be subject for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme,<sup>14</sup> or to governors* (2:13–14a). We are to obey the law and show respect for those in authority. Only when the law violates the teaching of Scripture are we to be defiant (Acts 5:29b).



God established government *to punish those who do evil* (2:14b). Government is divinely appointed to maintain law and order. *To praise those who do good* probably refers to *good*, or fair, treatment (2:14c; Rom. 13:3).

Peter continues, *For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people* (2:15). By obeying the law, we are doing *good* and silencing those who would make false accusations.

We are to *live as people who are free*, not using our *freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God* (2:16). We are not to use our *freedom* in Christ as a *cover up*, or “cloke,” to justify *evil*. Jesus was asked about paying taxes to the corrupt Roman government, which financed the Roman occupation of Israel. How does He respond in Luke 20:25b?

Living submissively also requires we *honor* everyone (2:17a). The word *honor* means respect or value. It doesn’t matter whether he or she is a garbage collector or a CEO; we are to treat everyone as a valuable person.

We are also to *love the brotherhood*—our brothers and sisters in Christ (2:17b). Some so-called Christians say, “I love the Lord; I just don’t care for the church.” That’s like saying, “I love swimming, but I don’t care for water.” Or, “I love playing football, but I don’t want to be on a team.”

Jesus loved the church and gave his life for her (Eph. 5:25). His true followers will love her, too. We are also to *fear God*, which refers to awe and reverence that lead to obedience (2:17c). One way we do this is by obeying what commandment in Exodus 20:7a?

Peter adds: *Honor the emperor* (2:17d). He probably repeats this command (2:13b) because his original readers found it very difficult to *honor* the notoriously cruel and wicked Roman emperor, Nero. He was the emperor who accused Christians of starting the fire that destroyed Rome in A. D. 64 and began the horrible persecution of Christians. We may not be able to *honor* the person but we are to *honor* the position.

*Servants*, or employees, are to *be subject to their masters*, or bosses, *with all respect* (2:18). The commands given to *servants*, or slaves, apply to employees today. Employees are to show respect, *not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust* bosses. The word translated *unjust*, or “froward” (SKOLIOS, skol-ee-os’), is the word from which the medical profession gets the word “scoliosis” (of the spine), which means “curved” or “crooked.” Peter’s command refers to bosses who are crooked or unfair. Christians are to treat not only *good and gentle* bosses, but even unfair bosses, with *respect*.

Now, Peter tells us the motive for being submissive: *For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly* (2:19). God is especially pleased when we do what is right when being treated unfairly. However, what does Peter write in verse 20a?

In Peter’s day, a servant could legally be *beaten*. Such things are not permitted in our culture, but employees can be unjustly punished by being demoted or fired. However, if the punishment is for our *sin* (stealing, lying, laziness, shoddy work, etc.), there is no favor *in the sight of God* (2:20a–b).



*But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God (2:20c–d).* We are to seek justice and fairness in the workplace, but we are to do so respectfully through the proper channels, not through gossip, riots, or violence. When it comes to prejudice or injustice, we need to obey what command in Psalm 82:3?

If we are righteous people, we will always champion what is right and just.

To influence people for Christ, **live differently**, **submissively**, and ...

## **Live obediently (2:21–25)**

God not only commands us to be a good influence; He also gives us an example to follow. Peter writes: *For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps (2:21).* The question is not “What are my rights?” Instead, we should ask, “WWJD” (What would Jesus do?), and then *follow in his steps*.

Peter paraphrases the prophecy in Isaiah 53:9 to help us determine what Jesus would do: *He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth (2:22).* Peter was one of Jesus’ constant companions for three years and knew Jesus’ character from personal experience. How did Jesus, our example, react to unfair treatment? Peter writes: *When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly (2:23).* The word *reviled* means to insult or attack someone verbally. When we are *reviled*, we are not to retaliate. Instead, we are to respect what words of the Lord in Hebrews 10:30b–c?

Peter explains that Christ died on the cross *that we might die to sin (2:24b)*. Being dead to sin means we don’t respond to stimuli that lead to sin. Peter also writes that Christ died so we can *live to righteousness*, or live an ethical, moral lifestyle (2:24c). *By his wounds we have been healed from the otherwise incurable spiritual disease of sin (2:24d).*

In the past, we were all *straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of our souls (2:25)*. Jesus is our *Shepherd*, who constantly leads, protects, and feeds us. He is also our *Overseer*, or “Bishop” (EPISKOPOS, e-pis’-ko-pos), which means “guardian.” Therefore, we have what promise of Jesus in John 10:28?

To influence people for Christ, you must **live differently**, **submissively**, and **obediently**. This is a very important part of your “journey into triumphant living.”

## JUNE

### Improving Your Marriage (1 Peter 3:1–7)

Peter continues his emphasis on living an exemplary life before an unbelieving world. He moves from the way we should live in relationship to human government (2:13–17) and the workplace (2:18–25) to marriage (3:1–7). When reading this passage, it might appear women need six times more instructions than men, since six of the seven verses are written to wives. However, Peter is primarily writing to believing wives whose husbands are unbelievers.

In Peter's day, a woman who became a Christian brought shame and humiliation to her unbelieving husband because it was considered an act of rebellion by his wife. God doesn't want the unbelieving world to think that only one spouse becoming a Christian will destroy a marriage. Instead, God wants the unbelieving world to know being a Christian will make any woman or man a better wife or husband. Someone has suggested the reason six verses relate to the wife and only one to the husband is most men have much shorter attention spans. Whatever God's reason, in this passage we find His commands for improving marriages, beginning with ...

#### God's Commands to Wives (3:1–6)

Peter begins with the word *likewise* (3:1a), which refers to the spirit of submission he has already advocated regarding government and the workplace. Therefore, what does he write to wives in 3:1a?

A Christian wife is to be submissive to her own husband, not to men in general. The obvious reason is to improve the marriage, not destroy it. As someone has said, "Anything without a head is dead and anything with two heads is a monster." To minimize conflict in marriage, there must be an appointed servant-leader like Christ, and God has appointed the husband.

Few words in the Bible have been perverted like the word "submission." The world looks at it as a synonym for "doormat," or mindless obedience. However, in the Bible, "submission" means one equal willingly and lovingly submitting to another equal, so Jesus Christ may be glorified. That's why we have what command in 1 Corinthians 10:31b?

The reason for believing wives to *be subject* to their husbands is so their husbands *may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives*. This will be the result of the wife's *respectful and pure conduct* (3:1b–2). A wife is not to try to win her husband through nagging, or saying things like "turn or burn," but is to show him respect and live a godly life before him.

As it is today, first-century women wanted to be attractive, which has always involved hairstyles, jewelry, and clothes. Therefore, Peter writes: *Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear* (3:3).

Both the NASB and NKN wisely insert the word “merely” before the word external, or “outward,” which is clearly implied. Peter is not commanding wives to refrain from dressing stylishly or attractively. This would contradict what fact about a godly wife in Proverbs 31:22b?

*Fine linen*, or “silk,” and *purple* refer to nice, stylish, and even expensive clothing. *Purple* was a very expensive, stylish dye made from shellfish. King Ahasuerus (uh-has-yoo-air'-us) wore *a robe of fine linen and purple* (Est. 8:15). The Bible teaches that women should dress attractively but not provocatively. Wives, remember two principles in this area: (1) If you don't look good, your husband won't look much. (2) If you don't look attractive to your husband, some other woman will; the devil will see to it.

Rather than relying on provocative appearance, Peter writes: *but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit* (3:4a–b). The word *gentle*, or “meek” (PRAUS, prah-ooce') means considerate of others and not pushy or overly assertive. A godly wife is also to have a *quiet spirit*—not causing quarrels or divisions. From all this we find that a woman's beauty shouldn't depend on her outward appearance but should come from her personality, attitudes, and holy life. What does Peter write about such attributes in the last phrase of 3:4?

Peter reminds his readers: *For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their own husbands* (3:5). Then, he writes: *as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord* (3:6a). Before considering this verse, we need to remember the word Abraham uses to describe his wife Sarah in Genesis 12:11c. What is it?

Therefore, Sarah took care of her *appearance*. She also *obeyed Abraham*, which means she was submissive to him. In addition, she called him *lord* (KYRION, ky'-ree-on), which means “master” and was a general term of respect for someone in authority. However, Sarah's submission didn't make her a “doormat.” When she was childless in her old age, she convinced Abraham to sleep with Hagar, which resulted in the birth of Ishmael. Years later, she insisted Hagar and Ishmael be sent away. Abraham didn't want to do this, but he yielded to Sarah's request after God approved it (Gen. 21:10–12).

Peter uses Sarah as an example because she was considered the mother of God's people, as Abraham was the father. Therefore, Peter writes: *And you are her children* (3:6b). Christian wives are the spiritual *children*, or “daughters,” of Sarah. So, as she did, they are to show respect to their husbands. This includes never referring to them as “my old man” or “that mouse I married.”

Wives are the spiritual daughters of Sarah if they *do good and do not fear anything that is frightening* (3:6c). This could refer to the fear of the insults of so-called liberated women who despise the idea of a submissive wife. It could also refer to fearing what their unbelieving husbands may think of their Christian faith. Whatever might be frightening to us, we need to remember what fact in 2 Timothy 1:7?

**Improving your marriage** not only requires women obeying **God's commands to wives** but also men obeying ...

## God's Commands to Husbands (3:7)

The introduction of verse seven is critically important: *Likewise* (HOMOIŌS, ho-moy'-os) *husbands*. This means, in the same way, husbands are to be submissive and unselfish toward their wives, and not be tyrants. The verse that precedes Paul's discussion of the responsibilities of husbands and wives (Eph. 5:22–33) is Ephesians 5:21. Write it below:

Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Peter tells husbands: *live with your wives in an understanding way* (3:7b). This means men are to constantly work on *understanding* their wives. This requires listening to her and cultivating an *understanding* of her temperament, emotions, personality, gifts, and how she differs from him.

Husbands are to show *honor* to their wives (3:7c). The word translated *honor* (TIMĒ, tee'-may) means high value or dignity. So, husbands should value their wives' advice and opinions. Husbands, treat your wife like she is the most valuable thing in your life. That requires never forgetting what truth about wives found in Proverbs 31:10b?

Husbands are to honor their wives *as the weaker vessel* (3:7d). This doesn't mean women are inferior, because in many marriages the wife is intellectually and morally superior. The *weaker vessel* means she is physically *weaker* and emotionally more vulnerable.

Listen, men, and listen carefully: Emotionally, most men are like iron skillets and most women are like fine china, *weaker* vessels. Imagine rude, harsh words are a hammer. Think about what happens when that hammer hits an iron skillet. Now, imagine that same hammer of harsh words hitting a fine china cup. Like fine china, most women are emotionally more fragile than men; therefore, rude, harsh words can hurt them more.

Because God created her as the *weaker vessel* physically, a husband is never to use his superior physical strength to force himself on his wife sexually or any other way. He is never to bully his wife, which is a horrible sin God will judge. God demands that husbands protect, not hurt, their wives. Iron skillets, are you paying attention?

Peter reminds husbands that their wives *are heirs with you of the grace of life* (3:7e). This means although husbands are to be like Christ—spiritual servant-leaders—in the home, their wives are their spiritual equals. How does Galatians 3:28c–d express this spiritual truth?

Husbands are to continually cultivate *understanding* of their wives and show them honor, so their *prayers may not be hindered* (3:7). Not treating a wife as God commands is sin. Any husband who sins in regard to his wife and fails to confess and forsake that sin will not even have his prayers heard by the Lord (Psa. 66:18).

By and large, our modern culture rejects God's design for marriage. However, to improve your marriage, never forget what fact in Psalm 127:1a?

**Improving your marriage** requires women obey **God's commands to wives** and men obey **God's commands to husbands**.

# JULY

## Changing Your World (1 Peter 3:8–17)

We each have our own world that includes our family, the church we attend, our workplace, our community, etc. One reason God leaves us on this earth is to change our world. However, like Peter's original readers, we live in a world that is often hostile to the Christian faith. After giving instructions concerning submission to government, the workplace, and marriage, Peter moves to our extended spiritual family and beyond by sharing principles for changing our worlds. This requires the right attitude toward **three** groups of people.

### The Right Attitude Toward Saints (3:8)

Peter begins this section with the word *finally* because he is summing up his exhortation concerning submission. He then lists five building blocks for improving relationships in the church.

1. Peter writes: *all of you, have unity of mind*, or be “of one mind” (3:8b). This means we should be working together to achieve our common goal of winning the lost and developing the saved. This refers to unity and cooperation among diversity. We must realize God made us all different to complement, not irritate, each other. In vocal music, there are sopranos, altos, tenors, and basses. They are all different, but no music is more beautiful than well-done, four-part harmony as it creates one unified sound. What does Jesus pray in John 17:22?

2. We are to have *sympathy*, or “compassion,” for one another (3:8c). We should feel what others are feeling. This is often just willingly, sympathetically, and compassionately listening to someone's hurts, fears, or frustrations. This is one way to obey what command in Galatians 6:2?

3. We are to have an attitude of brotherly *love*. The Greek word translated *love* (PHILADELPHOI, fil-ad'-el-foo) is where we get our word “Philadelphia” (3:8d). It refers to the special *love* that binds or unites Christians together.

4. We are to have *a tender heart* (3:8e). This means we don't coldly or harshly apply the Bible. We desire to alleviate the needs of others from a heart touched and moved by their hurts or sins. Having *a tender heart* means we are never anxious to cast stones, but to *restore* (Gal. 6:1).

5. We are to have *a humble mind*, or be “courteous,” (3:8f). We must have realistic estimates of ourselves and not think we are better than anyone else. We are not to be modern-day Pharisees. Instead, we are to obey what command in Philippians 2:3?

To change your world, have **the right attitude toward saints** and ...

### The Right Attitude Toward Sinners (3:9–14)

Peter writes: *Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called* (3:9a–c). Warren Wiersbe writes: “As Christians we can live on one of three levels. We can return evil for good, which is the satanic level. We can return good for good and *evil for evil*, which is the human level. Or, we can return good for evil, which is the divine level” (*Be Hopeful*, p. 80). If we live on the “divine level,” we will bless those who mistreat or insult us. The word translated *bless* (EULOGEŌ, yoo-log-eh'-oh) is the word from which we get our word “eulogy.” It means to speak well of or to praise. How does Jesus use this word in Luke 6:28?

If we do this, we will *obtain a blessing* (3:9d). In verses 10–12, Peter quotes from Psalm 34:12–16, explaining the specific blessings promised to those who obey verse nine. He writes: *For “Whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit”* (3:10). There is a saying: “**The best way to get even is to forgive.**” That’s part of the *blessing*. On the other hand, when we refuse to forgive, we will become bitter, resentful, jealous people who are miserable and unable to *love life*.

Peter continues his quote: “*let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it.*”<sup>12</sup> *For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil*” (3:11–12). To receive the Lord’s *blessing*, we must strive for *peace* with everyone (Rom. 12:18).

Instead of seeking revenge, we should try to break the cycle of returning *evil for evil*. Therefore, Peter writes: *Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good?* (3:13). As we return *good* for being mistreated or hurt, most people will respond in kind. Just as it is human nature to return *evil for evil*, people also usually return *good for good*. However, there is more involved than human nature. There is what promise in Proverbs 16:7?

However, some satanically motivated people will inevitably return evil for good; therefore, Peter writes: *But even if you should suffer for righteousness’ sake, you will be blessed* (3:14a). The word translated *blessed*, or “happy” (MAKARIOIS, ma-kar'-ee-os), means “divine delight.” This joy that comes from enduring trials will far exceed the pain and even be experienced in heaven for eternity. So, we should *have no fear of them, nor be troubled* (3:14b).

To change your world, have **the right attitude toward saints and sinners**, but also ...

## **The Right Attitude Toward Seekers (3:15–17)**

As Christians, one of the most frightening, intimidating things we are called on to do is share our faith. To prepare us, Peter writes that in our *hearts* we are to *honor Christ the Lord as holy* (3:15a). We are to put Jesus Christ on the throne of our hearts, which means we make Him *Lord*. Then, we will be like the psalmist when he writes that *the LORD* is his *light and salvation* (Psa. 27:1a). What does he write in the rest of that verse?

When Jesus is on the throne of your heart, there is nothing to fear. Therefore, we are to *always be prepared to make a defense* (3:15b). The word translated *defense*, or “answer” (APOLOGIA, apo-log-ee'-ah), is the word from which we get our word “apologetics.” It denotes a formal defense, or proof, of one’s faith. Here it refers to the ability to answer those who ask about our faith. We are *always* to be *prepared* to explain to anyone who asks us the reason for the hope we have in Christ (3:15b–c). When in His grace God begins to work in a person’s heart, that person becomes a seeker



who will want to know about *the hope* we have in Christ. When Jesus is the Lord of our lives, God will use us to draw people to Himself. Then, they will want to ask questions about our faith.

We are to answer *with gentleness and respect* (3:15d). We shouldn't act holier-than-thou, obnoxiously, or condescendingly. We must be witnesses, not prosecuting attorneys. The most convincing, powerful way to answer someone about the *reason for the hope that is in you* is sharing your personal testimony. People can argue with your doctrinal beliefs, the Bible, etc., but they can't argue with what God has done in your life. After Jesus heals the demon-possessed man, what does He tell him (Mark 5:19b–c)?

When someone asks about the *reason for the hope that is in you*, tell them what difference the Lord has made in your life and how He has *had mercy on you*. Your testimony should include at least four things: 1) What my life and attitudes were like before receiving Christ; 2) How I realized I needed Christ; 3) How I became a Christian; and 4) What difference knowing Jesus as Lord and Savior has made in my life. These should be brief enough so you can share your testimony in about three minutes. If you have never done it, this week write out your personal testimony and then condense it until you can share it in three to four minutes.

**Changing your world** requires *having a good conscience* (3:16a), or living a life of integrity. We should have nothing to hide—no secret sins, impure motives, or deceitfulness. In his defense before Felix, Paul declares what should be true of all believers. What does he say in Acts 24:16?

Live a life of integrity, *so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame* (3:16b–c). Being *slandered*, or being called “evildoers,” refers to malicious talk. The word *revile*, or “falsely accuse,” means “to insult,” or attack verbally. If we live lives of integrity, these things will be obviously false and put our accusers to *shame*.

If *God's will* allows us to be misunderstood and *to suffer for doing good*, that is better than *to suffer for doing evil* (3:17). Nobody wants to *suffer*. But if you do *suffer*, make sure it is *for doing good*, not *doing evil*. When suffering *for doing good*, remember the promise found in Galatians 6:9. Write it below:

**Changing your world** requires **the right attitude toward saints, sinners, and seekers**. This is a big part of a “journey into triumphant living.”



## AUGUST

### Being Triumphant in Suffering (1 Peter 3:18–22)

All of us must endure some kind of suffering in this life. It may be physical, emotional, relational, or whatever, but we will all face times of suffering. Therefore, Peter now begins to explain how we should live in a world that isn't fair. To be **triumphant in suffering**, remember **three** things. First ...

#### Christ's Triumphant Suffering (3:18)

Peter has just written that we may *suffer for doing good* (3:17). Who should come to our minds as the Ultimate Example of suffering *for doing good*? Jesus Christ! God always has a reason for allowing our suffering, even though we may not know what it is until we get to heaven. There are at least two reasons for Christ's suffering.

First, *For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous* (3:18a). The phrase *once for sins* emphasizes the completeness of Christ's sacrifice. He has done all that is needed for us to receive forgiveness of all our sins. He suffered and died on the cross *that he might bring us to God* (3:18b). The word translated *he might bring* (PROSAGAGĒ, pros-ag'-uh-gay) means to "gain an audience." Because of Jesus' death, believers can "gain an audience," or *draw near*, to God's *throne of grace* with *confidence* (Heb. 4:16a). What will we receive there (4:16b)?

Jesus *suffered* so He *might bring us to God*. Yet, there is a second reason. He was *put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit* (3:18c). Jesus being *made alive in the spirit* probably means His *spirit* was freed from His suffering body. That's why as our Lord was dying on the cross, what did He say to the thief who was dying on another cross (Luke 23:43b–c)?

Though Jesus' body died, He remained alive *in the spirit*. Only His body died on that cross.

To be triumphant in suffering, remember **Christ's triumphant suffering** and ...

#### Christ's Triumphant Sermon (3:19–21)

This passage is one of the most difficult in the New Testament to interpret. Peter writes: *he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison* (3:19). The word translated *spirits* (plural) is used only one time to refer to humans' *spirits* (Heb. 12:23) but many times to refer to evil, or "unclean," spirits (Mt 10:1; Mk 1:27, etc). Therefore, the word *spirits* probably refers to fallen angels or demons. Peter writes that these *spirits* are *in prison*. This place is briefly described in two verses in the New Testament. In his second epistle, Peter writes that God did not spare the angels who sinned (2 Pet. 2:4a). Therefore, what did He do, according to 2 Peter 2:4b?

The word translated *hell* (TARTAROŌ, tar-tar-ah'-oh) is the subterranean, bottomless pit called the "abyss" in Greek mythology. In the real abyss, as described in the Bible, God keeps fallen angels *in eternal chains under gloomy darkness until the judgment of the great day* (Jude 6). This abyss refers to the deepest part of hell.

These *spirits* are identified as those who *formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared* (3:20a–b). Fallen angels are somehow connected with the period before the Flood, perhaps because of their evil influence. For example, what does Genesis 6:5b tell us about the *wickedness of man* on earth?

There are many theories as to how *the spirits in prison* connect with the *days of Noah*. It takes humility and honesty on the part of any scholar or pastor to say, “I don’t know for sure what this means; I can only speculate.” One thing is for sure: these *spirits* contributed to the wickedness that preceded the Flood. Apparently, between Christ’s crucifixion and resurrection, He went to the spiritual *prison* where God keeps these *spirits* and *proclaimed*, or *preached* about, His victory over sin and death.

In Noah’s day, a *few, that is, eight persons were brought safely through water* (3:20c). Peter calls Noah a *herald*, or preacher, of *righteousness* (2 Pet. 2:5). During the 120 years it took for Noah to build the ark, he was also preaching God’s message with no response. Therefore, only he, Mrs. Noah, Shem, Ham, Japheth, and their wives were *saved*—*eight* in all.

Noah and his family were not *saved* BY water. They were *saved* FROM water by the ark, which is a type, or symbol, of Christ. The phrase “saved by water” (KJV) is better understood “saved through water.” It was the ark God told Noah to build that *saved* him and his family, not the water. No ark, no salvation.

Just as the Flood wiped out the sinful world of Noah’s day, Peter writes: *Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you* (3:21a). Some take this to mean that being baptized, whether as an adult or even as an infant, saves you. However, such an interpretation would contradict the truth that *if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead*, there is a certain result without any additional action on your part (Rom. 10:9a). What is that result (10:9b)?

To make sure there is no confusion as to exactly how we are *saved*, Paul also writes, *For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved* (Rom. 10:10). The tenth chapter of Romans is the most detailed and clearest presentation of how to be *saved* in the entire New Testament. The Bible makes it clear our salvation is not based on what we do but on what Jesus did for us on the cross. It is based on *grace* and *faith*. It is not because of *works* or ordinances such as baptism (Eph. 2:8–9; Tit. 3:5).

Baptism doesn’t save anyone, but belief in what it pictures does. It is an outer symbol of an inner spiritual truth. Baptism represents a complete break with the past, just as the Flood wiped out the old sinful world. Peter puts it like this: *not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience* (3:21b). The word translated *appeal*, or “answer” (EPERŌTĒMA, ep-air-oh'-tay-mah), refers to a response.

When the Holy Spirit convicts of sin, He also calls for a response. That response is pictured in water baptism. Everyone who is baptized should understand that being baptized is responding to God with a *good conscience* to live righteously for Him in a sinful world. Every believer is to *draw near* to God with a *true*, or sincere, *heart* full of faith (Heb. 10:22a). How does Hebrews 10:22b describe baptism?

The external cleansing of baptism symbolizes the inner cleansing of sin, made possible only by the death of Christ. It is not baptism that saves us; it is what baptism symbolizes—the death and *resurrection of Jesus Christ* (3:21b). Belief in Christ’s *resurrection* is essential to salvation (Rom. 10:9). Baptism also symbolizes dying to our old sinful life and being raised to live a new life (Rom. 6:4).

Baptism is symbolic, like a wedding ring. My wedding ring reveals I love and have dedicated myself to my wife. It doesn’t make me married; it shows the world I am married. The same is true with baptism. Baptism doesn’t save us; the shedding of blood by Christ on the cross does. However, baptism does show the world we belong to Christ.

Though baptism doesn’t save us, we must be careful not to minimize its importance. Saving faith is always accompanied by a strong desire to follow the Lord in baptism. Being baptized is the clear command of Scripture (Mt 28:19). If a person is truly saved, he or she will eagerly ask the same question the Ethiopian eunuch asked Philip when they came to some water. What did he ask (Acts 8:36d)?

Claiming to be a Christian, and yet having no desire to be baptized raises serious questions about the genuineness of a person’s conversion. True believers have an urgent desire to be obedient and be baptized.

To be triumphant in suffering, remember **Christ’s triumphant suffering, Christ’s triumphant sermon**, and ...

### **Christ’s Triumphant Seat (3:22)**

Forty days after His resurrection, Christ ascended to heaven and sat down *at the right hand of God* (3:22a–b). Peter and the other disciples were eyewitnesses to the ascension (Mk 16:19). The *right hand* is always the place of honor. That’s why a woman should always be ushered with the right arm of her escort. In His triumphant seat, Christ is interceding for us (Rom. 8:34).

Because of His triumphant seat, *angels, authorities, and powers have been subjected to him* (3:22c). All spiritual beings in the universe are in submission to Christ, including Satan and all his cronies. That’s why 1 John 4:4b makes what declaration?

When Jesus returns, every knee—living and dead—will bow before Him (Philip. 2:10). Therefore, neither Peter’s original readers, nor we today, need to fear anyone or anything.

To be triumphant in suffering, remember **Christ’s triumphant suffering, Christ’s triumphant sermon**, and **Christ’s triumphant seat**.

# SEPTEMBER

## Living in the Future Tense (1 Peter 4:1–6)

Living the Christian life in this sinful world is often tough. Temptations bombard us through friends and media, as well as our own sinful desires. There is also the problem of being misunderstood by unbelievers who often respond with ridicule and persecution. The secret to living for God in this present world is **living in the future tense**, which has at least **four** requirements.

### The Right Attitude (4:1)

Peter has just written about Christ's suffering in the previous passage. Now, he calls us to follow His example by writing, *since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves ...* (4:1a). The word translated *arm* is a military term that refers to arming with weapons. What is our best weapon in this world? It is *the same way of thinking* as Christ (4:1b). How does Paul express this in Philippians 2:5?

When we are mistreated, the most powerful weapon we have is the *mind*, or attitude, of Christ. Wrong attitudes lead to wrong reactions, which result in defeat and disgrace. However, the right attitude, or *way of thinking*, during tough times leads to triumphant living.

One reason Christians suffer is *for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin* (4:1c). This doesn't mean that suffering cleanses us from sin. Only Christ's blood can do that. But it does mean that obeying God becomes the most important thing in our lives, even if it results in suffering. **Living in the future tense** requires **the right attitude** and ...

### The Right Ambition (4:2)

This means we *live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God* (4:2). The phrase *time in the flesh* refers to our lifetime on earth. Our time here is limited by God. How does Job 14:5 express this fact?

Our time on earth is limited; therefore, we shouldn't live *for human passions but for the will of God* (4:2b). Before coming to Christ, we lived to fulfill human *passions*, but now our greatest ambition should be to fulfill *the will of God* for our lives. We know God's general, or moral, will for all Christians is to refrain from sin. However, how can we find God's specific will for our lives? In Romans 12:2a–b, Paul writes that we are not to conform *to this world, but be transformed* by renewing our minds. Then, what does he write in the rest of that verse?

The first step in finding God's will is refusing to conform *to this world*. As we refuse to conform, God will reveal more and more of His will for our lives, one step at a time. As someone has said, "The way to see far ahead in the will of God is to go as far ahead as you can see." That is part of what it means to live in the future tense, which begins with the **right attitude, ambition**, and ...

### The Right Actions (4:3–4)

Now, Peter urges his readers not to live as they did in the *past*, doing things contrary to God's will. He writes: *For the time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do* (4:3a). Then, in the rest of verse three he lists six common sins of his day.

*Sensuality*, or “lasciviousness,” translates a word (ASELGEIA, uh-sel'-gay-uh) that literally means “debauchery,” or absence of restraint in sexual sins resulting in shameful conduct. This is prevalent today in some so-called Christian universities. Just recently a “Christian” university in Texas set aside a block of dorm rooms for gays, lesbians, and bisexuals. Just because a university or church has “Christian” in its name doesn't mean it is Christian in biblical terms. How does Ephesians 4:19 explain such things?

Peter continues his list in verse three with *passions*, or “lusts,” referring to intense, uncontrolled sexual desire. *Drunkenness* needs no explanation. *Orgies*, or “revellings” (KŌMOS, koh'mos), refers to loud, wild parties that result in unrestrained sex. *Drinking parties*, or “banqueting,” refers to “drinking bouts” where people have a party simply to drink. The list ends with *lawless idolatry*, or “abominable idolatries,” which is a general way of summing up the list. All the sins listed had become idols in the lives of first-century Gentiles.

Many people today think such behavior is being liberated and part of a new generation. However, it is all just part of an old, unenlightened day of slavery to sin.

Peter continues: *With respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery* (4:4a). When we become Christians, our attitudes, ambitions, and actions change. As a result, we have few things, if any, in common with our pre-Christian friends. As with Peter's original readers, when we discontinue our old lifestyles, our unsaved relatives, friends, and associates don't understand the radical changes in our lives. Therefore, they *malign*, or “speak evil,” which means they slander us (4:4b). However, we shouldn't get angry with them because they truly cannot understand us. The reason is *the god of this world, Satan, has blinded the minds* of those who don't believe (2 Cor. 4:4a). What is the result (2 Corinthians 4:4b–c)?

So, don't get resentful toward them; instead, pray God will open their eyes so they will see *the light of the gospel*. However, for our prayers to be effective, we must have **the right attitude, ambition, actions**, and ...

## **The Right Anticipation (4:5–6)**

When people misunderstand and mistreat us, we can leave the hurt with the Lord because we anticipate His justice. Immoral people who slander believers will *give account to him who is ready to judge* (4:5a). The word translated *account* is a bookkeeping term. It refers to a detailed record of a person's life. It is so detailed, what does Jesus say in Matthew 12:36?

The word *account* also refers to a debt *account* that sinful people are amassing toward God. No one will escape the coming judgment because it will include *the living and the dead* (4:5b). However, we shouldn't take pleasure in the judgment of the unsaved. Instead, it should break our hearts that anyone we know will have to face God and give an *account* of a sinful life without Christ.

We should also remember the Lord takes it personally when His followers are persecuted. One day on the Damascus Road, Jesus confronts Saul (later Paul), the vicious persecutor of the early church. When a bright light flashes around Saul, he falls to the ground (Acts 9:1–4a). He then hears a voice, who is Jesus from heaven. What does He say (9:4b)?

This statement makes it clear that persecuting Christians is the same as persecuting Christ Himself.

Because everyone must give an *account* to God, Peter writes: *For this is why the gospel was preached even to those who are dead, that though judged in the flesh the way people are, they might live in the spirit the way God does* (4:6). Does this mean people will have another chance to be saved after they die? Absolutely not! Why, according to Hebrews 9:27?

*The gospel was preached even to the dead* while they were alive; they were saved and are now *dead*, probably martyred prior to Peter's writing. These were apparently *judged in the flesh and put to death by men but live in the spirit the way God does*. Rather than facing judgment for their sins, those who have heard and believed the Gospel have an altogether different future to anticipate. In view of the judgment, the martyred dead are far better off than unbelievers. For us as Christians, death doesn't lead to judgment but a blessed, eternal home. How does 2 Corinthians 5:8b express this fact?

For believers, the last earthly result of sin is physical death. Yet, Christ has taken the *sting* out of death. For believers, death is not the end of life but the enormous expansion of life in heaven (1 Cor. 15:50–58). For unbelievers, death still has its eternal *sting*. It results in judgment and separation from God for all eternity in hell.

When we die, we will be forever glad we lived in the future tense with **the right attitude, ambition, actions, and anticipation**.



# OCTOBER

## Preparing for the End (1 Peter 4:7–11)

In the beginning, God created everything. As surely as God started it all, He will end it all. God is the Creator and Sustainer of all things, but He is also the Terminator of all things. Peter writes: *The end of all things is at hand* (4:7a). History is rapidly heading toward *the end*. No one—not the *angels* or even *the Son*—just *the Father*, knows the exact date (Mk 13:32). However, we are to live expecting Christ to return at any time. The last words of Jesus are recorded in the next to last verse in the Bible. What does our Lord say in Revelation 22:20b?

Every day we should live with the anticipation of the coming of our Lord. Our Lord could come at any time; therefore, Peter gives us **four** ways to prepare for *the end* ...

### Think clearly and pray biblically (4:7b–c)

The nearness of *the end* should motivate us to be *self-controlled and sober-minded* (4:7b). This means being disciplined and clear-headed. We shouldn't make emotional decisions based on our uncontrolled passions. This is *for the sake of our prayers* (4:7c). We can't pray biblically if we don't think clearly.

Two of the most powerful weapons God has given us in the world are the Bible and prayer. However, one is not of much use without the other. The Bible tells us how to pray. Our prayers are powerful only if biblically based. Therefore, what does 1 John 5:14 declare?

Our prayers are not to be based on emotion, passion, or selfishness. We must think clearly so we can pray biblically. This is often hard to do in panic situations, as with Peter's original readers who were facing severe persecution and martyrdom.

Peter and John are wonderful examples of how to think clearly and pray biblically. After they heal the lame man at the temple gate, the Sanhedrin wants to stop their powerful ministry. Therefore, they order them *not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus* and threaten them with punishment if they did (Acts 4:18–21). After they are released, they go to their fellow believers and report what happened. Then, they lift their voices in prayer. How do they begin their prayer (Acts 4:24b)?

The word translated *Sovereign*, or “Lord” (DESPOTA, des-pot'-uh), is the word from which we get our word “despot.” It means “master” or “absolute ruler.” When we think clearly as we pray biblically, we are keenly aware we are speaking to the Sovereign Master of the universe, who simply spoke and by the power of His awesome voice *made the heaven and earth* (Acts 4:24c)

In panic and pressure situations, remember God has absolute power. To prepare for the end, **think clearly and pray biblically**, and ...



## Love earnestly (4:8)

Peter puts it like this: *Above all, keep loving one another earnestly* (4:8a). This means love must have first priority. The first component of the fruit of the Spirit is love (Gal. 5:22). It is listed first because it is the foundation of all the other components, or virtues. We are to love *earnestly*, or with “fervent” love. The word translated *earnestly*, or “fervent” (EKTENĒS, ek-ten-ace’), means without ceasing. It refers to love that doesn’t stop loving. When we love earnestly, we always willingly forgive rather than taking offense and harboring hurt. That’s why Peter writes: *love covers a multitude of sins* (4:8b).

When we love earnestly, we will not gossip and tell all our friends how someone has hurt us in an attempt to make the offender look bad. Also, when we love earnestly, we will not broadcast the sins of others. Instead, we will lovingly and discreetly obey what command in Galatians 6:1a–b?

However, we must watch ourselves, so we will not be *tempted* to act holier-than-thou or fall into the same sin (Gal. 6:1c). To prepare for the end, **think clearly and pray biblically, love earnestly, and ...**

## Show hospitality cheerfully (4:9)

Peter puts it like this: *Show hospitality to one another without grumbling* (4:9). The word translated *hospitality* means lover of strangers, or fond of guests. There is no place where this command needs to be heeded more than in a local church. Every church thinks it is friendly because many people don’t understand the word *hospitality* in the Bible. Every Sunday at church, most people greet the same people, talk to the same people, and sit with the same people. That’s not being friendly; that’s being cliquish.

*Hospitality* means every Sunday intentionally greeting strangers—people you don’t know—talking to them and even sitting with them. Nothing will encourage visitors to return to a church like biblical *hospitality*. Showing *hospitality* cheerfully is obeying what command in 2 Corinthians 13:12?

In our culture that means everyone should be greeted with kind words and a warm handshake or holy hug. **Everyone**, not just friends and relatives!

*Hospitality* is also a great way to use our homes as places of ministry. *Hospitality* is not the same as entertaining. When we entertain, the focus is on the place, not the people. We spend our time and efforts on having a spotless house and great food.

However, *hospitality* focuses on people, so the cleanliness of the home and the food are not the primary concern. *Hospitality* sometimes takes place eating old crackers and cheese in a messy house, because there is a climate of love, acceptance, and a compassionate ear. Don’t wait until your house is clean enough and you have a well-prepared meal to show *hospitality*!

This week, invite someone into your home—not to entertain them but to show *hospitality*. A spontaneous invitation to a messy house is a million times better than an invitation perpetually delayed. When it comes to our homes, we especially need to remember what truth about God in the last phrase of 1 Timothy 6:17?

Few things can help us *enjoy* our homes and feel God's pleasure like using them to *show hospitality*. All *hospitality* should be done *without grumbling*, or "*grudging*." Therefore, it must be done with kindness and cheerfulness.

To prepare for the end, **think clearly and pray biblically, love earnestly, show hospitality cheerfully**, and ...

### **Minister unselfishly (4:10–11)**

God has equipped every believer to minister. Therefore, Peter writes: *As each has received a gift* (4:10a). The word translated *gift* (CHARISMA, kar'-is-mah) refers to a spiritual endowment or enablement. Every believer has at least one spiritual *gift*. How does 1 Corinthians 7:7b verify this?

Many spiritual gifts are mentioned in the New Testament (Rom. 12:6–8; 1 Cor. 12:28–30; Eph. 4:11–12). These are categories of gifts rather than exhaustive lists. A spiritual *gift* is an ability empowered by the Holy Spirit for ministering to others. Whatever *gift* we have, we are to use it *to serve one another* (4:10b). Our gifts must never be used for selfish reasons.

We are to use our spiritual gifts *as good stewards* (4:10c). A steward has no wealth of his own but serves as a manager, distributing his master's wealth according to his master's will. Spiritual gifts are also called *manifestations of the Spirit* (1 Cor. 14:12). What does 1 Corinthians 12:7b reveal is the purpose of all spiritual gifts?

Spiritual gifts are given to strengthen and build up the church, not for personal edification or glory. Spiritual gifts are given according to *God's varied grace* (4:10d). The word *varied*, or "manifold," means "various forms." Just as every fingerprint is unique, so are spiritual gifts when mixed with personalities, backgrounds, and passions. This means **you** are the only one who can do exactly what God wants **you** to do.

There are two basic kinds of spiritual gifts: speaking and serving. Therefore, Peter writes: *Whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God* (4:11a). Everything a Bible teacher or preacher says must be based on the *oracles of God*, the Bible, not human opinions. Also, *whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies* (4:11b). People with serving gifts minister primarily by what they do, rather than by what they say. They also serve with supernatural energy, or *strength*. According to 1 Peter 4:11c, what is the ultimate purpose for all spiritual gifts?

This is because *to him belong glory and dominion forever and ever* (4:11d). When you use your spiritual gift for the glory of God, others will see the love of Jesus in you and will glorify Him for the loving help or ministry they receive from you.

To prepare for the end, **think clearly and pray biblically, love earnestly, show hospitality cheerfully**, and **minister unselfishly**.

# NOVEMBER

## Rejoicing in Suffering (1 Peter 4:12–19)

In our culture, false teachers often pervert and promote the Gospel as a means of prosperity and health. However, in this passage Peter reminds us that sometimes suffering is a part of God's will for our lives. He is encouraging his original readers and us so we will not be surprised by suffering and will persevere with the proper attitude. **Rejoicing in suffering** requires **three** attitudes.

### Anticipate suffering (4:12)

Peter writes: *Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you* (4:12). The word *fiery* refers to a furnace in which gold and silver are melted down so the impurities will come to the surface for removal. This reminds us God uses suffering as part of His spiritual refining process. Job knew this; therefore, what does he say in Job 23:10?

Instead of thinking *the fiery trial* is *strange*, we should be surprised if suffering doesn't come. Bashing evangelical Christians has become a popular sport in America. However, we shouldn't be surprised when people misrepresent what we believe or what we say. This is because of what warning in 2 Timothy 3:12?

As someone has said, "Christians are like teabags. You can't tell what's inside them until they get in some hot water." To rejoice in suffering, **anticipate suffering** and ...

### Celebrate suffering (4:13–14)

Peter continues: *But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings* (4:13a). Peter doesn't tell us to "enjoy" our suffering; he says *rejoice* in it. Enjoying means we take pleasure from something. Rejoicing means we choose not to let suffering steal the inner joy of knowing God has a purpose for allowing it. When we suffer for living by God's Word, we *share Christ's sufferings*. The word translated *share*, or "are partakers" (KOINŌNEŌ, coin-oh-neh'-oh), means "fellowship" or "partners." When we suffer for obeying God's Word, we deepen our fellowship with the Lord Jesus.

Going through suffering with someone bonds you to that person. Just ask any war veteran. Many veterans have reunions forty and fifty years after the war in which they fought together. When we suffer for standing for God's Word, we get closer to Jesus. That should cause us to *rejoice*.

Peter continues: *that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed* (4:13b). Our present suffering for Christ's sake is similar to a pregnant woman anticipating her baby while having birth pains. After she gives birth, her suffering is replaced with the joy of a new baby. In the same way, the future hope of *his glory* should cause us to *rejoice* in our present suffering. How does Romans 8:17c remind us of this?

We can also celebrate because suffering for Christ brings supernatural strength. Peter puts it like this: *If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you* (4:14). The word *insulted* means verbally abused or slandered. Not only can we rejoice when Christ returns, but also because His glorious Spirit *rests upon* us, giving us power, love, and self-control (2 Tim. 1:7).

To rejoice in suffering, **anticipate** and **celebrate suffering**, but also ...

### Evaluate suffering (4:15–19)

Not all suffering results in blessing (2:20). Therefore, Peter writes: *But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler* (4:15). This means we should evaluate ourselves to make sure our suffering is for Christ's sake, not our own sin. So, let's take a little test to make sure we are not suffering for the wrong reason.

Most of us would quickly say, "I'm not *a murderer*." But wait a minute. Jesus said: "*You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment'*" (Mt 5:21). Then, what does our Lord Jesus say in Matthew 5:22a?

This means being angry with someone is committing murder in our hearts. Murder is the outward act of what is in a person's heart.

Or, have you ever suffered for being a *thief*? For example, an employee may be demoted or fired for habitually coming in late, leaving early, taking too long at breaks, or doing shoddy work. That is not suffering for Christ! That is suffering for being a *thief* because not giving a day's work for a day's pay is stealing.

An *evildoer* refers to someone who commits any kind of crime. The word translated *meddler* implies being "an agitator" who disrupts peace and harmony in a family, business, church, or community. It is basically being a troublemaker by way of gossip, which the Bible calls being a *whisperer*. What does Proverbs 16:28 say about such a person?

We should always **evaluate** our suffering to see if we have done anything to warrant it. On the other hand, Peter writes: *Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed* (4:16a–b). We should be *ashamed* if we suffer for doing wrong, but we should *not be ashamed* when we suffer for living up to the name *Christian*.

How many times does the name *Christian* occur in the Bible? In this passage and only two other times (Acts 11:26; 26:28). The early believers were called *disciples*, *brethren*, and five times in the book of Acts followers of the *Way* (9:2; 19:9, 23; 24:14, 22). Originally, the name *Christian* was an insult. It meant you were a follower of an uneducated, Jewish carpenter who had been crucified.

However, Peter tells us to *glorify God in that name* (4:16c). This means we should bear the name *Christian* as a badge of honor because it means we are proud to be followers of Christ. What does Jesus say about those who are *ashamed* of Him and His words (Mark 8:38b)?

Do you want Jesus to *be ashamed* of you? Then never *be ashamed* to tell anyone you are *Christian*. Say it proudly!

Our sufferings as Christians are nothing compared to the sufferings unbelievers will experience. Peter puts it like this: *For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?* (4:17). Peter is talking about the time of the two kinds of suffering. First is the suffering of *the household of God* or of Christians. Though God disciplines and refines us now through suffering, the future *judgment* on unbelievers will be infinitely worse. Jesus said at the end of the age the angels will come to *separate the evil from the righteous* (Mt 13:49). Then, what does Jesus say the angels will do with unbelievers (13:50)?

We can endure suffering with joy, knowing it is refining and preparing us for eternal glory. The alternative to living for Jesus is to later experience infinitely worse eternal suffering. This should cause us to do everything we can to reach our lost relatives, friends, neighbors, and associates for Christ. As someone has said, “I don’t know how people who claim to love Jesus can act like they care so little about those who don’t know Him.”

In verse eighteen, Peter quotes Proverbs 11:31: “*If the righteous is scarcely saved*. The word translated *scarcely* (MOLIS, mol’-is) means “with difficulty.” It refers to the difficulties and sufferings we experience as believers. That’s why Jesus tells us to count *the cost* (Lk 14:28).

If God allows believers to suffer and have difficulties in this life, *what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?*” (4:18b). In other words, how much more severely will God deal with those who reject Christ? In comparison, our present sufferings fade into oblivion. Peter sums it all up by writing: *Therefore let those who suffer according to God’s will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good* (4:19).

When we *suffer according to God’s will*, we can rejoice that our suffering has a divine purpose and goal, as well as a glorious end. The word translated *entrust*, or “commit,” means to give something to someone for safe-keeping. It is the very same Greek word Jesus used on the cross when He loudly cried out what words (Luke 23:46b)?

That verse is a quote from Psalm 31:5. Many Jews would pray this prayer before going to sleep at night. The worst thing anyone can do to us is kill us, as they did Jesus. However, death simply delivers us into our heavenly Father’s *hands*. Therefore, **evaluate suffering** in that context.

To be able to rejoice in your suffering, **anticipate, celebrate, and evaluate your suffering.**

## DECEMBER

### What God Requires When Life Is Tough (1 Peter 5:1–7)

Peter wrote this letter just before the Roman emperor Nero began a horrible persecution of Christians. Peter knows the persecution is bad but about to get much worse. We can see the same thing happening in America because our culture is becoming more and more anti-Christian and anti-Bible. Part of this passage is written to church leaders but it applies to all believers because church leaders are to model what God requires of all believers. When life is tough, God requires **three** things.

#### A Stirring Witness (5:1)

During tough times, it is critically important for God's people to have good spiritual leaders who faithfully preach and teach the Bible, without watering it down for political correctness. Therefore, Peter begins this section: *So I exhort the elders among you* (5:1a). The word translated *elders* (PRESBYTEROS, pres-boo'-ter-os) refers to men who served as pastoral leaders of the congregation. The words elder, overseer (bishop), and pastor (shepherd) are used interchangeably in the New Testament. For example, in Acts 20:28a–b what does Paul say to the elders of the church at Ephesus?

Peter includes himself in this group by calling himself *a fellow elder* (5:1b). After Jesus' resurrection, Peter preached the first gospel sermon on the day of Pentecost and continued to preach and teach about Christ and the resurrection. Peter reminds his readers he was *a witness of the sufferings of Christ* (5:1c). The word translated *witness* (MARTUS, mar'-toos) is the word from which we get our word "martyr." It means "to bear witness." In Acts 1:8b, how does Jesus use the same Greek word to describe what His disciples will become when the Holy Spirit comes upon them?

Because so many were killed for being *witnesses*, the Greek word "martyr" became a reference to one who was killed for his or her faith.

Peter is writing not only as a *witness* but also *as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed* (5:1). This probably refers to Peter's experience at the Transfiguration, where He saw Christ in His glory (Mk 9:2), which is yet to be *revealed* so every believer can be *a partaker* in it. Every church leader and believer should be a *witness* of what Christ has done for them.

When life is tough, God requires **a stirring witness** and ...

#### A Serving Spirit (5:2–4)

Peter, who was himself called by Jesus to be a shepherd (Jn 21:16), exhorts the elders to *shepherd the flock of God that is among you* (5:2a). The word translated *shepherd*, or "feed" (POIMAINŌ, poy-my'-no), means to tend sheep. The Greek word can also be translated "pastor." A shepherd,



or pastor, leads and feeds the church—leading them from pasture to pasture to make sure they have adequate food. This means leading the flock from scripture to scripture, or Bible book to Bible book, so they will be well-fed. A faithful pastor must obey what command in 2 Timothy 4:2a–b?

This means preaching God’s Word when it is popular and when it is not. A pastor must preach the word *exercising oversight*, or being an “overseer,” *not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you* (5:2b). This means a pastor must not be lazy nor need people in the church to constantly compel him to do his work effectively. Instead, he should shepherd the church *willingly*, as God would have him, because of his love for God and the flock over which God has made him overseer.

Shepherding cannot be *for shameful gain*, which means not out of greed nor a desire to enrich oneself, *but eagerly* wanting to serve God (5:2c–d). This doesn’t mean a pastor shouldn’t be fairly paid; it means money cannot be the motivation for pastors carrying out their ministry. A church has the responsibility to provide the pastor with an equitable salary and benefits. Quoting from *Deuteronomy*, how does Paul express this fact in 1 Timothy 5:18b–c?

When a church doesn’t adequately compensate a pastor, it has been my observation God will move that pastor to a church that will take care of him. He will then send the previous church the kind of pastor they deserve.

Peter writes that shepherding is *not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock* (5:3a–b). This means pastors are not only to preach and teach the Bible, but to live it.

Elders are under-shepherds who are accountable to *the chief Shepherd*, Jesus Christ (5:4a). One day, *the chief Shepherd* will *appear*, or return. When He does, what will faithful pastors receive (5:4b)?

Crowns are often used in the Bible to represent different kinds of rewards. There is the *crown of righteousness* (2 Tim. 4:8) and the *crown of life* (Jas. 1:12; Rev. 2:10). When life is tough, God requires **a stirring witness, a serving spirit**, and ...

## A Submissive Attitude (5:5–7)

Peter writes, *Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders* (5:5a). Everyone in the church is to be submissive to church leaders, or elders, unless the leaders are guilty of dishonesty, teaching false doctrine, or immorality. The reason *younger* believers are specified is they may lack maturity and want changes that violate doctrinal integrity.

For example, there is a “worship war” going on in many churches between *younger* and older believers concerning music and style of worship. Concerning worship, what does Psalm 29:2 tell us?

Two things are required in worship: giving *glory* to the Lord and revering His *holiness*. In any church there will be disagreements about preferences concerning music, worship times, etc. Therefore, Peter writes: *Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another* (5:5b). This means there must be mutual submission and respect between young and old believers. The word *clothe* translates a Greek word that refers to a servant putting on an apron before serving. Peter may have been thinking back to the Last Supper when the disciples were arguing about which



of them would be greatest in the kingdom of heaven (Lk 22:24). In the midst of that debate, Jesus gets up from the meal, takes off His outer garment, and ties a towel around His waist like an apron. Then, He begins to wash His disciples' feet and dries them with the towel. When He finishes, what does Jesus tell His disciples (John 13:15)?

In many churches today, disciples of Jesus are still arguing about which of their preferences are greatest. However, the Bible teaches we are to put on the “apron of *humility*” and be concerned about serving one another. To reinforce his exhortation, Peter quotes Proverbs 3:34: *for “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble”* (5:5c). *God opposes the proud* because arrogant people trust in themselves and always think their opinions and preferences are superior to everyone else's. Being *proud* keeps older people from trying to understand younger people and younger people from trying to understand the concerns of older believers.

Because God has allowed Peter's readers to suffer, he writes, *Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God* (5:6a). *The mighty hand of God* means God allows unpleasant things to happen to make us *humble* and more dependent on Him. We are to submit to God's *mighty hand* as we would to the skillful hands of a surgeon. This is because God often uses affliction to eliminate spiritually harmful things, such as pride, from our lives. We are to endure affliction without becoming bitter or mad at God *so that at the proper time he may exalt us* (5:6b). How does Jesus express this principle in Luke 14:11?

Now we come to one of the most wonderful promises in the Bible. It is given to those who have a **stirring witness**, a **serving spirit**, and a **submissive attitude** when life is tough. The promise is found in 1 Peter 5:7. Write it below:

The word translated *anxieties*, or “care,” means “to be drawn in different directions.” It refers to worries that are pulling us apart and having a debilitating effect. The verb *casting* is the idea of throwing our anxieties to the Lord and leaving them there. Too many of us cast our burdens, like we do a fishing line, and reel them back. However, we are to cast them to the Lord and leave them there. It is important to understand we cast our anxieties, not our troubles. God may not take the problem away, but we can give Him our worries about it, because he cares for us. Peter's words are reminiscent of what promise given in Psalm 55:22b–c, if we cast our burdens on the Lord?

We can cast all our anxieties, or cares, on the Lord because He is genuinely concerned about us all the time, even when life is tough. However, when life is tough, God does require a **stirring witness**, a **serving spirit**, and a **submissive attitude**.

## DECEMBER

### Determining the Right Result of Suffering (1 Peter 5:8–14)

As Peter concludes this letter, he mentions two possible results of suffering. One is the result the devil seeks, and the other is the result God desires by allowing us to suffer. Responding properly to suffering and achieving the right result requires remembering **three** things: **the roaring adversary**, **the right action**, and **the right aftermath**.

#### The Roaring Adversary (5:8)

Casting our cares upon God (5:7) doesn't mean we sit back and do nothing. That is not faith; that is presumption. Our Lord warned Peter that Satan wanted to sift him like wheat to separate him from his faith in Jesus (Lk 22:31). From that experience, Peter learned two attitudes required to respond properly during tough times. He writes, *Be sober-minded; be watchful* (5:8a–b). This means we are always to be self-controlled and alert. How does Peter explain why in the rest of that verse (5:8c–d)?

One of the devil's most effective tactics is getting us to “write him off” as a myth or fairy tale. Satan wants to work incognito in our lives so we will be unaware of his tactics and influence. He hates the Bible because it reveals his reality and strategy. Therefore, he doesn't want you to read or study it.

The word translated *devil* (DIABOLOS, dee-ab'-uh-los) means accuser or slanderer. The devil is the arch *adversary*, or enemy, of truth and holiness. The chief target of his slander is the truth of the Bible. Satan cannot lead us into sin unless he persuades us to doubt the truth of God's Word. His oldest, most effective tactic is convincing us the Bible isn't true or that God doesn't mean what He says. He used this scheme in the original temptation. God tells Eve if she eats from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, she will “*surely die*” (Gen. 2:17). But what does *the serpent*, Satan, tell Eve in Genesis 3:4b?

Satan also tells Eve her eyes will be opened and she will be like God “*knowing good and evil*” (Gen. 3:5). However, the moment Adam and Eve bit into the forbidden fruit, they died immediately in their spirits because they became sinners. They also began to die progressively in their bodies. Sin could only enter the Garden of Eden after Satan convinced Adam and Eve to doubt the Word of God. His tactics have not changed; he still seeks to deceive us. In 2 Corinthians 11:3b, how does Paul explain why Satan, who *deceived Eve by his cunning*, wants to deceive believers today?

Through deceit, Satan stalks us like a *roaring lion* (5:8c). Why does a lion roar? To create fear! A lion's roar near a sheepfold causes a frightened sheep to flee from the flock and become easy prey. When life is tough, Satan roars to scare us into fleeing from the flock, which is the church.

Satan wants to *devour* us (5:8d). This doesn't mean he wants to *devour* us physically. He is not going to bite off a hand or leg for his lunch. He wants to *devour* us psychologically and spiritually. He is very successful today at devouring people through one of his newest weapons, the internet.

The fastest growing addiction in America for boys and men is hard-core, internet pornography. As with Eve, Satan wants to get us to look at something forbidden and desire it. That's why we need to pray what prayer in Psalm 119:37a?

The word translated *worthless*, or “vanity,” refers to anything morally worthless. Satan knows if he can get our attention, he can get us to sin. Satan also wants to *devour* us because he hates what we represent—truth and holiness. Remember **the roaring adversary** and be sure to take ...

## The Right Action (5:9)

Instead of running in fear, *resist* him (5:9a). The word *resist* means to stand your ground and not retreat. Nowhere in the Bible are we told to attack the devil, but we are to *resist* him. But how do we do that? Our best example is Jesus Himself. Immediately after His baptism, Jesus was tempted by the devil in the wilderness. Each time He resisted Satan, Jesus used this phrase to introduce His answer, “*It is written*” (Mt 4:4, 7, & 10). Jesus resisted the devil by quoting scriptures He had memorized. Jesus is the Supreme Example of what practice found in Psalm 119:11?

The only way to effectively *resist* the devil is the sharp, two-edged sword of the Word of God (Heb. 4:12). After Jesus quotes scriptures to *resist* each of the devil's temptations, the devil leaves Him (Mt 4:11). This is an example of resisting the devil so *he will flee from you* (Jas. 4:7b).

We can only *resist* the devil with the authority and power of God's Word. To prevent becoming discouraged, we must be *firm in our faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by our brotherhood throughout the world* (5:9b). We should never feel sorry for ourselves, thinking no one has it as hard as we do. The devil tries to *devour* our spiritual strength through self-pity. However, all of our sufferings and temptations are experienced by thousands of other believers throughout *the world*. Suffering is a common experience to all committed followers of Christ (1 Cor. 10:13a).

Paul tells Timothy not to be ashamed of the *testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner* (2 Tim. 1:8a). Then, what does he write, which also applies to you and me (1:8b)?

When our **roaring adversary** is met with **the right action**, the result will be ...

## The Right Aftermath (5:10–14)

When we suffer, we have *the God of all grace* on our side (5:10a). This refers to God's empowering and sustaining grace (Acts 4:33; 2 Cor. 12:9b). When we are spiritually weak, *the God of all grace* will provide the power and strength we lack.

Peter reminds us God, *who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore ... you* (5:10b). The word translated *restore*, or “*perfect*” (KATARTIZŌ, kot-ar-tid'-zoh), refers to mending a hole or tear in a net. Suffering reveals holes in our faith and character. God allows suffering to reveal our faith flaws so He can mend our spiritual nets.

God also uses suffering to spiritually *confirm* and *strengthen* us (5:10c–d). Reading a book about body building will not make you strong. You must do some resistance training and weight lifting. The same is true in the spiritual realm. To be spiritually strong, we must have spiritual resistance.

Nothing strengthens our faith like the tough times of life when we learn by experience the truth of God's Word. After conquering the Promised Land, what does Joshua tell the Israelites about God's promises in Joshua 21:45?

When life is tough, God will *confirm* and *strengthen* us, and at the same time, *establish* us in the faith. He can do this because *to him be the dominion (power) forever and ever. Amen* (5:11). The power of God will never diminish because it is *forever and ever*.

Peter concludes this letter by writing that with the help of *Silvanus* (Roman form of "Silas"), he has *written briefly* to his original readers (5:12a). This is probably the same Silas who accompanied Paul on his second missionary journey (Acts 15:40). Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Peter probably dictated the letter as Silas wrote it down. Also, Silas probably delivered this letter to its recipients.

Peter also sends greetings from *she who is at Babylon* (5:13a). Babylon is most likely a metaphorical or cryptic reference to Rome, which is where Peter probably was when he wrote this epistle to churches in the Roman provinces of Asia Minor. *She* probably refers to the church at Rome, since the Greek word for "church" (EKKLĒSIA, ek-clay-see'-uh) is feminine. Also, what is the church called in Revelation 19:7 and 21:9?

Some scholars believe Peter may have been disguising his location to protect both himself and the church at Rome during the time of persecution. The reference to *Mark, my son* (5:13) refers to John Mark. Mark apparently became an associate of Peter, with Peter being Mark's main source of information for the gospel he wrote.

Peter concludes: *Greet one another with the kiss of love* (5:14a). This was not a romantic kiss but a cultural greeting, like a warm handshake. At Bible study and worship, or whenever believers meet, everyone should be greeted with a warm handshake or a holy hug. In some cultures, *the kiss of love* still applies.

Peter knows his beloved suffering brothers and sisters in Christ will suffer even more severely in the coming diabolic persecution. Therefore, he ends with this prayer: *Peace to all of you who are in Christ* (5:14b). This *peace* is only available through prayer and surpasses all human understanding (Philip. 4:6–7a). According to Philippians 4:7b what is the result of receiving this kind of *peace*?

To determine the proper result of suffering, remember three things: **the roaring adversary, the right action, and the right aftermath**. The result will be a "journey into triumphant living."