

1 Peter Devotionals-Today in the Word

Today in the Word Devotionals 1 Peter

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- [1 Peter 1 Devotionals](#)
- [1 Peter 2 Devotionals](#)
- [1 Peter 3 Devotionals](#)
- [1 Peter 4 Devotionals](#)
- [1 Peter 5 Devotionals](#)

1 Peter 1 Devotionals

1 Peter 1:1-2 "In the summer of 1969, then-President Richard Nixon engaged in hyperbole to express his excitement over America's landing on the moon... The President obviously got a little carried away by the thrill of man's first steps on the moon. When the Apollo 11 astronauts returned to earth following the first-ever moon landing, Nixon called their mission ""the greatest week in the history of the world since the Creation, because as a result of what happened in this week, the world is bigger, infinitely."

The President obviously got a little carried away by the thrill of man's first steps on the moon. But it was an historic moment. For the first time ever, human beings left the familiar confines of earth and traveled to a strange world, where they ""sojourned"" for a short time before returning home.

We might say that our Christian pilgrimage on earth reverses this movement. Almost from the opening word of his first letter, the apostle Peter lets us know that believers are just ""passing through"" this world. In 1 Peter 2:11, he even refers to God's people as ""aliens"" on earth.

Why are Christians only temporary travelers on earth? It's because heaven is our true home, toward which we are moving every day. Everything we value and hold dear originated in heaven and is designed to get us to heaven one day.

For example, our salvation was initiated by the electing work that the Father performed in eternity past. It was secured for us by the blood of Christ, shed at the cross. And our salvation is brought to maturity and completion by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, the process of conforming us to the image of Jesus Christ.

Peter knew those to whom he was writing, many of whom may have been strangers where they were living. He was writing to believers scattered throughout the five areas he lists, each a Roman province in Asia Minor. Some of these people may have been driven to their location by persecution (Acts 8:1 describes a similar situation).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY We can't afford to forget that this world is just a ""rest stop"" for us on the way to our true home. So how do you know if you're really living in the light of this truth? One way is by testing your reaction to the loss of any ""creature comforts"" that God might ask you to surrender

1 Peter 1:1-2

Grace and peace be yours in abundance. - 1 Peter 1:2

TODAY IN THE WORD

According to Baptist Standard reporter Robert O'Brien, "Desert-dwelling Bedouins come straight out of biblical history, but they don't live in a land flowing with milk and honey. They eke out a hard existence, either as rootless nomads living in tents across the Middle East and North Africa or as cultivators who have gravitated into a more settled life in concrete and stone structures." O'Brien goes on to say that, even for Bedouins who live in houses, "their nomadic past shapes and dominates their mindset and worldview."

As Christians living in this world, we're much like these modern-day Bedouins. Although most of us live in homes and not in tents, spiritually speaking we're nomads and aliens whose mindset and worldview need to be shaped by this reality.

The apostle Peter knew what it was like to be a traveler with no permanent earthly home. He spent the last decade of his life in Rome, where he was eventually martyred around AD 67.

Many of the Christians in Peter's day were also strangers in a strange land, scattered throughout the Roman world. Several years prior to his death, Peter wrote to a group of these believers living in provinces spread across Asia Minor, in what is now northern Turkey.

The apostle addressed his readers as "strangers in the world" (v. 1), a spiritual reality for people whose true citizenship was in heaven (Phil. 3:20). As such, they were subject to the misunderstanding, threats, insults, persecution, and other abuse that a pagan culture often inflicts on followers of Christ.

Peter wanted his readers to know how to handle persecution from a hostile world. The goal for people who claim to follow Christ is to display "the true grace of God" (1 Peter 5:12) that has transformed their lives.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Since we're travelers and strangers, we can't be too settled in our routines or too attached to our stuff.

1 Peter 1:1-2

To God's elect ... who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father. - 1 Peter 1:1-2

TODAY IN THE WORD

The ritual of naming in the Native American tradition conveys an understanding of the power and expectations in the name a person receives. Whether named for a particular virtue, part of nature, or an innate talent, names form an integral part of identity in this culture.

Peter understood much about identity, and today's reading focuses on that theme in two ways. First, notice how Peter identified himself: he is not "Simon," his birth name, but "Peter," the name given him by Christ Himself (cf. Matt. 16:18). The self-description he gave is also important: "an apostle of Jesus Christ" (v. 1). The Greek word apostle means "sent one." In other words, Peter identified himself as one who is sent; his identity was linked with his calling as an apostle. But his calling was further linked with someone in particular: Jesus! Peter's identity was intricately attached to his relationship with and calling by Christ.

Second, notice that Peter spent even more time identifying his audience. They are "God's elect, strangers in the world ... who have been chosen" by God (vv. 1-2). Don't miss the subtle significance of these designations. For any first-century Jew, calling someone "chosen" by God, or a "stranger" in the land would quite obviously refer to Israel, God's chosen people (cf. Deut. 32:8-9). But most of the initial readers of 1 Peter likely consisted of Gentiles. Peter was emphasizing their new identity. They may have been idolaters and pagans in the past (cf. 1:18; 4:3), but Peter designated them as the true people of God.

Finally, notice the Trinitarian shape of their identity. They have been chosen by the Father, through the work of the Spirit, for obedience to and participation with the Son (v. 2). What makes Peter's audience God's people is not an act of self-determination, but a gracious work of the Triune God Himself. As with Peter, so with followers of Christ: who we are is determined by whom we belong to. Our relationship with God determines our identity as His people.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Who are you? How would you identify yourself to others? Today's passage encourages us to think theologically about our identity. We may perform many tasks, experience many rejections, or wrestle with past sins; but 1 Peter reminds us that our identity is grounded in our calling and acceptance by God. Take time to pray before God about how you see yourself, asking Him to shape your self-identity around the truths He presents to you in His Word. You may find that keeping a spiritual journal will help you in this process.

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TODAY ALONG THE WAY - Since we're travelers and strangers, we can't be too settled in our routines or too attached to our stuff.

1 Peter 1:3-6 There are plenty of ways to lose money, but not many ways to replace it. However, the government will replace currency that has been waterlogged, burned, torn, or otherwise marred, provided certain criteria are met. The Treasury will replace damaged bills if more than half of the bill is identifiable. If less than half remains, Treasury officials will replace the money if they are satisfied it was destroyed. Bills that are so damaged that their value is unrecognizable must be redeemed by the Bureau of Engraving.

We can thank the Lord that no such restoration or reclamation project will be necessary for our ""heavenly currency,"" the inheritance God has reserved for us in heaven. Peter says that this inheritance will not ""perish, spoil or fade"" (v. 4).

This is Peter's version of Jesus' threefold promise that the treasure we lay up in heaven will not be susceptible to moths, rust or thieves (Matt. 6:20, see Tuesday's study). It's important to notice what secured this treasure for us: the resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:3), which demonstrated that God accepted His payment for our sins on the cross.

In other words, our heavenly inheritance--which includes our salvation--was purchased at a great price. God the Father is not about to let such a costly gift be corrupted or spoiled. As a matter of fact, it is impossible for that to happen.

But the fact that heaven holds a treasure for us is not the whole story. If even one believer were to lose his or her salvation and fail to reach heaven, a part of God's inheritance would go unclaimed.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY - Whenever the biblical writers talk about believers and their hope of heaven, they are very sure that all of those who know Christ will reach their eternal home. These writers have good reason for such certainty. Jesus Himself said that He had not lost one of those whom the Father had given Him, except Judas in fulfillment of prophecy (John 17:12). Our Savior also said that no one could snatch His sheep out of His hand or out of His Father's hand (John 10:28-30).

1 Peter 1:3 Acts 22:1-21

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth. - 1 Peter 1:3

TODAY IN THE WORD

No Compromise recounts the radical conversion of Christian singer and songwriter, Keith Green. As a young man trying to make his way in show business, Keith experimented with drugs and the free love lifestyle before coming to faith in Christ. After he was saved, his passionate zeal for Christ and personal holiness ignited spiritual fire in those who knew him and listened to his music.

1 Peter 1:3-5 Last spring's bizarre and tragic mass cult suicide in southern California underscored the dramatic difference between the Christian's hope and the false hopes of this world. The ""Heaven's Gate"" cultists' belief that death would free them to rise to the ""next level"" of existence became literally a dead hope when they acted on their leader's teachings and took their own lives.

The gloom, despair and death that shrouded this news story as it unfolded contrast sharply with the joy, praise and life that accompany salvation in Christ. Peter had special reason to exult in Christ's resurrection, which sealed the divine redemption that brought us from spiritual death to eternal life.

Peter was an eyewitness of the Resurrection, which not only placed him in special company but also energized his faith and removed any doubt or reluctance from his heart. Even more, as we saw earlier, Peter was forgiven and restored to service by the risen Christ. The former fisherman knew all about God's ""great mercy"" (v. 3).

In relation to the inheritance stored up for us in heaven, Peter's words in today's passage echo the teaching of Jesus, which Peter heard during the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 6:19-21). The apostle proved to be a good pupil, reflecting his Master's view of a heavenly treasure which no earthly corruption can touch.

This teaching about their heavenly inheritance must have been encouraging to Peter's readers. Judging by both 1st and 2nd Peter, these people were undergoing persecution and suffering for their faith in Christ.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Need three great reasons to rejoice on this Lord's day? Consider what God has done for believers in Christ. First, God has taken care of our past through our new birth (1 Peter 1:3). Although we were dead in our sins (Eph. 2:1), when we trusted Christ, we were given new life.

Second, God has secured our future by storing up an inheritance that is kept in heaven for us (1 Peter 1:4).

And in the present, despite the trials that come upon us, nothing can take us down because we are being "shielded by God's power" (v. 5). We will enjoy that protection until Christ comes for us!

1 Peter 1:3-5

Hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts. - Romans 5:5

TODAY IN THE WORD

According to an article in the Seattle Post-Intelligencer on June 16, 2005, the Department of Revenue has \$470 million in unclaimed funds, including personal inheritances. Recently officials have begun sending out thousands of letters, hoping to connect individuals and their unclaimed money.

The thought that a large sum of money could be ours is pretty exciting. It's easy to daydream about how we'd spend all that money. For many, the future would seem brighter given the prospect of much wealth. And yet, as believers, we already have an unimaginable inheritance waiting for us!

Many passages in Scripture describe our heavenly inheritance. In Colossians 1:5, our inheritance is defined in terms of "hope," which is the source of our faith and love. Recall from yesterday that the faith and love of the Colossians was the source of Paul and Timothy's thanksgiving. There's a wonderful connection between these three: faith, love, and hope, as we see in today's verse. Human beings cannot exist without hope—that's why we're so devastated when our hopes are dashed. But hope based on faith in what Christ has done can never disappoint.

Christian hope is a very powerful reality. Many people around us live with no real hope for their futures. They believe that when a person dies, that's it. But this viewpoint isn't what the Bible teaches. In 1 Peter, we learn that our hope is based on Christ's resurrection and that our heavenly inheritance can never be taken from us. This inheritance of eternal life is protected for us and we are protected by God's power.

It's likely that this message of hope was stressed when Epaphras shared the gospel, or the word of truth, with the Colossians. And this same message needs to be shared today. As one Bible scholar says, "The solid facts about the future hope of Christians are a powerful motivation for constant faith and costly love in the present."

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

There's no need to check the mailbox to find out if you have an inheritance waiting for you—you already do! Spend some time focusing on the hope that comes from this certain inheritance of knowing that you'll spend eternity with Jesus Christ. Pray that this hope will increase your love for Him and others.

If you've never trusted Christ for eternal life, don't let one more day go by without the eternal hope that comes from knowing Jesus.

1 Peter 1:3-7

I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. - Romans 8:18

TODAY IN THE WORD

From the beginning, Christians were viewed with suspicion and hostility. Their refusal to sacrifice to pagan gods and their claim that Jesus is Lord earned them the reputation of being dangerous, disloyal citizens. Their gatherings evoked rumors of unspeakable immorality. Physical persecution often resulted.

While more widespread, systematic persecution would come a few years later, Peter's audience was already experiencing the trial and suffering that accompanied being a follower of Jesus. Into this context, Peter spoke a word of hope.

This reading begins with a description of our “new birth into a living hope,” anchored by “the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (v. 3). Christ's resurrection secured for us something we could never attain on our own: true hope in a fallen world. This biblical hope is more than just “I hope so”; it is confidence in the promise of God. This, says Scripture, is what God, in His mercy, has “given us.” Scripture also reminds us that we are born into a heavenly inheritance (v. 4). Because of Jesus' resurrection, and our faith in Him, we are now children of God and inheritors of all that is His (see Rom. 8:14-17). And not only are we heirs of this coming salvation, we are protected heirs—shielded from our enemies by the power of God (v. 5). Thus, the “living hope” of verse 3 is linked with God's promise of protection in verse 5.

Finally, lest the reader assume that Scripture promises an easy life, we are reminded of the suffering, grief, and trials in life (v. 6). Scripture doesn't deny our suffering; it is real, and it will be part of all Christian living (cf. John 16:33). But we are pointed to something else: the final outcome of our suffering. Just as gold is refined by fire, so too our faith is refined—or proved genuine—by suffering. In the end, when Christ is fully revealed, our perseverance in faith will be rewarded with “praise, glory and honor” (v. 7). In the meantime, Scripture offers this “living hope” amidst our suffering.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

In addition to the important reminder about our “living hope, Scripture also exhorts us to the proper response to God's sure promises: joy (v. 6)! Clearly, biblical joy is not determined by earthly circumstances; it's rooted in something much deeper: knowledge of God's love and protection. Can you truly say that this is your response to suffering and trial? It may be difficult to transform your attitude overnight, but ask God for strength to respond to this week's trials and difficulties with today's picture of biblical joy.

1 Peter 1:3-9

[God] has given us new birth into a living hope... and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. - 1 Peter 1:3-4a

TODAY IN THE WORD

In the classic novel *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, a young boy living in deep poverty with his mother in America learns that his father was a member of a British noble family. The boy's grandfather sends for him, and the boy soon finds himself living on a fine estate in England. He is also the heir to the estate, which includes the title of lord.

This is our story as believers. Through Jesus Christ, we have gone from having nothing to having everything: new life, new hope, and an eternal inheritance in heaven that nothing can ruin. It's this inheritance we want to focus on today.

People who have an inheritance are called heirs. But being an heir only has value if the person leaving the inheritance has something of value to give. We're in great shape there because the Bible says we are “heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ” (Rom. 8:17). This means that all that God has is ours!

Peter says that heaven itself is part of that inheritance, our future home where all that is wrong on earth will be set right and we will enjoy God's presence forever.

How did we ever get in on something this good? Because God is so good. It cost Him everything--the death of His sinless Son for our sins--to make us His heirs. Jesus paid the price for our salvation on the cross, and His resurrection guaranteed that someday we will come into our full inheritance in heaven.

Here on earth, estates can change in value over time, or even lose value. Buildings and other property that are part of an inheritance can become rundown if they're not maintained.

But there are no such problems with our inheritance in heaven. Peter used three distinct terms to get his point across. The things that God has in store for those who love Him will never “perish, spoil or fade.”

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Being co-heirs with Jesus Christ means we have an inheritance on reserve in heaven that's beyond anything we can imagine.

1 Peter 1:3-9

He has given us ... an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. - 1 Peter 1:3, 4

TODAY IN THE WORD

For as far back as she could remember, Annie associated her Aunt Edith with a beautiful walnut piano. Each visit to her aunt's brought the opportunity to lovingly stroke the finely carved piano legs and cautiously play the ivory and ebony keys.

It was no surprise, then, that her aunt's will left the piano to Annie. At the time, however, Annie's family had no room for the piano. A relative agreed to keep the piano until Annie could take it. Finally, after Annie graduated from college and got a place of her own, she called her relative specifically to make arrangements to move the piano.

Her relative's response shocked her: "Why, that old thing! I sold it last year to get a new air conditioner!"

Perhaps you know of a similar story regarding an inheritance, or perhaps you have experienced a similar disappointment. Few issues can create sensitive disputes in families like inheritances can.

Fortunately, God's inheritance is not like human inheritances! Peter emphasized the true nature of God's inheritance when he wrote to a group of believers scattered across the region that today is modern Turkey. These people were facing persecution that was causing them great distress (1 Peter 1:6; 4:12).

Peter started off by focusing on the current reality of the living hope that was theirs through their new birth in Jesus Christ (1:3). Then he directed their thoughts to eternal realities about their inheritance (v. 4): it could never "perish, spoil or fade." Finally, Peter reminded them that this inheritance was kept for them in heaven (v. 4).

This reflects Jesus' words: "Do not store up for yourselves treasure on earth, where moth and rust destroy... But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven" (Matt. 6:19–20). Peter wanted these anxious believers to know that nothing on earth could take away what was safely preserved for them in heaven.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Have you been setting your hope on something that can perish, spoil, or fade?

1 Peter 1:3-9

Though you have not seen [Christ], you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him. - 1 Peter 1:8

TODAY IN THE WORD

Someone has said that Christians are an unusual group of people. We have to die in order to live, we discover our greatest joy and peace in the midst of our hardest circumstances, and we're called to give up the things we can see and touch for a Person and a place we've never seen.

The Christian life is a paradox to a lot of people, especially those on the outside looking in. That's understandable--but sometimes the Christian life is a paradox to those of us who are trying to live it. It's not very easy knowing that you are a stranger whose real home is in another place.

Some of the believers Peter addressed in his first letter were also aliens. They were Christians scattered throughout the Roman Empire. Peter called them "strangers" (v. 1), a word that could also be translated "scattered." The term "scattered" in verse 1 was a term used for Jews who were living outside Israel, and Peter applied it to Christians who were also separated from their homeland.

Peter had a welcome word for these followers of Jesus Christ who must have felt like nomads at times. Their past, present, and future were absolutely secure because of their new birth, the keeping power of God, and their inheritance in heaven!

This is why Peter could begin his first letter with a burst of praise (v. 3). Our faith is a "living hope" because God the Father raised Jesus Christ from the dead. We serve a risen, living Savior, not a dead idol or a vague ideal.

When we trusted Christ to save us, we also came into an inheritance. This is not the reward for faithful service that Paul refers to (1 Cor. 3:10-15), but the full realization of our salvation. Word pictures ("perish, spoil or fade") abound in verse 4 to describe how safe our future in heaven is.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Let's talk about the "present tense" of salvation--days such as today when we are being "shielded by God's power" (v. 5).

1 Peter 1:3-12

You believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy. - 1 Peter 1:8

TODAY IN THE WORD

Pilgrimages to the Holy Land were quite popular in the fourth century A.D. One of the pilgrims was a nun from Spain named Egeria. Traveling on foot or by mule, Egeria seems to have been the leader of her pilgrimage group and the one financing their three-year trip. At the various holy sites they visited, they read Scripture, sang psalms, and celebrated communion. Especially meaningful were their visits in and around Jerusalem to the sites of Christ's Passion, including Golgotha, the Mount of Olives, and the empty tomb. Egeria described how the Jerusalem Christians worshiped during Easter by literally following Jesus' footsteps around the city as Holy Week unfolded.

This is the "inexpressible and glorious joy" which Peter wrote about in today's reading—the joy of Christ's death and resurrection that accomplished God's purpose of redemption. Verses 8 and 9 are the key: "Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls." Faith means to believe in the One we have not seen and to love Him. The "inexpressible and glorious joy" that such faith inspires is justified because we are on the way to Him—our souls are in the process of being fit to spend eternity with Him.

The foundation stones of our faith are God's mercy, the gift of spiritual rebirth, the resurrection of Christ, the resulting hope that we don't deserve but that He freely gives, and the eternal inheritance awaiting us (vv. 3-5). Our present sufferings are nothing by comparison, and in fact they have the purpose of refining and enriching our faith (vv. 6-7). We even have the privilege of knowing more of God's plan of redemption than the prophets did (vv. 10-12). All of this has been done, is being done, and is guaranteed by God's power. Our faith is sure, and joy is our response.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

What key truths and principles have you learned from Scripture this month about godly joy? What might be different about your joy in the month to come? We conclude this month's study with a benediction from Jude 24-25: "To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy—to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen."

1 Peter 1:6-9: Trials have an uncanny way of revealing what's inside a person. Consider the behavior of some passengers aboard the doomed luxury liner Titanic. As the great ship was sinking and the few lifeboats were being filled, the command on deck was ""women and children first."" According to one survivor, most of the men and older boys obeyed the order. But some men ran back to the ship's staterooms and changed into women's clothing in an effort to gain a seat on a lifeboat.

The crisis brought out the worst in these men. What about us? When God sends trials our way, do we respond in fear or in faith? God intends trials and testings to produce good fruit in our lives. This is one of the classic paradoxes of the Christian faith: great rejoicing in the face of real troubles. A Christian's joy is not driven by circumstances.

What is its source, then? Peter answers that question beginning with the first two words in verse 6. ""In this"" refers to the exciting truth that God has secured our past, present and future (vv. 3-5).

When trials and testings are seen against the backdrop of God's complete work in us, we realize that His purpose in them is to strengthen us, not to sink us. Peter makes that truth explicit in verse 7. God's goal in testing is to produce in us a pure, priceless faith.

To some, this kind of reasoning sounds like ""pie in the sky."" But Peter is not talking about grinning and bearing it or pretending it doesn't hurt. He knew what it meant to be beaten and imprisoned for his faith (see, for instance, Acts 12).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY - Need three great reasons to rejoice on this Lord's day? Consider what God has done for believers in Christ. Peter doesn't deny that trials can bring temporary grief.

But the apostle also says we can find abundant joy in spite of our troubles when we lift our eyes to take a larger view. Although Peter may be referring primarily to persecution, a Christian's trials can also include physical suffering, financial setbacks or family disappointments.

Peter reminds us that these troubles can be tools in the Father's hand to refine and strengthen our faith, as well as to bring praise and glory to Christ

1 Peter 5:6

Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.

Faithful Witness: The Visible Hand of God Read Daniel 5:5–17

Scripture says that correction is needed to ensure that children are brought up in the fear of the Lord. When this does not take place, more painful judgment is in store. In the same way, God's hand goes out on those who need to be brought back, initially as a gentle rebuke and then more severely for those who do not learn (Prov. 3:12; Heb. 12:6). In our reading today, the hand of the Lord appeared quite literally and began writing a mysterious message on the wall so that He could not be easily ignored!

God's usually invisible actions were made manifest, and like His creation, were put on display for all to see. Belshazzar was so shocked by this that he appeared to go into a state of shock. Like Nebuchadnezzar before him, he offered great treasures for anyone who could interpret the message.

It is worth noting that Belshazzar had to summon the wise men of the kingdom since they were not among his thousand guests, which tells us something about the feast. When the king's wise men could not answer the riddle of the writing, Daniel's attributes and abilities were finally remembered by the queen mother.

The king described Daniel's outstanding wisdom (v. 14), and offered him great wealth and prestige, including the third highest position in the kingdom (v. 16). But Daniel responded with a declaration that clearly revealed his opinion of Belshazzar and his ability—or in this case, his idolatrous inability—to lead. Daniel was about to make manifest God's plan, one that Belshazzar should have avoided had he been brought up in the fear of the Lord. This lesson will be more fully unpacked tomorrow.

Apply the Word

Where have you seen God's hand in your life recently? How has He brought you back to Himself? Share this testimony with those around you, declaring God's goodness. Let your life be a positive example of the Lord's "writing on the wall" through your actions today. Who knows? Someone might hear His good deeds and turn back to Him!

1 Peter 1:8-9

Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed. - John 20:29

TODAY IN THE WORD

In his treatise, *Faith in the Unseen*, the fourth-century bishop Augustine of Hippo challenged the idea that nothing should be believed if it cannot be seen or verified physically. Instead, argued Augustine, nearly all of life requires trust, or belief, in things we cannot see: the will of our friends, the love of our parents, the existence of a foreign country. In short, said Augustine, if we refuse to believe what we cannot see, "nothing would remain stable in human society."

Today's reading emphasizes this fundamental call to believe in Jesus, whom we have not seen. Peter, of course, had seen Jesus. He could call to mind any number of scenes where Jesus healed, taught, prayed, received abuse at the hands of Roman soldiers, died on the cross, or appeared alive again. For Peter, his love for Jesus could easily be linked with his witness of Jesus' love and power during His earthly ministry.

But Peter's audience didn't have that advantage. Here was a group living in northern Asia Minor, some years after Jesus' life on earth. They had never seen Jesus with their physical eyes, and yet they loved Him and believed in Him (v. 8). Perhaps Peter had in mind Jesus' words to Thomas: "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (John 20:29). None of us have seen Jesus, yet our encounter with Him and love for Him is real thanks to God's Word, the testimony of others' experience, and the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

Although we do not see Jesus now with our physical eyes, Scripture encourages us with the reminder that we will see Him in the future when our salvation is obtained in full (vv. 7, 9; cf. 1 Cor. 13:12). Notice, however, that while our full salvation is something yet to come, the Christian life is a present reality. The love, faith, and "inexpressible and glorious joy" that Peter speaks of is all in the present tense. We may wait in eager anticipation of that glorious day, but true love and joy is ours even now.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Do you struggle with the reality that you cannot see and touch Jesus? Or perhaps you know of someone who resists faith in Christ because they cannot see Him with their eyes? In many ways, God calls us to be His tangible body to those who need the physical presence of God. Be that "visible Jesus" for someone today. Consider visiting a sick person in the hospital or their home, or simply give a hug to someone who needs to know God's love in a physical way.

1 Peter 1:10-12 Various cults believe they have ""revelation"" that is additional to the Bible. Joseph Smith, for instance, founder of Mormon-ism, claimed to have discovered and translated divine golden tablets. ""Christian Science"" is firmly based on the writings of Mary Baker Eddy. And the Jehovah's Witnesses and others have actually tried to set dates for Jesus' return.

The beliefs of these and other cults illustrate the strong spiritual curiosity and hunger in human nature. But their quest for additional

revelation is in vain. God's ""final word"" has already been spoken in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ. We in the church know what saints and prophets in the Old Testament longed to know.

The Bible often speaks of the fact that in Jesus Christ God's revelation was complete (Heb. 1:2). Jesus was prophesied in the Old Testament and revealed in the New Testament.

It's clear from the Old Testament writings that the prophets did not have all the pieces of the puzzle. They wrote of the Messiah's coming and His sufferings, but according to Peter they strongly desired to know more.

It's a little overwhelming to think that in one sense the experiences of prophets such as Isaiah and Ezekiel are not complete without us in the church. Peter says this is so, however, and that these earlier believers were serving us in what they wrote. Even angels long to understand about salvation.

What a privileged position we enjoy, being on this side of Calvary and having God's complete revelation in our hands. Peter wrote to his scattered readers as one who was aware of his privileged position. As an apostle and a biblical writer, he was one of those to whom God entrusted His final revelation.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Need three great reasons to rejoice on this Lord's day? Consider what God has done for believers in Christ. It's amazing: the prophets of Scripture, and even the angels, are overcome with curiosity about our salvation.

No matter what setbacks and disappointments we may face in this life, as believers in Jesus Christ we are incredibly privileged people. It's good to step back from time to time to simply delight in the truth that we are children of God

1 Peter 1:10-12

Just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do. - 1 Peter 1:15

TODAY IN THE WORD

During the recent mission of the space shuttle Endeavour, the crew collected radar images of the earth that will be transformed into the most accurate maps ever made of our planet. The shuttle's two large radar antennas had to be held perfectly still while the readings were taken--an amazing feat. The result will be precise, three-dimensional maps of the earth.

God's Word operates in much the same way in our lives. The Scripture provides us a precise, completely reliable "image" of what life is truly like from God's perspective. The Word gives us the knowledge and guidance we need to map out our lives according to God's will.

Peter had a deep appreciation for God's revealed Word. The apostle lived during a unique time in history, the transition from the old sacrificial system of Judaism to God's new work of salvation in Jesus Christ. Peter was present during the early, sometimes miraculous, events that brought the church into being; he even delivered the "keynote address" for the whole process--his incredible sermon on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2).

Peter understood that the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ was God's full and final payment for sin. Thus he could write to a group of Christians scattered throughout Asia Minor, suffering various kinds of persecution and harassment, and tell them that they were especially blessed.

That's the point of verses 10-12. As believers in Christ and members of His body, the church, we are the recipients of a blessing that the Old Testament prophets had longed to comprehend fully as they spoke and wrote God's Word. Even the angels are in awe of God's work of salvation.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

When he wrote "prepare your minds for action" (v. 13), Peter uses an interesting word picture to make his point understood.

1 Peter 1:10-12

Even the angels long to look into these things. - 1 Peter 1:12

TODAY IN THE WORD

For the second-century here-tic Marcion, the Jewish God of the Old Testament was different than the Christian God of the New Testament. The lesser god of violence and law had been replaced by the superior God of love and grace. Thus, according to his thinking, Christians should have nothing to do with the stories and teaching of the Bible of the Jews.

Although written prior to Marcion, today's passage speaks firmly against a Marcionite concept of God and the Bible, as Peter discusses the salvation that has come in Christ. First, Scripture presents the unchanging God of our salvation. Nothing that happened with Christ, His death, His resurrection, and the subsequent grace given to the church was without anticipation. The Spirit of Christ predicted these things through the Old Testament prophets (vv. 10-12). The Spirit who led the old prophets was the same as the one preaching the gospel. The salvation now enjoyed by Jews and Gentiles alike was part of God's plan and purpose from the beginning.

Second, Scripture reveals the preciousness of salvation. So significant was this promised salvation that the prophets who predicted Christ's coming eagerly tried to discover when and how these events would come about. Moreover, even the angels in heaven "long to look into these things" (v. 12). In other words, the gift of salvation in Christ was so important that it got the attention of Old Testament saints and heavenly beings alike.

Finally, Scripture indicates the surprising pattern of salvation. Many first-century Jews anticipated a kingly Messiah who would vindicate Israel and free them from oppression. Most expected glory; few anticipated a suffering Messiah. Yet Scripture declares both: the events predicted by the prophets included both "the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow" (v. 10). For Peter's readers, this is a subtle reminder that their sufferings are following the pattern of Christ, and their end will be the same as His: glory. But this should be no surprise; it's all been predicted beforehand.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Today marks the second Sunday in Advent, that season of reflection on the first and second comings of Christ. What a perfect occasion to appreciate the wonder and significance of what God has done for you in Christ. Spend time meditating on several Old Testament passages, such as Psalm 110, Isaiah 53, or Psalm 22, that foretell the suffering and the glory of the Christ who brings us salvation. Then thank God that in His unending love He had planned a way for our restoration and renewal in His Son, Jesus Christ.

1 Peter 1:10-16

Prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed. - 1 Peter 1:13

TODAY IN THE WORD

In Future Grace, John Piper explained: "To fear the Lord is to tremble at the awareness of what a terrible insult it is to a holy God if we do not have faith in his future grace after all the signs and wonders He has performed to win our obedient trust. It's this faith in future grace that channels the power of God into obedience... There is such a delight in the worth of God's past grace, that we are driven on to experience more and more of it in the future. But this is not done by "'payments' of a debt in any ordinary sense. Rather, it is done by transforming gratitude into faith as it turns from contemplating the pleasures of past grace and starts contemplating the promises of the future."

Christ's Second Coming is chief among the promises of future grace, and in today's reading Peter linked grace with eschatology. Verse 13 is the key. "Therefore" points back in the passage to the gospel message, God's grace in Christ that saved us, and the plan of redemption that previously had not been fully revealed (vv. 10-12). As a result of all this, we are to live with self-control and put our hope "fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed," that is, when He returns. Since Christ's Second Coming is an absolute surety, there's no reason to give in to temptations and trust in any lesser hope. We are to live holy and obedient lives in the power and delight of future grace (vv. 14-16).

In the past, the prophets looked forward to the "grace that was to come." In the present, with God's plan of Christ's atoning sacrifice revealed, we have the privilege of trusting in Him for salvation by grace and the presence of the Holy Spirit. In the future, when Christ returns in glory, we will be on display as eternal trophies of His grace!

1 Peter 1:13-21 A recent survey of Japanese and American parents revealed much about the values that people in various cultures hold dear. The question was submitted to these parents, "'What do you wish most for your children?'" The leading response among Japanese parents was that they wanted their children to be successful--a reflection of the high value Japanese culture places on marketplace success. The most frequent wish of American parents for their children was happiness--a reflection of our "'feel good'" culture.

Our Father God's greatest desire for His children is neither success nor happiness, but instead that we be like Him, "'holy in all [we] do'" (v. 15). This is a command, written into the Mosaic Law and never altered.

How do we fulfill our Father's desire--and His command--for us? Peter gives us several ways.

For example, he tells us to get ready for action as people who are self-controlled (v. 13). Peter's original readers were facing hard times, yet the Bible never tells Christians to hide out until trouble passes by. New Testament metaphors for the Christian life--a walk, a race, a war, even a boxing match--all suggest action and the need for self-discipline.

Another way we can achieve the holiness Peter speaks of is by setting our hope fully on Christ. This should sound familiar by now, because it is a favorite theme of Peter's. Looking ahead with hope and joy to the return of Christ is a call to action, not an invitation to a hammock in the shade.

Peter also calls us to be "obedient children" (v. 14) by not conforming to our old way of life. The original word for "conform" is the same one Paul uses in Romans 12:2, where we are called to be transformed rather than conformed people.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Need three great reasons to rejoice on this Lord's day? Consider what God has done for believers in Christ. Success and happiness are not evil in themselves. But they're not primary on God's "wish list" for His children. One problem with pursuing success or happiness as our main ambition is that the pursuit itself can lead us into desires that definitely are evil. It's hard to live in "reverent fear" when we are running after temporal things.

1 Peter 1:13-16

Therefore ... be holy in all you do. - 1 Peter 1:13, 15

TODAY IN THE WORD

When interpreting the Bible, scholars observe something called "the indicative and imperative." In Scripture, the "indicative" tells us who we are and what God has done—it tells us what is true. The "imperative" tells us how we should act as the people of God that we are—it tells us what to do. In short, the indicative and imperative in Scripture tells us what is true and what to do.

When we come to the "Therefore" of verse 13 in today's reading, we are shifting from the "what is true" into the "what to do." Because God has chosen you (vv. 1-2) and given you a living hope and a new inheritance (vv. 3-4), and because of the promise of salvation and glory yet to come (vv. 7-9), therefore, says Scripture, we must live a certain way.

First, we are called to self-control (v. 13), to engage our minds in thinking about how we live and making sure it's in accord with who we are. Next, we are called to set our hope on the grace to come; that is, we should live our lives in light of the sure expectation of Christ's return. Third, we are exhorted not to conform to the evil desires of our past (v. 14). This implies a change has taken place from one way of life—ignorance and disobedience—to another—knowledge and obedience (see v. 2). Finally, we are called to "be holy in all you do" (v. 15).

Simply put, holiness is being set apart for and to God. In fact, God Himself became the basis and pattern for our holiness: "Be holy, because I am holy" (v. 16). Peter is quoting a refrain that occurs several times in Leviticus and was first given to the nation of Israel (see Lev. 11:44; 19:2; 20:7). This call to total holiness ("in all you do") may seem like an impossible task, but remember, you have the Holy One Himself working in you and through you. The question is, will you give yourself to your holy Father?

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Today's call is a daunting one, but Scripture's order is essential: the indicative first, then the imperative. We live with self-control, resist evil desires, and act in holiness not so that God may grant us grace, but precisely the opposite. Because God has done those things, therefore we live like the people God has already declared us to be. As you attempt to "be holy in all you do" today, ask God for strength to live in a manner indicative of who you already are in Christ.

1 Peter 1:13-25

Love one another deeply, from the heart. - 1 Peter 1:22

TODAY IN THE WORD

ABC News reported a study done by psychologists at Cornell University to uncover the science behind "holier-than-thou" attitudes. The study showed that most people have an accurate sense of the morality of others, but they tend to overestimate their own morality. David Dunning, who led the study, noted that a skewed sense of moral superiority makes people too judgmental, saying, "They don't realize that in the same situation, they are going to act the same way."

Even the most devout Christian can give in to the temptation to equate holiness with superiority. We use the mandate to "be holy as I am holy" to distance ourselves from people who are too sinful for us. Our problem is that we misunderstand the nature of holiness

and the responsibility that comes with holiness.

As Peter defines it, holiness is not an end in itself; it is a means to prepare us for brotherly love (v. 22). A misguided understanding of holiness causes judgment and division, but true holiness removes the obstacle of self-centered sin and compels us to love as Jesus did. Peter instructs us in the daunting task of aspiring to holiness.

The quest for holiness begins in the mind. In his call to action in verse 13, Peter actually says to gird up the loins of your mind like a soldier prepares for battle. Being holy requires us to turn our minds from our sin to God's grace. Instead of focusing on our current desires, we dwell on the future rewards that Christ has in store for us. It's a matter of recognizing that this world is not our home (v. 17).

Being holy doesn't make us superior to other people because holiness isn't attained by our own efforts. Our dependence is entirely on God (vv. 21, 23). Holiness that results in judgmental pride is no holiness at all. A clean conscience and an obedient spirit feed directly into a loving heart. Verse 22 puts an emphasis on the purity and sincerity of our intentions. True love is not for show or out of guilt—it's from the heart.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

If holiness is tied directly to our ability to love, we must deal with a convicting reality: there is no such thing as a "victimless" sin. Any sinful thoughts, attitudes, or actions that we try to keep hidden from others still stand in the way of our personal holiness and prevent us from loving others as we should. Remember yesterday's study on P

1 Peter 1:17-21

The LORD redeems his servants; no one will be condemned who takes refuge in him. - Psalm 34:22

TODAY IN THE WORD

In the Roman Empire, the common word redemption referred to the process whereby a slave could be released from bondage through some form of payment to the slave's master. That payment, made either by the slave or by someone else, would buy the slave's freedom. A new life was the result.

This theme of redemption is central to today's reading. First, Peter declares the method of payment for our redemption: it did not come through the typical means of silver or gold (v. 18). Rather, we were redeemed with something far more valuable: "the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect" (v. 19). The reference here, of course, evokes the Old Testament command for a sacrificial animal that was perfect and without defect (see Lev. 22:17-25). Christ, in His sinlessness, was that perfect sacrifice.

Notice too, that we were not the ones making this payment. It was the work of God Himself, who chose Christ "before the creation of the world" (v. 20), raised Him from the dead, and glorified Him (v. 21). This was no afterthought; God had planned our redemption from the very beginning. Even before we existed, we were already thought of by our loving God.

The imagery of redemption implies freedom from slavery, but to what were we enslaved? Peter calls it an "empty way of life" (v. 18), a phrase commonly used for idolatry and rebellion against God (see Jer. 16:19). Without Christ, we have only the vanity which the world has to offer.

What does our freedom from such a life entail? Scripture declares that through Christ we gain faith and hope in God. Recall from previous days what that hope means. We also have a new relationship with God—He is not just an impartial judge, but a Father we can call upon. And we have a new home; no longer enslaved to emptiness, we live a life of "reverent fear" (v. 17). Strangers in this world, we are citizens of heaven (Phil. 3:20). Our redemption in Christ accomplished it all.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

We all revere our fathers in some way, whether earthly, national, or ideological. But today's reading challenges us to value one Father above all, and to live in reverence of Him (vv. 17, 18). Make a list of the influential figures in your own life, and then ask yourself: Does following the footsteps of these figures lead to a life of holiness and reverence for God the Father? If so, thank Him for such godly influences. If not, ask God for wisdom to re-prioritize the "fatherly" figures in your life.

1 Peter 1:15

TODAY IN THE WORD

In some circles it is common to refer to practices like the use of marijuana and prostitution as "victimless" crimes. This indicates a belief that these practices are a matter of individual choice. Since those who engage in such actions are the only ones who suffer the consequences, they should not be penalized for choosing such a lifestyle. In reality, however, there is no such thing as a

victimless crime. An individual's actions affect the entire community. This is doubly true of the church, where "each member belongs to all the others" (Rom. 12:5). Like the physical body, the spiritual health of one member of the body of Christ affects the other members.

1 Peter 1:17-25

You have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. - 1 Peter 1:23

TODAY IN THE WORD

The largest bill ever printed by the United States treasury was a \$100,000 gold certificate that carried the picture of Woodrow Wilson. As you might guess, these bills were not exactly tossed around in everyday transactions. In fact, they weren't issued to the general public at all, but were used only for money transfers between federal reserve banks.

This piece of trivia from the history of money reminds us of a simple fact. The more valuable something is, the more carefully it should be treated. Consider our salvation. It was bought at an unimaginably high price, the precious blood of Christ. We can't afford to treat a sacrifice such as this lightly by living half-hearted, careless Christian lives.

Instead, God's Word exhorts us to live as "strangers here in reverent fear" (v. 17). We've already discussed what it means to live as a stranger, or an alien, in the midst of a corrupt culture. This doesn't mean we're supposed to act strangely, but to realize that our loyalties and commitments are tied to heaven, not to earth.

Living entirely for Christ is the only reasonable response we can make to what He has done for us. Peter probably had very little silver or gold in his pocket as he wrote this letter, but he knew that money alone doesn't get a person very far in the kingdom of God.

Verse 18 reminds us of Peter's words to the crippled man who asked him for a handout one day: "Silver or gold I do not have ..." (Acts 3:6). And then the apostle gave the man what he did have, and what no amount of money could buy--healing and salvation in Christ.

What does a life of reverent fear look like? Peter describes this life in the remaining verses of chapter 1, and continues into the next few chapters. For example, living reverently means a life of purity resulting from obedience to God's Word, the "seed" through which we have been born again.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Peter talked about the "empty way of life" his readers had inherited from their ancestors (v. 18).

1 Peter 1:22-25 Perhaps not even a single one of our readers has read all the way through the U.S. tax code. This document is about 9█ pages long, discouraging enough for even the most avid reader. But there's another challenge awaiting those who attempt to understand this massive piece of government regulation. The tax code is undergoing constant revision--and according to one certified public accountant, the manual for the 1996 tax year alone is more than 700 pages long!

America's ever-changing tax code provides a stark contrast to the unchanging, imperishable Word of God. The apostle Peter's reverence for the Word shines through in many places in his epistles. He certainly has the Old Testament in mind here, because it was a completed work in Peter's day and a source of changeless divine truth.

But Peter was also keenly aware that the gospel which he and the other apostles were preaching was the revealed Word of God (v. 25). He refers to the fact that his ""dear brother Paul"" was also writing Scripture at that time (2 Pet. 3:15).

The process by which Peter, Paul and the prophets wrote is called ""inspiration,"" a term Peter explains in 2 Peter 1:19-21. He makes it clear in those verses that the biblical authors wrote not from their own impetus, but as they were ""carried along by the Holy Spirit.""

The result of this divine overseeing is a Word that ""stands firm in the heavens"" (Ps. 119:89). The prophet Isaiah contrasted God's eternal Word with the short life span of grass and flowers, which fade and fall rather quickly.

Peter quoted Isaiah to remind us that our new birth rests on the unchanging guarantees of God's Word. We will be eternally grateful for that! Imagine what it would be like if the truth we are commanded to obey kept changing with every new fad of culture or religion.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Need three great reasons to rejoice on this Lord's day? Consider what God has done for believers in Christ. Notice again the last phrase in today's text. Peter reminds his readers that the preaching of the imperishable Word is God's method of transmitting His truth (1 Cor. 1:21).

1 Peter 1:22-2:3

For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. - 1 Peter 1:23

TODAY IN THE WORD

In 1789, a group of mutineers put their officers on a longboat, took control of the H.M.S. Bounty, and sailed to Tahiti to enjoy a comfortable life. Fearing punishment, some of them, along with several Polynesians, later moved to uninhabited Pitcairn Island and burned the ship so there would be no evidence. Despite the South Pacific paradise-like setting, sexual immorality, jealousy, anger, alcohol, and disease took their toll until there was only one Englishman, ten women, and many children left.

The remaining Englishman, Alexander Smith, discovered a Bible in the ship's goods, and thankfully, the next-to-last man had taught him to read before he died. Smith studied the Word, decided it held the answer to the community's problems, and initiated Sunday worship and daily prayer times for the remaining people. In 1808, an American ship happening upon the island was surprised to discover a thriving group of 35 English-speaking Christians.

The power of Scripture can transform lives! As we learn in today's reading, the Word has an important role to play in spiritual rebirth and sanctification. The reading begins with a moral imperative found throughout the New Testament: "Love one another deeply from the heart." This should be the natural result of purity and obedience (1:22). This pursuit of holiness and love should in turn spring from our salvation, which is linked with the message of salvation, the gospel (1:23; James 1:18). Being born again is a spiritual and eternal event (John 3:5-6), and the Bible is a spiritual and eternal revelation. Much more than a "good book," it is the "living and enduring word of God," as Isaiah had also proclaimed (1:23-25).

After being spiritually reborn, we are to "grow up" in our salvation (2:2), progressing from spiritual infancy to maturity, as displayed in increasing love and righteousness. Our motive is greater intimacy with God (2:3; cf. Ps. 34:).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

"Born again" is a popular phrase, but not everyone knows what it means. Do you? It means that when a person trusts in Jesus for salvation from sin, he or she essentially starts a new life as a new person.

But without that trust, the Bible says you are "dead in your sins" (Col. 2:13). There's nothing you can do to save yourself. If you've never trusted in Jesus, let today be the start of your new life!

1 Peter 1:22-2:3

Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation. - 1 Peter 2:2

TODAY IN THE WORD

The word love is common today. From glib declarations in a Hallmark card to the newest pop song's promise, "I will love U 4ever," the idea of love has become devoid of meaning. A mere sentimentality, contemporary notions of love often express infatuation, lust, or need-driven feelings. So when we come to the call in today's passage to "love one another," it's easy to miss the challenge in Peter's exhortation.

Earlier, holiness was urged through self-control over evil desires (1 Peter 1:13-16). Now the exhortation to holiness continues with a call to love. The Christian life is not just internal; it is also about relationships with others. The call is explicit: "love one another deeply, from the heart" (1:22). And it's worth noting that the word "deeply" might better be translated "extensively" or "earnestly." It's the same word used to describe Jesus' longing prayer in Gethsemane (Luke 22:44).

This positive call to relational love is then repeated from the negative side in 2:1. All the named vices that we are called to extinguish from our lives are nothing less than attitudes and behaviors that lack love. Where there is "malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander," there can be no love in the community (2:2). This is no superficial call to niceness or civility, but rather to an earnest, sincere attitude and action of care among the Christian family.

Scripture also reveals the foundation of this new life of love. Our reading begins with a reminder that we have been purified already through obedience to the truth (1:22). The remainder of our passage makes it clear that the obedience Peter has in mind is the believer's faithful response to the gospel proclamation, the "word that was preached to you" (1:25). Compared to all other living things, which eventually wither and die, God's word is "living and enduring" (1:23). That creative, life-giving word of God which brought all things into existence is the same word now in us. It purifies, renews, and empowers us to live a life of true love.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

The call to love is not static; it requires attitude and action. But today's passage adds another ingredient necessary for Christian growth: nourishment, what Peter calls "pure spiritual milk" (2:2). So important is this spiritual food that he compares us to a hungry infant craving to be fed. Do you see the growth of true love in your own spiritual life? If not, perhaps you need to recommit yourself to the regular spiritual nourishment of God's Word. Don't just taste it; feed on it, and grow!

1 Peter 2 Devotionals

1 Peter 2:1 The story is told that author Edgar Allen Poe died in 1849 in a drunken stupor while lying in a Baltimore gutter. But a new look at the medical evidence from Poe's last days shows that the writer was not drunk, but suffering from rabies. Furthermore, he did not die on the street, but in a hospital.

So how did the false story get started? It may have been concocted by Poe's doctor. A strong temperance advocate, he might have wanted to turn the writer's death into a propaganda lesson about the evils of alcoholism.

Whatever Edgar Allen Poe's personal shortcomings were, it appears that his reputation has suffered from more than a century of slander. It's a classic case. Like most slander, the story contains a kernel of truth. Poe was seen in a bar acting strangely shortly before his death, and he did drink occasionally. But these facts did not contribute to his death. Nonetheless, the slanderous account endured for more than one hundred years.

The Bible warns: ""Do not slander one another." Slander has no purpose but to tear down the character and reputation of its target. It is often built on just enough truth to make it believable, especially to ears receptive to gossip. But slander inflicts damage that is almost impossible to undo. That's one reason it has no place in the family of God.

James links slander with a violation of the law of God, saying that the person who slanders a brother or a sister in Christ sets himself above the law. There is only one Person who is higher than the law: God, the Lawgiver and Judge.

In what way is slander the same as judging a fellow Christian? In many cases, the person spreading slander has made a judgment about another person's motives, which we learned earlier this month is a very dangerous step to take (see February 6).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Slanderous gossip can be passed on only when there are ears and mouths willing to do the job.

Besides refusing to listen, there is an effective way to silence slander. Tell the speaker that you won't listen unless he or she agrees that the two of you will go to the person named and confirm the facts of the case. If the ""juicy bit"" is merely a second-hand rumor, your offer will likely be refused.

1 Peter 2:1 James 4:11-12;

TODAY IN THE WORD

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1 Peter 2:1-3: Like many doting new fathers, President William Howard Taft was delighted with the birth of his first child, Robert. The elder Taft, writing in 1890, called his son "the finest seven-month-old boy in the country" and referred to the nightly "interviews" he and Mrs. Taft were obliged to have with their infant son.

Any parent of a newborn knows that those nightly "interviews," as Taft called them, are really feedings. A baby doesn't try to hide or deny his hunger. He isn't hypocritical about it either, pretending he wants milk for any purpose other than to satisfy his hunger.

This is the way God wants us to approach His Word. If we are going to experience the full benefit of its nourishment, we need to rid ourselves of the attitudes that block God's work in our lives. Today's text contains five sins that can sour the "pure spiritual milk" of the Word within us.

These sins of the heart and the lips are for the most part self-explanatory. Peter borrows from one of them to show how God's Word is utterly different from anything that is tainted with sin. He calls the Word "pure," the opposite of the word used in verse 1 for "deceit."

There is nothing deceitful at all in God's Word. "The words of the Lord are flawless... purified seven times," the psalmist writes (Ps. 12:6). We don't need to worry that we will receive anything but pure spiritual nourishment when we take in the Scriptures.

And the goal of being nourished, of course, is to grow. Good parents don't feed their babies just to silence their cries. Feeding on milk is part of the growth process.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Everyone knows how much newborn babies crave the milk they need to live and grow on. Nothing else can satisfy them.

Wouldn't it be great if we as God's people felt that same kind of intense hunger for His Word? We can!

One key to developing that kind of hunger is found in verse 3 of today's reading. If you have "tasted that the Lord is good," you'll want more. In what ways have you tasted the Lord's goodness over the past few months or weeks

1 Peter 2:1-10

You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God. - 1 Peter 2:9

TODAY IN THE WORD

Dr. Joseph Stowell remembers seeing railroad crossing signs from his childhood that said, "Look, Listen, and Yield." Dr. Stowell says this combination of alertness and submission is not only a good formula at railroad crossings, but also an excellent pattern for Christians to follow in their relationship with God.

The apostle Peter would say amen to this formula. The apostle was writing to Christians living as aliens in the world, to encourage them in the face of suffering and to urge them to respond as Jesus Christ would. To do this successfully, these believers needed to be alert (see 1 Peter 5: and to yield to God's will for them. God calls us to follow the same example.

We learned that God's will for us is our holiness (1 Peter 1:15-16). Holiness is a big concept, so Peter clarified its meaning. Holiness means living with a reverence for God that takes into account the high price He paid to save us. It also involves loving other Christians with a pure love that avoids hypocrisy.

Living in this way is possible because we have been given new life through the gospel (1:12) that Peter and the other apostles preached to the church. Part of Peter's Spirit-inspired preaching urged believers to grow spiritually the way a baby grows naturally-- by taking in solid nourishment.

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student of the Old Testament, Peter knew that the prophets had likened the coming Redeemer to a stone. The apostle had seen the Stone, Jesus Christ, with his own eyes and had heard Jesus refer to Himself as such (compare v. 7 with Matt. 21:42).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Today we don't have to bring an animal sacrifice to a priest, so that he might offer the animal's blood as a temporary covering for sin.

1 Peter 2:4-8 Perhaps your church has a cornerstone inscribed with the date your church was built and maybe a Scripture verse. You may have been present when this cornerstone was laid and the building dedicated.

Although cornerstones today are largely ceremonial--sometimes even hollowed out for a time capsule--ancient buildings had massive cornerstones to support their weight. Because cornerstones were essential, they became a metaphor for a foundation. Psalm 118 describes the nation Israel as a cornerstone, but one that had been rejected by other nations yet chosen by God (v. 22). God's vindication of the nation produced great joy (vv. 23-24).

Centuries later Jesus used the Parable of the Wicked Tenants (Matt. 21; Mark 12; Luke 20) to apply this psalm to Himself, likening Himself to Israel--rejected by humans but vindicated and exalted by God.

Perhaps while reflecting on this very parable, Peter also wrote about Jesus, the Cornerstone. But since a cornerstone is used in a building, we may wonder what type of building would have Jesus as its cornerstone? Notice how today's passage from Peter begins by calling Jesus the Living Stone (v. 4). What's more, all believers are described as living stones who are precious to God and who are being built into a spiritual house of worship (v. 5).

In addition to Psalm 118, Peter also quoted Isaiah 28:16--today's verse. This beautiful passage probably first had the massive stonework of the temple in mind, alluding to the abiding, unshakable presence of the Lord. The one who trusts in this chosen, precious Cornerstone will never be put to shame (1 Peter 2:6).

Knowing that Jesus is our Cornerstone is a marvelous source of comfort. He is our stability, our firm foundation, the solid rock of our strength.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Psalms and hymns are filled with metaphors for Jesus' foundational nature. For example, in Psalms 18:2 and 31:2, the Lord is a rock and a fortress. In Psalm 61:3, the Lord is a strong tower.

1 Peter 2:4-9 More than 120 years after General George Custer and his 7th Cavalry were destroyed at the Little Bighorn River in southern Montana, the famous battlefield is adding a new memorial stone. A monument was erected in 1881 to honor Custer and the soldiers and Indian scouts who fell with him. Now the National Parks Service has announced plans to add another monument in tribute to the Sioux, Cheyenne, and Arapaho warriors who defeated Custer on June 25-26, 1876.

Memorial stones are important markers. The Bible speaks of another important stone--not an historical monument to people now dead, but a "living Stone" and a living Person, Jesus Christ (v. 4).

In today's Scripture reading Peter shifts his thought from our desire for the Word of God to our longing for the God of the Word. The coming to Jesus that Peter has in mind is clearly not salvation, since the verb form suggests a repeated coming. What the apostle is talking about is our fellowship with Christ, the heart of our Christian experience.

Peter's picture of Jesus as a cornerstone, rejected by some but precious to others, is borrowed from the prophets, particularly Isaiah. The cornerstone is that stone on which a building rests, which gives it its visible support.

Jesus the Messiah came as Israel's cornerstone, but the nation rejected Him. Its leaders stumbled over Jesus because they disobeyed His message of repentance and faith in Him.

As Jesus' apostle, Peter felt the sting of that rejection. But he was also privileged to participate in the construction of God's new building, the church.

Notice the lofty language Peter uses in verse 5 to describe the church. We are a "spiritual house" and a "holy priesthood." Priests offer sacrifices, so we offer ourselves as living sacrifices to God and give Him a sacrifice of praise (Rom. 12:1-2; Heb. 13:15). As God's priests must be holy, so we are called to be holy (1 Peter 1:15-16).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

The picture of the church as a group of "living stones" formed into a spiritual house tells us that for believers in Jesus Christ,

church is not optional.

Someone has said that if Christ was willing to lay down His life for the church, it shouldn't be a problem for us to show up regularly in our churches.

1 Peter 2:4-9; Colossians 3:1-4

You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house. - 1 Peter 2:5

TODAY IN THE WORD

One of the world's most famous gems is the Hope Diamond. The story goes that a French merchant purchased an enormous 112-3/16-carat diamond. The diamond, most likely from India, was described as having a "beautiful violet" color. The merchant sold the diamond to King Louis XIV of France in 1668. Many of its owners experienced bad luck and even death, which led to the association of the gem with its unfortunate legend. Over the years, the diamond passed through the hands of royalty and wealthy businessmen, and along the way, it was recut and shaped to its present 45.52 carats. Although now a fraction of its original weight, the diamond is still a magnificent treasure on permanent display in the Smithsonian.

Precious stones do not go unnoticed. They are valued, displayed, treasured, and fought over. They are used as a tribute to one's love when placed in an engagement or anniversary band. So it is noticeable that God compares us, as well as His Son, to living stones "chosen by God and precious to him" (1 Peter 2:4).

In Colossians, our value is linked to Christ. Paul explains that since we have been raised with Christ into a new life (v. 1), our focus should not be on things here on earth, but on eternal things. Our new life, says Paul, is "hidden with Christ in God" (v. 3). To be hidden means that our own selfish desires are submitted to Christ. We are invisible, so that Christ can become visible in our lives.

The word hidden also carries with it the idea of protection. When a gem is very valuable, it is often hidden to protect it from theft or destruction. Our lives, our very identity, is hidden safely in Christ. No one can take or destroy what is safely hidden with God. Scripture tells us that our one gem becomes part of a larger dwelling, "a spiritual house" offering sacrifices acceptable to God. Together, our precious gem becomes transformed into something immensely valuable to our Creator.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Our lives and our identities are hidden in Christ—protected and being transformed to be more like Him. Spend time in prayer today asking the Holy Spirit to show you any areas where you are tempted to shine your own light or promote your own identity. Sometimes we do this out of fear or in order to feel in control. Ask the Lord to help you remember that when you are hidden in Christ, you are safe and fully loved.

1 Peter 2:4-10; Hebrews 10:24-25

You are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. - 1 Corinthians 6:19

TODAY IN THE WORD

There's nothing unusual about cars pulling to church parking lots on Sunday morning. But unlike other churches, worshipers remain in their cars at the Daytona Beach Drive-In Christian Church, listening to the service through speakers attached to their car windows. An average of 700 people choose this as their weekly dose of church. Yet one essential aspect of worship seems to be lacking—the fellowship of believers worshipping together.

Notice the corporate emphasis in 1 Peter 2. First, believers are like living stones, who come to Christ, the Living Stone, to form a new spiritual house. No temple was ever built with just one stone! In fact, this spiritual house can add an infinite number of new stones. Second, notice the group terms in verses 9 and 10: a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God. These titles first described the nation Israel and are here also applied to Christians. Finally, notice that one of the privileges that we've received is to offer up spiritual sacrifices (v. 5). We'll talk more about this tomorrow, but for now it's important to realize that few sacrifices were offered in isolation. Instead, the Levitical sacrifices frequently involved the entire community. Using language borrowed from the Old Testament, Peter described the worshipping community in terms of a group, not just individuals.

When we worship as part of a community, God shows us how we've been incorporated into something much bigger than our own self—we've become part of the body of Christ. That's why it's important to meet together with other believers. Many people say that they can have just as meaningful a time with God in their garden on Sunday morning than being in a church. But Hebrews 10 shows us that we can't grow in love and good deeds in isolation. In community, we grow closer to God and to each other than we ever could alone.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

It's possible to attend a "drive-in church" even if you leave your car and sit in a pew on Sunday morning. Every church has people who show up just after the service has started and leave a few minutes early. But worship is more than a place and a certain time. Worship involves a vibrant community of living stones joined together in Christ. True worship binds believers together as they experience abundant life with each other.

1 Peter 2:4-12

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God. - 1 Peter 2:9

TODAY IN THE WORD

In both ancient and modern buildings, the cornerstone is the key piece of architecture. The first stone put in place, it anchors the whole building. Because the rest of the structure is built on it, a weak or faulty cornerstone will result in instability. But a strong and level cornerstone will produce a stable building.

Using this metaphor of a building, Peter describes Christ as the cornerstone, and the church as God's house. But this is no inanimate structure. Both Christ and the church are "living" stones (vv. 4-5). Though rejected by men, Christ the cornerstone is chosen by God and has become the foundation of the church. Notice that Peter (who was himself named a "Rock" by Christ [Matt. 16:18]) draws our attention away from himself and places it upon Christ the "Stone." Jesus, not human leaders, is the true foundation of Christ's church.

So what does all this foundation talk lead to? A new identity. Built on the sure foundation of Christ, we are a "spiritual house," a "royal priesthood," a "chosen people," a "holy nation," and a "people belonging to God." All are wonderful descriptions of our new status before God, but don't miss the clear evocations for Peter's first readers: these are Old Testament descriptions of Israel (e.g. Ex. 19:6)! Gentiles, once "not a people," are now part of the family of God. God's love and protection shown to Israel in the Old Testament now belongs also to Christians. And this new identity, says Peter, all rests on our foundation stone, Christ.

Finally, Scripture points us to the purpose of our new identity and the reason God has shown us His mercy: the glory and praise of God. Part of being brought from darkness into His "wonderful light" should include telling others about God's mercy. We are also called to live in a way that compels unbelievers to "glorify God on the day he visits us" (v. 12). Whether through voice or action, our goal should be the praise and glory of our merciful God.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Edward Mote, a nineteenth-century English preacher, understood the security that comes with Christ as our sure foundation. The refrain of his now famous hymn echoes this theme from today's reading: "On Christ the solid Rock I stand / All other ground is sinking sand; / All other ground is sinking sand." Find the full words to this hymn in a hymnal or online, and sing them privately or with your family today to "declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (v. 9).

1 Peter 2:9 Dr. Joseph Stowell remembers seeing railroad crossing signs from his childhood that said, "Look, Listen, and Yield." Dr. Stowell says this combination of alertness and submission is not only a good formula at railroad crossings, but also an excellent pattern for Christians to follow in their relationship with God.

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TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Today we don't have to bring an animal sacrifice to a priest, so that he might offer the animal's blood as a temporary covering for sin.

1 Peter 2:9

TODAY IN THE WORD

Russ Lawson recounts the story of Minnie, a homeless and very unattractive little dog. When Minnie was about to be euthanized, Russ, a vet's assistant, was struck by her good disposition and decided to find her a home. In response to his ad, a teenager called and said that he wanted the dog for his grandfather. Warned that the dog looked strange, the young man was not deterred. When the family arrived to pick up Minnie, Russ waited anxiously to see what their reaction would be to her appearance. Minnie's tail wagged excitedly as she licked the grandfather's face and he stroked her lovingly—it was a perfect match! Minnie's funny appearance was no problem because the elderly man was blind.

Now you may be wondering what this has to do with our study! Well, in many respects, believers can be like funny-looking dogs. We're far from perfect, yet despite appearances, we're actually chosen—even royal and holy (1 Peter 2:9)!

1 Peter 2:9–12

Desires of the Flesh Wage Soul-War

Two decades ago, Woody Allen caught the media's attention when he began dating the adopted daughter of his then-partner, Mia Farrow. The odd couple married five years later. When pressed by a reporter from Time magazine, Allen remarked, "The heart wants what it wants." Though offensive to some, the words were nonetheless true. Whether a child secretly drops her veggies into the garbage, a college student polishes off a bag of cookies, or an older man turns to liquor for comfort, the heart—the flesh!—wants what it wants.

In writing to believers who were scattered geographically, Peter reminds them of their truest identity. They are both a "royal priesthood" and a "holy nation," belonging to God. Specifically, he wants to encourage them to live good lives so that others may glorify God. Knowing how "the heart wants what it wants," Peter urges his fellow Jesus-followers to "abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul" (v. 11). Peter recognizes in our human nature a pull between what the flesh—the sinful desires of our hearts, minds, and bodies—wants and the godly way. He knows that, as in any war, when one side gains ground, the other loses it!

To identify the sinful desires of the flesh as those that wage war against our souls is always very different than saying the body itself is bad. Peter is warning that following sinful desires will lead to death—but these desires do not define our identity. We are God's chosen people! We are God's holy nation! When we live in the direction of our true calling, we are able to live lives that testify to God's love and power.

Apply the Word

Self-esteem has been a topic of national conversation for years. Where should Christians find self-esteem? This passage tells us. If you struggle to know how and why your life is valuable, write 1 Peter 2:9 on a note card to carry throughout the day. This verse tells you who you are—God's special possession!—and your life purpose—declare His praises!

1 Peter 2:9-12 When the secular world tries to define what is "Christian," the result is often a bad case of confusion. Two recent surveys verify that fact. In one study, people suggested that the most widely read "Christian" magazine is the Reader's Digest! In another survey, the respondents said the most listened-to "Christian" radio programs were a popular newscast and a well-known conservative political talk show.

We should not be surprised by such thinking from the secular world. But the sad reality is that the Christian world often seems to be similarly confused about what makes believers distinctive.

Anyone who needs a short refresher course on this subject can find it in today's reading. In a series of rapid strokes, Peter paints a remarkably clear portrait of who we are in Christ and what we are supposed to be about as Christians.

That is, we Christians are not different because of the things we do or do not participate in. Nor are we different because we go to church. Fundamentally, we are different because God has called us out of the darkness of sin into the light of His salvation.

We are chosen because of the electing work of the Father (1:1-2). We are royal because we are children of the King. We are holy because God declared us righteous through the sacrifice of Christ. And we belong to God because He bought us with the precious blood of Christ (1:19).

That's a profound difference from the world! No wonder that we are considered ""aliens and strangers"" (2:11) in this world. But our uniqueness is not designed to make us feel proud or superior to unbelievers, or to cause us to withdraw and huddle together until Christ returns.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

There's nothing like a brightly shining light to drive away the darkness and dispel confusion.

The unsaved people around you may not have their theology straight, but it's hard to overlook or deny the witness of your life as it's lived for Christ. Is there something about your life that cannot be explained apart from the power of God working in you?

1 Peter 2:9-17

Live such good lives among the pagans that ... they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us. - 1 Peter 2:12

TODAY IN THE WORD

Schindler's list was recently found at a library in Australia. Viewers of the Oscar-winning movie, Schindler's List, know that in the waning days of World War II, industrialist Oskar Schindler typed a list of 801 Jewish names, people he then saved from the Nazi gas chambers. The actual list was rediscovered this April among the research notes of Thomas Keneally, author of Schindler's Ark, the book that was the basis for the movie. "It's an incredibly moving piece of history," said a librarian about the 13-page document. As one of the characters in the movie said, "The list is life."

God keeps an even more important list, the Lamb's Book of Life, and His list means eternal life (Rev. 21:27). Those who receive eternal life as His gift are empowered to live righteously. And as today's reading reminds us, righteous lives bring glory to God because He is absolutely righteous and holy. This is our identity in Christ—"a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation" (vv. 9-10). For what purpose do we belong to Him? To declare His praises. What did He do for us? He called us out darkness into light and gave us mercy. These spiritual facts constitute our identity as believers.

The main implication of this identity, as we've said, is to be righteous, which is here described as abstaining from sinful desires and living good lives (vv. 11-12). Such life makes us "aliens and strangers in the world," which is not characterized by holiness. We benefit because, while sin wars against our souls, righteousness spiritually nourishes them. Unbelievers benefit, because our good deeds are a witness. And God benefits, because through our good lives He receives glory from both believers and unbelievers. Specific examples of righteous living include submission to authority, respect for people, reverence for God, and love for the church (vv. 13-17).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Part of how our righteousness brings glory to God is our freedom in Christ. But Peter warned: "Do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God" (v. 16). Sometimes we tend to think of freedom as the license to do whatever we like. Genuine freedom, however, might be defined as the freedom to do whatever God likes. Freedom can be found in obedience and service, because God created us for a purpose and knows best how this purpose is to be fulfilled.

>1 Peter 2:11-17 When the Roman Empire fell to barbarian invaders in the fifth century AD, many people blamed the empire's collapse on Christianity, which was considered a cult opposed to the traditional Roman gods. One of the Christian faith's greatest defenders against this slanderous charge was the church father Augustine. This great theologian and leader wrote The City of God to demonstrate the superiority of Christianity over any worldly system.

The accusations against Christians when Rome fell were the culmination of a stormy relationship between the Roman Empire and Christians living in it. Christians clashed with the empire when they refused to worship the emperor or otherwise conform to its pagan culture. At times, the church was the target of intense, organized persecution by the authorities.

Such persecution doesn't seem to be the case in Peter's day. He indicated that, in general, Christians could expect the protection of the government if they did what was right. But the recipients of 1 Peter were still the target of slanderous charges by some people who wanted to discredit them and their faith.

Peter reminded his readers that the best answer of all to false charges was the true evidence of a Christian's "good deeds." Like the prophet Daniel, we need to live with such personal integrity and honesty that even our worst accusers can't make their charges stick.

One of the good deeds Christians are commanded to do is to show respect and submission to authority. That's not always easy, and there are times when obedience to Christ demands disobeying human rulers. Peter himself applied this exception (Acts 4:19-20).

Under most circumstances, however, the rule is obedience to authority, because God both requires it and blesses it. Notice the motivation for living holy lives with respect to human authority. We do so “for the Lord’s sake” because it is “God’s will” (vv. 13, 15).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Hopefully few of us will have serious problems with the government or other authority figures.

1 Peter 2:12 1 Corinthians 7:10-24

Live such good lives among the pagans that they may see your good deeds and glorify God. - 1 Peter 2:12

TODAY IN THE WORD

When George trusted in Christ as Savior, his wife Vicki thought he had lost his mind. At first she tolerated his new faith with an attitude of scorn, hoping that it would go away. George was determined, however, to live out his faith in his marriage. He also began to talk to Vicki, gently but persistently, about her need to accept Christ as her Savior. At first, Vicki reacted to George with anger. She even began to consider getting a divorce. When she saw that she was unable to shake his faith, she started to ask George questions and eventually surrendered and gave her heart to Christ.

Believers who have trusted in Christ while married to someone who does not know Him as Savior have an opportunity and a responsibility. They have been strategically positioned in the marriage as a representative of the gospel (v. 14). Those who were in these spiritually “mixed” marriages in Corinth needed this important reminder. Perhaps as a result of those who incorrectly taught that God wanted spouses to live a celibate lifestyle, they had begun to question whether they should remain in their marriages. Paul reminded both married Christians and Christians who were married to unbelievers that it was their duty to stay. Unfortunately, some unsaved spouses refused to remain in the relationship. In such cases, Paul’s counsel to the believing spouse who had done everything to preserve the marriage was to let the unwilling partner go (vv. 10-15).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Most of us have multiple roles. They may include friend, employee, spouse, and parent. The biblical concept of calling that Paul describes in these verses gives dignity and significance to all of them.

1 Peter 2:13-17 The New York subway system has been trying what some are calling a “grand experiment in efficiency and manners.” In an effort to cut subway train stops to less than 45 seconds and increase passenger flow, the New York City Transit Authority has painted orange arrows and black lines on the subway platform at Grand Central Station. The idea is for people to play by the rules by following the lines and making the train stops more efficient. After one month, officials reported that, to the surprise of more than one observer, commuters were for the most part obeying the rules.

Living as “aliens and strangers in the world” (v. 11) does not exempt believers from playing by the rules or the laws of society. On the contrary, we are also to set the example in this area.

This section of Peter’s letter gives us further indication that his readers (in the five provinces he listed in opening the epistle) were undergoing some sort of persecution for their faith in Christ. It does not seem likely that organized persecution of Christians by the Roman government had yet begun. That was still to come, and under those conditions believers would face torture and death.

In the case of Peter’s audience, it seems that the mistreatment was mostly in the form of slander and accusations (v. 12)--the “ignorant talk of foolish men” (v. 15) that was best answered by an exemplary life.

Since its earliest days, the church has wrestled with its relationship to the government. Peter himself gave us the principle that when obedience to the state and obedience to God are in conflict, “we must obey God rather than men!” (Acts 5:29; see also 4:19-20).

But Peter was also quick to admonish God’s people to obey God-ordained authority. He even went so far as to tell slaves to bear with unjust treatment by a harsh master.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Do you “play by the rules,” even when no one is looking and when cutting a corner might save you time and hassle?

Scoffing at traffic laws, misusing the boss’s property or time at work, or failing to show courtesy and respect for others in public are areas of Christian discipleship easily overlooked

1 Peter 2:13-25

Patience: Enduring Injustice

Be] strengthened with all power ... so that you may have great endurance and patience. Colossians 1:11

In Harriet Beecher Stowe's bestselling antislavery novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Tom, a middle-aged slave, is eventually sold into the hands of Simon Legree, a man so brutal and cruel that he eventually determines to kill Tom. "I hate [Tom]!" said Legree. "I hate him! And isn't he MINE? Can't I do what I like with him? Who's to hinder, I wonder?" Tom, however, bears up under Legree's hateful treatment—and never wishes his master ill.

Our passage might seem a strange one to consider as we turn our attention towards patience. Beginning with verse 18, Peter addresses slaves. We might consider this passage irrelevant to our 21st-century lives. It's true that slavery was outlawed in the United States more than a century ago, and it's also true that the slavery of the ancient Roman Empire, to which Peter refers, differed fundamentally from American slavery. Although slavery may feel like a topic from the history books, oppression and injustice still afflict our modern society. Some of us may be the victims of physical, emotional, and verbal abuse. even from those who would call themselves friends.

This passage does not defend abuse, nor does it commend our inaction. Setting aside cruelty and extreme abuse, however, this passage does teach what patience can look like in circumstances of injustice. When we are accused, manipulated, and maligned, we need look no further than Jesus to discover what patience looks like. Trust in God. Refuse to retaliate. Maintain integrity. Keep silent.

This self-restraint might seem impossible, but it is possible when we realize to Whom we belong. Like Christ, we are precious to God, and He will ultimately defend and rescue us.

Apply the Word

When has someone deliberately tried to sabotage your reputation? And what was your response? How could it have been more like the response of Jesus when nailed to a cross? Patience is the supernatural gift of the Holy Spirit, and it allows us to withstand trials and suffering, especially of what we would call the "undeserved" variety.

1 Peter 2:13-17

Live as free men, but ... live as servants of God. - 1 Peter 2:16

TODAY IN THE WORD

The spirit of the age is all about "rights": the right to make choices, the right to government provision, and the right to choose our own definition for relationships, to name a few. We have become a nation demanding our right to live any way we want to live. So often, however, this talk of rights is actually a demand for freedom without responsibility.

Scripture today challenges us to shift our thinking from the notion of "rights" to the notion of "freedom." But here's the catch: Christians are called to a freedom of submission. While today's passage calls us to "live as free men" (v. 16), the text as a whole demonstrates that Christian freedom really entails submission to others and to God.

Our passage begins with a call to submit to "every authority instituted among men" (v. 13). The call to be a good citizen may seem prosaic today, but for the early church it was a burning question. As aliens in the world who belong to the one true King, should Christians submit to secular authorities? Peter's answer is a resounding yes. Whether kings or governors, all who occupy the God-given role of authority are owed our respect and honor (vv. 13-14, 17). In fact, the respect we show to others may act as a witness to the world (v. 15).

The Roman government was not exactly friendly to early Christian communities, yet Peter calls on them to live in submission to others in the world. Why? In short, because our identity as "free men" (v. 16) is secure, and because such a life pleases God. We are called to submit "for the Lord's sake" (v. 13). Later, Peter tells us that "it is God's will" for us to live in humble submission (v. 15). Unlike the world's idea of freedom, Christian freedom is not an excuse for sinful living; rather, true Christian freedom is understanding our identity in Christ and living as servants of the God who has loved us in His Son. Only when we understand this will we be able to submit truly to those around us.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Scripture challenges us to think about freedom as a responsibility to respect and submit to others, especially those in positions of authority. We may not always agree with our political leaders, but we are called to honor them. Pray today for the President and all others in authority, using the words from the Book of Common Prayer: "Grant [them] wisdom and strength to know and to do thy will. Fill them with the love of truth and righteousness; and make them ever mindful of their calling to serve this people in thy fear."

1 Peter 2:13-17

Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honor the king. - 1 Peter 2:17

TODAY IN THE WORD

In 1924, the Teapot Dome scandal undermined the Harding Administration. In 1972, the story of the Watergate burglary broke, leading to the resignation of President Nixon. Political scandals have continued in the decades since, including the recent lobbying scandal and the behavior of Congressman Mark Foley with congressional pages. Every political party has had to face the sordid reality of elected leaders who act irresponsibly and illegally.

Some charge that a sensationalist media drives the search for scandal, but this doesn't account for the real, devastating consequences of failures in leadership. Leaders should be held to high standards of accountability, for when they fail, the consequences can be huge.

With regard to righteousness in the area of public leadership, Christians have a duty to love one another, fear God, and honor civil leaders (v. 17). Today's passage—written when Nero was emperor!—highlights the reality that it's God's will for believers to submit to government authorities (vv. 13-14; cf. Rom. 13:1-5). Society needs order and justice. Although leaders may behave wickedly, God remains sovereign over all human authorities, whether or not political leaders acknowledge Him.

When we submit to the proper authorities, it's also a good witness for the Lord. No one should be able to gossip that believers are troublemakers or rebels (v. 15). Our freedom in Christ is not to be a cover-up for sin or some sort of license to do as we please. Many Americans may have a view of freedom that looks like the mythic independent cowboy. But authority, submission, and responsibility still exist within true Christian freedom. All this is part of our identity as servants of God (v. 16).

As Americans, we're used to criticizing political leaders, to the point where many have grown cynical. Even when we disagree with government policies, we must be careful to give proper respect to our leaders.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Often Americans identify their political party with their Christianity, leading them to view the other party as spiritual as well as political enemies. One way you can follow the exhortation of Scripture is to pray for your political leaders—whether you voted for them, supported their policies, or even feel particularly politically minded. Pray for them with the confidence that God is sovereign and that the responsibilities and consequences of leadership are tremendous.

1 Peter 2:18-25 At the end of the 1500s, the Japanese church was thriving, with about 300 Christians. But at the beginning of the 1600s, the Japanese emperor decided that Christianity was a tool Western nations were using to gain political power. He issued a decree against the church and a time of severe persecution began.

In one incident, 70 Japan-ese believers were crucified upside-down on the beach at low tide. As the tide rolled in, the water rose higher on their bodies, finally covering their noses and mouths. The 70 Christians died by drowning and became martyrs for Christ.

The churches under Peter's care were also experiencing persecution, and the apostle wanted them to understand that suffering is part of the Christian life. His thoughts on this topic carry through to the end of chapter 2. Peter points to the sufferings of Christ as our ultimate example.

First, Peter states an obvious truth: suffering deserved punishment for doing wrong doesn't get us anywhere with God. If we are going to suffer, he says, make sure it's because we are doing right as Christians (see 1 Peter 4:16).

Peter has already told us several times how important it is for us to do good. Is he asking us to be ""do-gooders"" as the world uses that term? Hardly. Doing good in Peter's mind is the response of someone who has experienced salvation; good deeds are not themselves the path to salvation.

Verse 21 reminds us that for believers, suffering is not an accidental happening. We have been called to suffer as witnesses to the world of the character of Christ. We can imagine the images that must have been in Peter's mind as he recounted Jesus' sufferings and death, much of which Peter had witnessed.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Not all of the problems and setbacks we encounter in life are the result of our commitment to Christ.

But if you can point to a situation where you are making a sincere effort to do what is right, and yet you are suffering in some way for it, that's a different case. First, you need to know that you enjoy God's commendation for your determination to do right. And second, you need to realize that this is an opportunity for you to display the character of Christ to everyone involved.

1 Peter 2:18-25

If you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. - 1 Peter 2:20

TODAY IN THE WORD

A recent report from a mission board tells of a Christian in West Africa who was arrested and subjected to four days of intense pressure in an effort to make him renounce Christ. But the believer held firm, and as a result at least four people have put their faith in Christ. One of the new converts said of the mistreated Christian, "Nobody would endure what he endured for something that wasn't true."

This is a modern-day example of what Peter had in mind when he urged Christians to put up with suffering for the sake of Christ. The slave/master situation continues the theme of submission that Peter began in verse 13.

The closest equivalent today is the employer/employee relationship, and the message is the same. As believers, God calls us to submit to authority, even when that authority is not concerned with honoring God. That's not part of our natural instincts--which is why we need the supernatural power of God to respond as Christ did when He was mistreated.

The kind of Christian endurance Peter called for here is not just incidental. In other words, following Christ's example of enduring unjust treatment is something to which we are "called" as His disciples (v. 21). Jesus said, "If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first" (John 15:18).

Even though it may be hard, Peter presents the best possible motivations for obeying God in this area. The first motivation is our conscious awareness of God's presence with us when we suffer. By patiently putting up with mistreatment, we are demonstrating His grace to the world.

A second motivation is Christ's own example. He suffered for us in the way God asks us to suffer--except that Christ's sufferings in His crucifixion were infinitely greater. It took His wounds to win our salvation, our spiritual healing from the deadly disease of sin.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

We might not complain when we do something wrong and have to pay the price. But we might also be tempted to believe that every time we do the right thing, we should be rewarded.

1 Peter 2:18-25

To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example. - 1 Peter 2:21

TODAY IN THE WORD

In the 1982 blockbuster film, *Rambo: First Blood*, Vietnam War veteran John Rambo wandered into a town where he was mistreated by local authorities. Tension escalated when Rambo escaped and armed with military weapons and Green-Beret smarts, showed the full force of his anger and retaliation at the injustice he experienced. When asked to turn himself in, Rambo refused saying, "They drew first blood."

For the thousands of viewers that made *Rambo* such a popular film, something felt satisfying about seeing a man exact revenge in the face of clear injustice. But today's reading calls us to consider a different response. Continuing yesterday's theme of submission, Scripture teaches us what submission in an unjust world may cost: suffering (vv. 18-19). However, not only is suffering for doing good "commendable before God," Peter tells us that this is part of the Christian calling (vv. 19-21). If we are Christ-followers, then we should expect to follow Christ's suffering.

Look then at Christ's example. Quoting or alluding to Isaiah 53, Scripture presents Christ's response to the injustice He experienced. Without sin or deceit, Christ did not retaliate or hurl threats. Instead, He maintained a quiet confidence in the One who judges justly, God the Father (vv. 22-23). Confidence in a just Father is key! Christian suffering is more than grinning and bearing it; we take our suffering to God, trusting that His perfect justice will prevail in the end.

Scripture presents the salvific purpose of Christ's suffering. Through Christ's pain, we die to sin, live for righteousness, are made whole again, and are restored to our loving Shepherd (vv. 24-25). In other words, Peter reminds us that all injustice is a demonstration of our fallen world's need of Christ's redemptive healing. Rather than focus on the injustice we experience, we are called to see those who harm us as sinners in need of Christ's redemption. Only He can bring true healing and justice to our world.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Today's passage is challenging if taken seriously. We have all experienced suffering, injustice, and the temptation to seek personal

vengeance in some way. What situations do you face this week—in your workplace, neighborhood, or among family members—where you experience suffering and injustice, perhaps even because you're a Christian? Ask God's Spirit to let the focus of today's passage change the way you view your situation, that you may entrust your suffering to the just Judge and pray for those who harm you.

1 Peter 2:19-23 Twelve Filipino evangelists visited a camp of Muslim rebels last July to pray for a group of hostages. The extremists decided to seize the ministers as well, keeping them as additional hostages. They were held captive for three long months.

Finally, in early October, one of the evangelists escaped and was picked up by Filipino soldiers. After a brief battle between the soldiers and the rebels, the rest of the evangelists were also rescued, although the Muslims escaped with four other hostages.

Because of the turbulent political situation in the southern Philippines, these evangelists endured a harrowing ordeal. But no doubt they viewed themselves as suffering for the Lord. Jesus never said that following Him would be easy! In fact, to follow in His footsteps means we can expect the same kind of treatment He received (cf. John 15:18-21).

Peter taught that when suffering is unjustly received for doing good, then it is worthy of respect before God, no matter what people think. He even went so far as to say that believers are called to suffer. Why? "Because Christ suffered for you" (v. 21).

Jesus set the example. He did not sin against His persecutors, nor did He deceive them, threaten them, or retaliate against them. Instead, He put His trust in God, the ultimate and perfectly just Judge (v. 23). The word example means that we are to imitate Christ in everything, in the same sense in which an art student reproduces a well-known drawing.

In the big picture, because Christ suffered, we are to live holy lives, submitted to the will of God (1 Peter 2:24; 4:1-2). We can expect to suffer, as He did, and should count it a privilege to do so (Phil. 1:29). We know that our reward will be great in heaven (Matt. 5:10-12)!

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Here on earth, suffering occupies a key place in the Christian life. God uses it to shape us into the "likeness of His Son" (Rom. 8:29).

1 Peter 3 Devotionals

1 Peter 3:1-7 A magazine for Christian leaders published a cartoon that showed a pastor peering out anxiously from inside a World-War-II-style bunker, which was behind the pulpit. The well-protected pastor announced, "My text for today is 1 Peter 3:1-7."

Today, it's very socially and politically incorrect to suggest that marriage is built on a wife's loving submission and respect and a husband's loving tenderness and consideration.

We shouldn't be surprised that the world labels this concept outmoded, even dangerous. As the magazine cartoon suggests, Christians often seem just as reluctant to stand by what the Bible teaches. However, Peter lets us know that couples need these qualities for the success of their relationship. Moreover, this issue affects how God relates to us.

Tommy Nelson, whose insights on marriage we shared last week (see September 17), puts it on the line for married believers. "If your relationship to God does not show itself in being a tender husband and a responsive and respectful wife, then it is not penetrating the most essential area of your life."

This requires serious reflection. Our reading indicates how essential the relationship between a wife and husband is. Much of a woman's sense of self is tied to the way she presents herself, both outwardly and inwardly. The Bible has been accused of trying to shut away women at home in a subservient role, but that distorts Peter's message. Accepting her husband's leadership is not a statement of a wife's inferiority. Both partners are equally valuable before God.

Peter's caution against a woman investing her wealth and worth in her physical appearance to the detriment of her spirit reflects the same principle Jesus taught on several occasions. That is, believers cannot afford to invest their resources in things on earth to the neglect of eternal issues (Matt. 6:19-21; Luke 12:21).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

You may recall the blast of media criticism that erupted in 1998 when a major Christian group dared to state that a wife should "lovingly submit" to her husband"

A cartoon in a magazine for those in Christian ministry shows the front platform in a church, but instead of a pulpit there is a tank-like box with only a narrow opening at the top. Through the opening we can see the pastor's fearful eyes, widened in apprehension as he announces that his text for the morning is 1 Peter 3:1-7.

That cartoon is significant because it reveals the sense many believers have that when we venture onto the subject of submission, we are bound to get bad responses from all sides.

Peter didn't suffer from our modern tentativeness. He gave us the "straight stuff," just as Paul did. In fact, our text bears at least one important resemblance to the passage in Ephesians 5. Ephesians 5:22 links a wife's submission to her husband to her submission to Christ. Similarly, Peter calls wives to submit to their husbands with the same spirit of submission Christ showed in going to the cross.

Notice how several of Peter's themes surface in the context of marriage. The first theme is a Christian's submission to God-appointed authority, which Peter had just discussed in relation to government and individual masters.

A second theme is the Christian's calling to live such an exemplary life that no charge of misconduct can stick. Peter applies that principle to a truly "mixed marriage," a Christian married to a non-Christian. Just as believers in general are to win over unbelievers, or at least silence their criticism, by the purity of their lives (1 Peter 2:12, 15), so a believing wife can win over an unsaved husband by the quality of her life.

The woman who lives by these principles is a true daughter of Sarah, the classic example of a wife who honored her husband. A wife who lives this way need not fear what others may say or do.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

This is a great time for a Christian couple to reaffirm their love and devotion to Christ.

If you are married, ask your spouse to read this passage with you and pray together that God will help you be sensitive and considerate toward each other. Agree ahead of time that either person will be free to discuss whatever is on his or her mind.

1 Peter 3:1-7

Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. - Ephesians 5:21

TODAY IN THE WORD

The philosopher Plutarch argued that wives should submit to their husbands, and husbands should exercise control over their wives. In the ancient Greco-Roman world, family stability was equivalent to civil stability. Anything that jeopardized the family structure was considered subversive and dangerous to the order of the state.

At first glance, Peter's words would have appeared quite sensible to his contemporaries. Upon closer examination, however, we discover that Peter's exhortations on marriage roles offer something uniquely Christian. The key lies in the words, "in the same way" (vv. 1, 7). Peter is continuing his discourse on godly submission begun in 2:13 and continued through Christ's sacrificial suffering in 2:25. When we hear in today's passage the call for wives to submit to their husbands "in the same way," we must remember the context. Just as Christ humbly submitted Himself with the goal of our salvation, so wives are called to follow that example in submitting themselves to their husbands. Christian submission is another way of following Christ's example.

In particular, though, Peter has in mind a marriage in which the husband is not a believer (v. 1). Into that context, Scripture calls for wives to imitate godly women of old, like Sarah, and to exhibit "purity," "reverence," a "gentle and quiet spirit," and a focus on the inward beauty of the heart rather than mere outward appearances (vv. 2-6). And just as Christ's expression of humility and submission brought our salvation, so too a wife's humility may win over the husband to Christ (v. 1).

One might then anticipate Scripture calling husbands to exercise their authority in marriage or to demand submission from their wives. But instead, Peter calls husbands also to imitate Christ's humility (note "in the same way" of verse 7). Husbands are called to treat their wives with respect and consideration of their needs, all the time remembering that the wife's role in marriage in no way diminishes her exalted status as a co-heir of eternal life (v. 7). A differentiation of roles need not indicate an inequality of status and worth.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Today marks the third Sunday in the Advent season, and it's appropriate to consider our passage in light of the Christ's submission and humility at His first coming. As you reflect on your own marriage (or the marriages of those you know), do you see in these relationships an attempt to imitate Christ's example of humility and service? What would change if you approached all relationships this way, choosing self-giving and sacrifice over self-assertion? Choose to perform one action today that will reflect Christ's humility.

1 Peter 3:1-7

Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. - Ephesians 5:21

TODAY IN THE WORD

Martin Luther was a latecomer to marriage, but the great reformer established a loving and happy home with his wife, Katie von Bora. Luther wrote: "Married life is no jest to be taken lightly, but it is an excellent thing and a matter of divine seriousness... I have always taught that marriage should not be despised, but that it be regarded according to God's Word, by which it is adorned and sanctified."

Marriage, at least as the Bible presents it, is attacked in our culture today. One recent example is the firestorm of public criticism one Christian group endured for daring to suggest that the Bible instructs wives to practice loving submission toward their husbands.

Peter called for the same principle, because this is God's design for marriage. Most discussions tend to start with the objections and exceptions, and the potential for abuse of the principle of submission. These problems need to be addressed in light of God's intent, and not used to deny or avoid God's good purposes.

When Peter wrote this letter, he had a particular kind of marriage in mind, that of a Christian wife and an unbelieving husband. In this case, a wife's commitment to loving submission and to godly living can help lead her husband to Christ. God will bless the commitment of a wife who follows Christ's example and submits "in the same way" He did.

The God-given responsibilities of a husband and wife in marriage are not limited to a particular situation. Peter refers to Sarah and Abraham to show that the principle of submission and the reality of the "unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit" (v. 4) are God's will for wives with believing husbands.

Peter's teaching is not one-sided. Husbands also have an obligation to act "in the same way" as Christ (v. 7). They have the lifelong assignment and delight of knowing their wives so intimately, and loving them so completely, that they can "be considerate" and respectful in the way they treat their wives.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

You won't find many Christians who want their prayers to be hindered. But God says that it will happen in a home where a husband and wife aren't in right relationship with each other.

1 Peter 3:1-17

When he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. - 1 Peter 2:23

TODAY IN THE WORD

Iranian pastor Youcef Nadarkhani was arrested and convicted for his Christian faith in the fall of 2011. When asked to repent, Nadarkhani answered, "Repent means to return. What should I return to? To the blasphemy that I had before my faith in Christ?" "To the religion of your ancestors, Islam," replied the judge. "I cannot," answered Nadarkhani, who potentially faced the death penalty for his alleged crime.

Nadarkhani joins the throngs of Christians who have suffered because of their faith in Jesus Christ. Throughout history and even today, Christians face the potential of losing their jobs, their houses, even their very lives simply because they profess faith in Jesus. Fear is no doubt an unwelcome companion in those moments of testing.

Peter writes to those suffering unjustly in our passage today. He encourages them not to give way to fear. Notice what happens when fear takes root. It doesn't always look like trembling cowardice, as if fear always drives us into the shadows to hide. Sometimes fear takes on a quality of fierceness. It becomes aggressive, presenting itself as revenge or retaliation. Because of fear, we can be tempted to simply take matters into our own hands and exact justice in a way we see as most fitting. We repay evil for evil. We dole out consequences to those who have hurt or oppressed us in some way.

Our actions betray not only our fear but also our lack of faith. What we've forgotten is God's rightful role as Judge. In His kingdom, evil is not tolerated. We don't need to fear that somehow, those who have wronged us are going to escape the judgment of God.

When we suffer and when we're afraid, we need to cast our eyes on Christ. He is our ultimate example. He didn't despair in His suffering—He entrusted Himself to God.

There can be an incredible peace even when we're most afraid because we know that God hasn't failed us and continues acting as the Good Shepherd of our souls.

APPLY THE WORD

Fear, when masked as anger or revenge, can sometimes be hard to identify. Are there relationships in your life marked by fear? You find yourself defensive, even aggressive toward those who have betrayed your confidence or wounded you in some way. Christ Himself suffered unjustly. He was falsely accused and insulted. How might you live according to His example today, blessing those who have hurt you?

1 Peter 3:8-12 In a classic case of knowing versus doing, a recent survey published in the Journal of Health Education reported that only eight percent of 100 people polled met the so-called "Five-A-Day" goal, the recommendation to eat five servings of fruits and vegetables each day to maintain good health. The researchers pointed out that despite the widespread knowledge that eating fruits and vegetables is important, there is a great gap between what people know and what they actually do.

Every sincere Christian understands that gap. When it comes to godly living, most of us know far more than we do. Today's reading gives us more of the meat-and-potatoes (or we should say, fruits-and-vegetables) exhortations that form the basics of the Christian life. But Peter also gives us encouragement to act on what we know.

Having just dealt with husbands and wives, the apostle now draws the circle as wide as he can by aiming his words at all Christians. But one thing that does not change is his theme of the way believers should respond to ill treatment.

Although Peter does not mention Jesus by name until verse 15, it's obvious that He is our best example when it comes to returning good for evil. Peter has already said that Jesus did not retaliate when He was slandered (1 Peter 2:23).

Jesus is also our example when it comes to love for one another as brothers and sisters in His body. In verse 9 of today's reading we can hear echoes of the Beatitude concerning the blessing of being ill-treated for Christ (Matt. 5:11-12).

This is Peter's encouragement for us to be eager to do good. Even if our good results in suffering, we receive a blessing from God. And since life deals out some measure of suffering to everyone, it is better to suffer for doing good (v. 17) than for doing wrong.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

One way you can be prepared to give an answer for your hope is by thinking through and organizing your personal testimony.

One simple outline you can use is to think about what your life was like before you met Christ, what He did for you in salvation, and how your life has been different since you have known Him.

1 Peter 3:8-12

Whoever would love life and see good days ... must turn from evil and do good. - 1 Peter 3:10-11

TODAY IN THE WORD

A nutritional health supplement called "Good Days Positive Mood Formula" boasts the ability to calm the mind and body while energizing you for the day. In its online ad, "Good Days" promises to "increase your confidence" and give you a "healthier, happier way of living." In fact, the makers of "Good Days" are so confident in its promise, you can receive a 30-day trial absolutely free!

By the world's standards, "good days" mean strong self-esteem, bubbly happiness, and lots of energy. But Scripture provides an alternative for those who "would love life and see good days" (v. 10). Indeed, today's entire passage is a kind of biblical prescription for a life of blessing. Earlier, Peter reminded his readers that they were called to follow Christ's example of suffering (2:21); paradoxically, he now declares that those same readers are called to a life of blessing (v. 9).

What does this look like? First it entails a life that blesses others. Scripture calls us to a life concerned with the well-being of others. Our lives should exhibit peace and harmony, sympathy toward others, love for our new family in Christ, compassion, humility, honest speech, and a biblical response to sin in which we repay evil not with more evil, but with blessing (vv. 8-11). Speaking of this life of blessing to others, Peter declares, "to this you were called" (v. 10).

A life of blessing means more than blessing others; it also means we "inherit a blessing" as well (v. 9). Given Peter's earlier exhortations about suffering, he clearly recognizes that the Christian life may be full of pain. Nonetheless, such suffering does not negate the gift of blessing. For one reason, such blessing is an "inheritance" from God (v. 9). It is His gift to us that cannot be taken

away, no matter what our earthly circumstances may bring. But also, because true blessing means having a God who truly cares for us (v. 12). A biblical life of blessing has more to do with our relationship with God than with what the world might deem “good days.”

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

A large part of today's reading emphasized our calling to be a blessing to others, both to our siblings in Christ and to those who may intend our harm. How will you bless others today? Perhaps you might give a tangible gift to someone in need? Or present an encouraging word to a struggling friend? Or even offer your forgiveness over a painful insult? As you go about your day today, seek for ways to offer blessing in someone's life, knowing that “to this you were called” (v. 9).

1 Peter 3:8-12

All of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble. - 1 Peter 3:8

TODAY IN THE WORD

C. S. Lewis offers these thoughts on what it means for us to be members of Christ's body, the church. “No one is like anyone else in the body of Christ. All are 'members': all are different and necessary to the whole and to one another; each is loved by God individually... How being a member of a body differs from inclusion in a collective may be seen in the structure of a family. The members are not interchangeable. If you subtract any one member, you have not simply reduced the family in number, you have inflicted an injury on its structure.”

Lewis notes some great reasons for treating each other the way Peter commanded in the verses we read today. Since every member of Christ's body is uniquely valuable to Him and equally important to every other member, it's vital for all of us to care for each other.

Peter wanted to emphasize his message to the church. The words used in the five exhortations of verse 8 are rare in the New Testament. Four of these words are found only in this passage in this form, and the word for “compassionate” appears just twice in Scripture.

How does God want us to treat our Christian brothers and sisters? We're to “live in harmony,” or be “like-minded.” This suggests not uniformity, but unity of heart and purpose. This is possible when we are able to love, understand, and sympathize with each other, and humbly put others ahead of ourselves.

But what happens when our love is met with insult and evil? In verse 14, Peter's words echo those that he heard from Jesus Himself: “Bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you” (Luke 6:28). Reacting with a blessing instead of revenge opens us to a special blessing from God. Peter appeals to Psalm 34:12-16 to restate and reinforce his point.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

On Sunday, we urged you to commit to God a situation in which you may be the victim of unfair treatment (see the June 11 study).

1 Peter 3:13-17

But in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks. - 1 Peter 3:15 (ESV)

TODAY IN THE WORD

In the United States, Good Samaritan laws provide protection from lawsuits against individuals who attempt to assist someone suffering a medical emergency. The aim of such laws is to encourage passersby to help someone in need without fear of being sued for unintentional injury or wrongful death. In other words, those who try to help someone else are protected by law in the event an unintended injury may result from the aid offered.

The idea that someone who does good should be protected from harm is found in today's reading as well (v. 13); yet, Peter quickly admits that this principle is not always followed. As Christians, we will sometimes suffer for doing what is right (v. 14). And this brings us back to a running theme in our study: how should Christians respond to suffering and persecution?

First, Scripture encourages us to have the right attitude. Persecution is not the opposite of blessing (v. 14a). Jesus said as much in His Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5). Another aspect of a biblical attitude includes exchanging fear for boldness (v. 14b). We need not fear what humans can do to us; instead, we reserve reverence for God, and Peter cites Isaiah 8 to make his point. Rather than fear human persecution, we are called “to honor Christ the Lord as holy” (v. 15, ESV). If we regard Christ alone as truly holy, then we live in hope rather than in fear.

Second, because we live with hope in Christ, our suffering may become an opportunity for witness. To those who inquire about our

response to suffering, we are called to give a gentle answer, grounded in our “fear” or reverence of Christ, a more accurate translation than the NIV’s “respect” (v. 15b). And when we have no opportunity to speak, Scripture reminds us that our behavior provides a witness to Christ as well (v. 16-17). A consistent witness of word and deed, especially in moments of persecution, brings glory to God and is faithful to His good will.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Do you believe that persecution and blessing can exist side by side? Are you able to rejoice at your suffering and to use it as an opportunity for witness the way Peter did in Acts 5:41-42? These are not easy words, and they require God’s grace in us to respond this way. Ask God for a renewed attitude toward suffering in your own life, and commit to use those moments as faithful and consistent witness for Christ in both word and deed.

1 Peter 3:13-17

Even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. - 1 Peter 3:14

TODAY IN THE WORD

The great Colonial-era pastor and theo-logian Jonathan Edwards once wrote, “The truly humble Christian is clothed with lowliness, mildness, meekness, gentleness of spirit and behavior. These things are just like garments to him. Christian humility has no such thing as roughness, or contempt, or fierceness, or bitterness in its nature... Yet in searching and awakening the conscience, [the Christian] should be a son of thunder... He should be like a lion to guilty consciences, but like a lamb to men and women.”

The person Edwards was describing fits the profile 1 Peter presents to us in today’s reading. Christians must be humble and yet fearless, with a powerful testimony for the Savior that makes them like lions in the presence of their false accusers. Both humility and courage are qualities especially important in situations where believers may have to suffer because of their faith.

We said that Peter’s purpose for writing his first letter was to help Christians live godly lives in a hostile world, and also to know how to handle persecution in a Christ-like way. In verse 13, this theme of suffering for Christ comes to the forefront.

In this verse Peter reiterated his counsel for Christians facing persecution: be sure that if you suffer, it’s for doing right, not for doing wrong. Continue to do what’s right and entrust your ultimate vindication to God, because He will give special blessings to those who stand firm in the faith.

Peter’s reference to Isaiah 8:12-13 is interesting because it helps to explain his reference to fear. Isaiah was telling godly Israelites not to fear the coming Assyrian invasion that would result in captivity and exile for the northern kingdom. Because these righteous people feared the Lord, He would take care of them even in frightening times.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

A major part of the “answer” we should be ready to give at any time involves being able to explain the gospel in clear and simple terms.

1 Peter 3:14 The great Colonial-era pastor and theo-logian Jonathan Edwards once wrote, “The truly humble Christian is clothed with lowliness, mildness, meekness, gentleness of spirit and behavior. These things are just like garments to him. Christian humility has no such thing as roughness, or contempt, or fierceness, or bitterness in its nature... Yet in searching and awakening the conscience, [the Christian] should be a son of thunder... He should be like a lion to guilty consciences, but like a lamb to men and women.”

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TODAY ALONG THE WAY

A major part of the “answer” we should be ready to give at any time involves being able to explain the gospel in clear and simple terms

1 Peter 3:18 We've all seen cartoons featuring an oddly-dressed crank who carries a sign reading ""The End Is Near."" We laugh at the image, feeling superior. Perhaps the man is not quite sane. Perhaps he simply wants to attract attention. We don't really think he has ""inside information"" about the world's end or that his message is true.

Unfortunately, that is how the world sees us as followers of Christ. People without God often view Christians as cranks, perhaps amusing or annoying, but not as people with a vital message of life. Jesus warned His disciples it would be this way. Just as the world misunderstood and persecuted Him, so it misunderstands and persecutes believers in Him.

That has been true throughout human history, as Noah could attest. He preached for 120 years, but his neighbors only thought he was a crazy man. In today's text, Peter referred to Noah's ministry to illustrate the necessity of keeping a good testimony in spite of unjust persecution.

We'll get to the difficult verses in this text below, but first we need to pause at verse 18, a text about which there can be no argument. One writer has called this verse a rich summary of the cross. It refers to the substitutionary nature of Christ's atonement, its finality, and its triumph in the resurrection.

In verse 19, Peter states that Christ preached to ""spirits in prison."" And verse 20 seems to indicate that the Spirit of the preincarnate Christ was speaking through Noah as he preached. Peter had earlier said the Spirit of Christ spoke through the Old Testament prophets (1 Pe. 1:11).

Some believe that Christ went to Hades in His spirit while His body was in the grave to announce His victory to human beings or to fallen angels. There is evidence for this interpretation, but the other explanation better fits the context.

Verses 21-22 get us into another controversy. Here we reject any notion that baptism saves us. We are saved by the death and resurrection of Christ.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Evidently some readers of 1 Peter needed to take a step of obedience that would please Christ and draw them closer to Him

1 Peter 3:18-22

Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. - 1 Peter 3:18

TODAY IN THE WORD

A U.S. Senate committee convened during the Civil War to investigate a rumor that Abraham Lincoln's wife, Mary, was disloyal to the Union. The president himself appeared before the committee and said, "I, Abraham Lincoln, President of the United States, appear of my own volition before this committee to say that I, of my own knowledge, know it is untrue that any member of my family holds treasonable communication with the enemy." Lincoln then exited the Senate chamber, leaving the committee members speechless. Without another word being spoken, the investigation was dropped.

Lincoln's eloquent statement of loyalty captures the spirit behind Peter's plea for Christians to be loyal to Christ. If Jesus is first in our loyalties, we don't have to fear anyone. Since Jesus was faithful in the face of the worst possible injustice and suffering, we can remain true to Him in our hard times.

Mention of Jesus' death led Peter to the truth of His resurrection. The Savior was "made alive by the Spirit." This reference is followed by three verses (vv. 19-21) that are hard to interpret with absolute certainty.

Some people use Peter's references to baptism to teach that baptism saves us, but that idea is refuted by many other passages that clearly teach salvation by God's grace, through faith alone (Eph. 2:8-9). We must not interpret the Bible's clear teaching in light of more obscure passages. Instead, we should interpret difficult passages in light of Scripture's clear teaching. So we conclude that Peter wasn't teaching that salvation was affected by baptism.

But how were Noah and his family "saved through water"? (v. 20). Noah, like Christ, was faithful to God despite rejection and ridicule. As the eternal God, Jesus preached in the person of the Holy Spirit through Noah to the people of Noah's day.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Peter left no doubt as to the power that saves us. It is not our actions that save us, but the death and resurrection of Christ.

1 Peter 3:18-22

He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit. - 1 Peter 3:18

TODAY IN THE WORD

Some things just go together. In an exercise for youngsters, the teacher gives one word and the students respond with the appropriate match: peanut butter and jelly; lock and key; ball and glove; Bert and Ernie. These words seem incomplete without the other.

This is true when we speak of our redemption in Christ. Today's reading portrays Christ's death and resurrection as the basis of our response to persecution. Whatever the difficulties we may face for Christ's sake, Scripture reminds us of what Christ has already accomplished. He died "for our sins" in order to "bring you to God" (v. 18). But Christ's death alone is incomplete. We also need Christ's victorious resurrection. He was "made alive by the Spirit" (v. 18) and has ascended to God's right hand (v. 22). If Christ's suffering gives an example of patience and humility, Christ's resurrection gives us courage because we know the triumph we share with Christ.

How then do verses 19 through 21 fit into this encouraging picture? Commentators disagree over the meaning of these verses. Some argue that the "spirits in prison" (v. 19) are fallen angels held until the day of judgment. Early Jewish tradition, as well as passages like 2 Peter 2:4-5 and Jude 6, support this view. If correct, Christ became a herald of victory over death, and is an encouraging picture of the victory we share with Him. Others argue that the "spirits" are disobedient men during the time of the Flood who refused the Spirit's call for repentance through Noah (see 2 Peter 2:5 for support).

Either way, Peter uses the days of Noah as an example of when wickedness flourished, yet in the end, God's judgment and vindication conquered. Noah being saved through the waters of the Flood becomes a "symbol" of Christian salvation through baptism (vv. 20-21). But how does baptism save? Through its connection with Christ's resurrection (v. 21b; cf. Rom. 6:1-11). We face suffering in a fallen world, but we do so with hope because our glorious end is already revealed in the resurrection of Christ.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Today's passage reminds us that we need both Christ's death and resurrection, not only to accomplish redemption, but to provide a Christian response to suffering in a fallen world. Which might you need to focus on? Christ's patient and humble death which brings us to God, or His glorious resurrection which promises us triumph over sin and death? Meditate on one or the other today (or both!) as you consider your own response to the suffering and injustice of a fallen world.

1 Peter 4 Devotionals

1 Peter 4:1-11 Earlier this year, George Bush fulfilled a 52-year-old promise he had made to himself when he parachuted from an airplane and landed at the Army's Yuma Proving Ground in Arizona. The former President was a World War II bomber pilot who had had to bail out of his plane over the Pacific Ocean after it was hit by enemy fire on September 2, 1944. Since that day, Bush had promised himself that one day he would sky-dive for the fun of it. And at the age of 72, he did so.

When it comes to fulfilling these sorts of promises, no real harm is done if there is a long delay between promise and fulfillment or even if the fulfillment never comes. But when it comes to the duties God is calling His people to fulfill, we can't afford to delay our obedience.

This is the spirit with which Peter comes to the final portion of his first letter. The apostle, like his brother Paul, felt a sense of urgency regarding the lateness of the hour and urged his readers to get on with the business of serving Christ.

Verse 1 brings us back to the theme of suffering. And once again, Peter draws on the example of Jesus Christ to teach believers how to respond to life's trials. We need to take the same attitude toward suffering that Christ took, which was to accept it as the will of God.

When we do this, it helps us get rid of sinful attitudes that might cause us to become bitter toward God and others, lash out at those causing our pain, or give in to sinful desires that promise to ease our suffering.

Peter's audience had already spent enough time living like pagans (v. 3). Coming to Christ meant a complete break from their old

way of life, a commitment these believers needed to make real in their experience.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Critics say one proof the Bible isn't fully true is that its authors were wrong in expecting Christ's soon return.

But that criticism misses the point. Peter wasn't trying to set a date for Christ's return. He was urging his readers to live in light of Christ's sure return, which could be any day

1 Peter 4:1-6

But they will have to give an account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. - 1 Peter 4:5

TODAY IN THE WORD

During the Watergate scandal and trials, one of President Nixon's top aides, Charles Colson, became a Christian. When word broke, numerous reporters ridiculed Colson's conversion. Through articles and cartoons, Colson was depicted as a joke, a cover-up artist seeking a reduced sentence. Now years later, Colson continues his witness for Christ and is responsible for Prison Fellowship Ministries, one of the most successful ministries to prisoners, ex-convicts, and their families.

Colson understood the ridicule and abuse today's passage warns that Christians may face (v. 4). Yet in the midst of this derisive response to our faith, Scripture calls us to stand firm in our Christian life. Peter begins our text with a reminder of Christ's suffering, and that the one "who has suffered in the body is done with sin" (v. 1). This doesn't mean that those who suffer no longer sin; rather, now that Christ has "died for our sins once for all" (2:18), the power of sin is over. We are no longer enslaved to that way of life.

Instead, Christians are called to put away "evil human desires" and live for "the will of God" (v. 2). And there's no point in wasting time about it. The life of perversion, intemperance, and idolatry should be a thing of the past (v. 3). And although the world may think our new lifestyle in Christ is a strange, even laughable thing (v. 4), our new identity means a new life.

Finally, if a reminder of the work of Christ is not enough, Peter adds that every person, believer and unbeliever, will one day give an account to the judge of "the living and the dead" (v. 5). Again, verse 6 presents interpretive difficulties, but the context of the passage suggests that the meaning is this: by human appearances, believers who have died have faced the judgment of death without vindication, but the reality is that in the eyes of God, those who responded to the good news are in fact alive. No amount of ridicule or mockery can take away the resurrection life we have in Christ.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Do you ever look around and wonder why the wicked seem to prosper while God's children suffer? Peter's answer to that query instructs us to take the long view: in the end, the Judge will set it all right. Faithfully serving Christ on earth can be a difficult challenge, especially when the world around us laughs and beckons us to something else. Try meditating on Psalm 73 today which wrestles honestly with these issues, but ultimately reminds us of God's constant presence and prevailing judgment in the end.

1 Peter 4:1-6

Since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude. - 1 Peter 4:1

TODAY IN THE WORD

Sukhwant Bhatia knows how costly faith in Christ can be. Sukhwant grew up in an affluent home in India. He was a Sikh like his father, who was an army officer. But Sukhwant's heart was hungry for the truth, and he found truth when he trusted Christ as his Savior. Sukhwant's decision enraged his father, who pulled out his pistol one day, pointed it at his son, and said, "If you come into this home again, I will kill you." Yet Sukhwant remained true to Christ. Today he is studying at Dallas Theological Seminary to prepare himself for ministry in India.

Only someone who is "armed" with the same attitude as Christ can make the life-altering decision that Sukhwant Bhatia had to make. How do we acquire this Christ-like attitude? By turning our backs on our

former lives without Christ, as the apostle Paul explained in Romans 6:11 when he wrote, "count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus."

This doesn't mean we won't sin anymore--as great as that would be. But it does mean that we refuse to allow sin to dominate us. Christians who are done with sin are ready to live the rest of their lives for the will of God. This commitment also includes a determination to remain true to Christ even when one's faith brings persecution or other suffering.

Verse 3 shows that some of the believers to whom Peter was writing were Gentile Christians who, like the Corinthians, had come to Christ from very corrupt backgrounds. In fact, the word translated “pagans” is the same word the New Testament often uses for Gentiles.

The problem here was that the pagans who had once been friends of the sinful Corinthians had since become their persecutors. These unbelievers were heaping abuse on the Christians who no longer participated in their wasted lifestyles.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

When Peter said we should arm ourselves with the same attitude as Christ, he used the same term that describes a soldier putting on his armor.

This picture makes us think of the Christian’s armor that God has given us for daily spiritual battle (Eph. 6:13-17). With this kind of protection available, we’d be foolish to go out without it.

1 Peter 4:7-11 Prisoners of war from the Vietnam War, some of whom endured as much as seven or more years of captivity, say that the most effective tool their captors used against them was isolation. Prisoners who could communicate with each other generally fared better, even despite physical torture, than those who were completely cut off from their fellow captives.

People need each other--and the church is no exception. In fact, Jesus Christ specifically designed His church to function like a human body, in which each part needs the support of every other part. Times of persecution have a special way of teaching us this reality.

That’s what the readers of 1 Peter were learning. The apostle wanted these believers in Asia Minor to exhibit the “true grace of God” (1 Peter 5:12) in their circumstances. Part of that process included learning how to minister to each other.

Both Peter and Paul expected Christ to return at any time (v. 7, see 1 Cor. 7:29). Each generation of God’s people needs to live with this sense of expectancy, which helps to produce holy living (as we will see in 2 Peter 3:8-13). Here in today’s passage, the emphasis is on prayer, which keeps us clear-headed in the middle of hard times and which helps us to express the kind of dependence on God that brings Him glory and praise (v. 11).

God is also glorified when we love each other despite our faults and failings. We’re facing some tough enemies in the world, including our old sinful nature and the devil. We need the ministry of other believers to stay on track, because God never intended us to go it alone.

God has even given all of us spiritual gifts by which we can serve Him and each other. Peter divided these gifts into two categories: speaking gifts and serving gifts. These categories describe the basic ministries of the church outlined when the first deacons were chosen (Acts 6:1-7).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

God’s grace “in its various forms” (v. 10) is more than enough to help us thrive spiritually despite “all kinds of trials” (1:6).

1 Peter 4:7-11

The end of all things is near ... To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen. - 1 Peter 4:7, 11

TODAY IN THE WORD

A man looks into the camera and shouts, “They’re coming! The end is here!” The shot then pans to the streets where space ships in the sky shoot laser beams into skyscrapers, and local citizens run screaming through the streets like madmen. Such scenes are the stuff of classic B-movie science fiction films about the invasion of outer-space aliens.

For many people, mentioning that the end is near often evokes such movie scenes, or perhaps images of disheveled crazies thrusting signs into people’s faces on the streets. But this is where our passage begins today: “The end of all things is near” (v. 7). Unlike movie images of mayhem and hysteria, however, Peter explains that knowledge that the end is imminent should lead instead to clear thinking and self-control. For Christians, knowing the brevity of life should not cause panic but prayerfulness for ourselves and our world. Sometimes a serious illness or loss of a loved one can remind us of that brevity; Scripture calls us to live all of life prayerfully with that knowledge.

What does a Christian life, lived with the end in sight, look like? It’s a life of service. Scripture calls us to a life of deep love for others. Rather than seeking to expose the faults of others, we should strive to cover those faults with a generous forgiveness and a welcoming hospitality (vv. 8-9). Knowing we are loved and welcomed by God, we should in turn offer love and welcome to others.

Love is more than just feelings and forgiveness; it involves tangible actions as well. Whatever gifts we've been given (and Scripture says that each of us has some gift), we are to use it to serve others. Whether speaking or serving in some other way, all of life should be an act of service that operates out of God's strength and for His glory (vv. 10-11). So while the end may be near, that knowledge should sharpen our focus on the things that matter most: honoring God by loving and serving one another.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

How will you live with the "end of all things" in view and for the glory of God? How will you manifest a life of love and service to others? Try making a list of personal service commitments, and post them where you will see them regularly: on a bathroom mirror, near the kitchen sink, on the dashboard of your car. Let them be a daily reminder of the focus of our living on what matters most: to Christ be "the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen" (v. 11).

1 Peter 4:7-11

Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. - 1 Peter 4:8

TODAY IN THE WORD

Stop, drop and roll—it's one of the first tips we learn about fire safety. If our clothes are on fire, the worst thing we can do is run and feed the flames with more oxygen. We've got to smother the flames in order to extinguish the fire. Peter has a safety tip for the church of Jesus Christ. When it seems that God's purposes are going up in flames, when people professing the name of Christ wound and are wounded, we've got to smother the fire of dissension and disappointment with the covering of God's love.

Why does it sometimes feel like the church is failing? Why does the church lead unbelievers to malign Jesus Christ and misunderstand His redemptive purposes? At these times it may be because the church has forgotten how to love.

Sinners we are and sinners we will be until Jesus returns for His church. We are a fallen people. Our offenses, both the ones we commit and the ones we suffer, are real and many. But if we remember and practice the law of love, the injuries from our offenses heal more quickly. Love helps us forgive. Love helps us persevere through conflict. Love believes the best.

Love also keeps us from complaining about one another (v. 9). Loving one another deeply means coming to a place where service doesn't happen because of arm-twisting. When we love deeply, we serve sincerely, without hypocrisy.

Finally, love frees us to exercise our spiritual gifts with humble confidence (v. 10). By recognizing that our gifts can actually administer the grace of God in someone's life, in love we'll be eager to serve and to use our gifts.

If the church remembers to love, God will be glorified. It's for this reason that the church exists. In fact, everything exists, "that in all things, God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever" (v. 11). Plain and simple, the church exists for the glory of God.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

For the next ten days, we'll be setting out diagnostic tests to examine the health of our churches. Today's test measures the quality of our love for one another. Proverbs 19:11 amplifies what Peter says about love: "A man's wisdom gives him patience ... to overlook an offense." Practice this week overlooking the mistakes, snide comments, and offenses of others. Praise God for every opportunity you have to cover these offenses by not mentioning them or being angered by them.

1 Peter 4:7-11

Love covers over a multitude of sins. - 1 Peter 4:8

TODAY IN THE WORD

Churches in wealthy areas from Fairfax, Virginia, to Phoenix, Arizona, have discovered that not everyone endorses offering Christian hospitality to those in need. Nearly two years ago, CrossRoads United Methodist Church began offering a hot, cooked breakfast on Saturday mornings to over 100 people who were homeless. Since then, 22 homeless people have joined the congregation of 200. But neighbors complained, and the city of Phoenix ruled that the church was violating zoning ordinances. A court settlement required the church to move their breakfast program to a poor neighborhood, though the city agreed not to prevent future ministry to the poor at the church.

The exhortations in today's passage seem simple at first. We might think we could boil this down to: "Just be nice to each other!" But far more is going on—and much more is at stake—than niceness. These are commands for us to extend God's grace, and we can do this only through His strength.

Peter started with the spiritual context: "The end of all things is near" (v. 7). As Christians we know that Christ will return and the world will be judged. That should impact the way we live. We make the choice to be clear-minded and self-controlled so that we can pray.

Notice that Peter didn't describe love and hospitality as easy. Christian love persists even in the face of opposition; it extends grace even to sinners. This kind of hospitality goes far beyond inviting friends over for a barbecue. Without the grace of God, this hospitality would incite grumbling (vv. 8-9). Christian love and hospitality require us to be willing to be inconvenienced in order to minister to others.

Each of us has received a gift from God, and the purpose of these gifts is to administer God's grace to others. Through our spiritual gifts, we are equipped to extend grace and bless others. Whether we are sharing the gospel, serving to meet practical needs, offering hospitality, or loving sacrificially, we are able to accomplish this ministry because of the grace that we've been given. For this reason, God receives the praise and glory (v. 11).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Some have bought the consumerist lie that your house has to look like a catalog or you have to cook like a Food Network star in order to extend hospitality. Scripture says that true hospitality comes from sharing God's grace with others, and all believers are equipped to do that. Our extension of hospitality should be motivated by the fact that Christ will return soon! Pray and see if God is leading you to open your home or participate in a ministry to extend hospitality to those in need.

1 Peter 4:10-11; 1 Corinthians 12:1-11

Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others. - 1 Peter 4:10

TODAY IN THE WORD

Talking about spiritual gifts and their use in the church brings to mind the late symphonic conductor Leonard Bernstein's reply when asked which was the hardest instrument to play in an orchestra. "That's easy," Bernstein replied. "Second fiddle."

It's hard for some people to play second fiddle in the church, too. The problem is not that such a position actually exists in the body of Christ, but rather the application of our culture's "celebrity" mentality to the topic of spiritual gifts. Because of this, the church has made certain believers appear more prominent or more important than others.

There is no denying that some spiritual gifts involve a more public role--teaching, for example--while others are exercised behind the scenes. But even using these terms to categorize spiritual gifts is invalid because the Bible doesn't make any such distinction. Instead, God's Word affirms the universality and the mutuality of the gifts God gives His people.

As we said yesterday, every Christian is gifted. The Holy Spirit gives gifts "to each one" (vv. 7, 11)--no one is left out. Gifts are also for "the common good" (v. 7). They are designed for the "body's" mutual benefit, which means that believers should never consider their gifts as superior. According to Peter, the only legitimate use of gifts is to serve others.

And since the Spirit allocates gifts "just as He determines" (v. 11), there are no mistakes. In fact, "God's gifts... are irrevocable" (Rom. 11:29).

Do you see anything in today's verses that would lead any believer to feel second-class, or a "second fiddle" member of Christ's body? Pride and prejudice simply aren't part of the spiritual gifts equation. The world may distinguish between the "stars" and the rest of us, but that thinking was never meant to invade the church.

Since God's requirement of us is faithfulness (1 Cor. 4:2), no matter what our gifts, we all have an opportunity to shine in His work. God Himself, in the person of the Holy Spirit, distributes spiritual gifts and provides the power to use them for His glory. We can be thankful He didn't leave that up to us.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

We now have a pretty good picture of what it takes to use our spiritual gifts the way God intended.

First, it takes a soberminded view of ourselves, not allowing pride to inflate us or false humility to deflate us. Then, we need a servant's mentality, seeking the good of our fellow believers rather than our own glory. Finally, we should serve with an "attitude of gratitude" for the gifts God has wisely chosen to give us.

1 Peter 4:12-19 Sufferers from poison ivy and related ailments can now find protection and relief in a new, non-prescription lotion approved last year by the Food and Drug Administration. The key ingredient in the new lotion is a drug that blocks the oil from

poison ivy's leaves and stems, preventing it from producing the characteristic itchy rash. With as many as seventy percent of all people sensitive to these toxins, this new drug promises widespread relief.

It's good to see unnecessary suffering alleviated. But for the Christian, there is no remedy that will block the trials and traumas of life from afflicting us. We've gone deep enough into 1 Peter to know not only that suffering is as inevitable for believers as for everyone else, but also that it is part of God's will for us. He wants to refine and mature us, to draw us closer to Christ.

Peter states this truth very succinctly: ""Do not be surprised"" when painful trials come your way (v. 12). Some people would look at that and say, ""Why should I become a Christian if all it's going to bring me is trouble and persecution?""

It's true that the Bible does not shrink from telling us the truth about the problems we will encounter in this world. As someone has said, clashes are inevitable because believers are going one way while the world is going in the opposite direction.

But the implication that only Christians have problems is, of course, silly. The difference is not that one suffers while the other goes free. The difference is that as Christians, we endure trials that are infused with purpose and even blessing (v. 14), while unbelievers have no such redeeming value in their troubles.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

In verses 17-18, Peter asks a probing question. If disciplinary trials are necessary for God's children, what will become of those who don't know Him?

Sadly, unbelievers have nothing to look forward to but fiery judgment and eternal separation from God. We began the month by encouraging you to witness to an unsaved friend or loved one. But we can never have too much concern for the lost.

1 Peter 4:12-19

Do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering ... But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ. - 1 Peter 4:12-13

TODAY IN THE WORD

Around the year A.D. 200, a pregnant woman named Felicity was arrested in North Africa on charges of being a Christian; she was sentenced to death in the arena. During her stay in prison, she went into labor and cried out in pain. In response one of the guards mocked: "If you complain now, what will you do when you're thrown to the beasts?" But Felicity responded: "I myself now suffer that which I suffer, but in the arena another shall be in me One who shall suffer for me, because I am to suffer for Him."

This young woman certainly knew something of what Peter describes in today's passage. Suffering for being a Christian is rarely understood by those who live in a culture that demands convenience and comfort at every turn. Perhaps Peter's audience were also puzzled by the "painful trial" they were experiencing. But Peter argues that we should not be surprised at such trials (v. 12). What should our response be?

Scripture is clear in its description of Christian suffering. This is not an unusual experience, nor an indication that God has abandoned us, nor something we need to be ashamed of. Rather, suffering for the name of Christ carries the encouragement that we are "blessed" and the "Spirit of glory and of God rests" on us (v. 14). Our suffering brings us closer to our Lord and Savior who already suffered for us. For that, we can rejoice and praise God that we bear His name, knowing that our "faithful Creator" has not forgotten us (vv. 13, 16, 19).

In addition to the individual blessing that comes with suffering for Christ, Scripture also issues a warning for the church in general. As Peter says, judgment "begins with the family of God." Sometimes trials can winnow and refine Christ's church, weeding out those who do not "obey the gospel" (vv. 17-18). Like a refining fire, suffering reveals those who are truly committed to our faithful God.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

In the last two thousand years, scholars estimate that 70 million Christians have died for Christ. Of these, 45 million (65 percent) were in the last century! The experience of worldwide Christian suffering is a reality. You may feel like you don't face extreme suffering in your own life, but thousands of Christians around the world do. Will you pray for them today, asking God to give them strength to stand, and the encouragement of knowing that in suffering for Christ, their union with Him is brought ever closer?

1 Peter 4:12-19

Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. - Ephesians 6:4

TODAY IN THE WORD

The church has benefited in many ways from the movement to challenge and to equip Christian men to be faithful in every area of life. For example, countless Christian fathers are now living with a conscious, top-priority commitment to be godly fathers, who love and lead their families according to the principles of God's Word.

One of a dad's primary responsibilities is to lead his children by example. Our Father's Day passage suggests one way a father can set a godly example for his family and even other believers--although you probably won't find this item on too many lists of preferred ways to lead by example. Here it is: show others how to "suffer as a Christian" (v. 16) in the name of and for the sake of Christ.

Of course, Peter wasn't writing just to fathers, but to the whole church. His instruction, however, has a strong appeal for those in places of spiritual and human leadership, including Christian dads. Indeed, all mature believers can accept painful trials without losing heart or compromising their commitment to Christ.

We may wish the New Testament didn't have so much to say about the important, even necessary, place of suffering in the Christian life. But these are God's shaping and refining tools, and a way He disciplines His children. That's one reason Peter says we shouldn't be surprised when the world and the devil turn up the pressure.

We can assume that some of Peter's readers came from godless backgrounds, judging from his references in this letter to the difference between suffering for Christ and being punished for doing wrong. Thus Peter was careful to make clear that it's believers' participation in the Savior's sufferings that brings glory and blessing.

Note how Peter linked hardships with such words as "glory," "rejoicing," and "blessing." There is a reward for us when we react to suffering with Christ-like faith. We're called to a life of deeply ingrained joy that accepts trials as part of God's fatherly disciplinary love.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

"It is time for judgment to begin with the family of God," Peter wrote. God is always faithful to discipline His children. And godly fathers know about the importance of discipline, both in shaping children's character and expressing a father's love. If you have been blessed with a godly father, thank him today. And if you didn't have such an earthly father, you can turn to God as the most loving, faithful Father. Let's pray that God will give fathers the wisdom they need to lead their families with godly discipline and unshakeable love.

1 Peter 4:13 In 1912, Scottish evangelist John Harper and his six-year-old daughter, Nana, boarded the famous Titanic for its fateful maiden voyage. He was on his way to a new ministry at Moody Church in Chicago.

When the doomed ship struck an iceberg, Harper put Nana into a lifeboat, then began preaching the gospel to anyone who would listen. He gave away his lifejacket. Even in the water, he continued urging those he encountered: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved."

Harper died in the very act of sharing his faith. Suffering and even death for Christ's sake are part and parcel of the life of pilgrimage. Paul and Peter even regarded it as a privilege (Phil. 1:29; 1 Peter 4:13).

Today's reading is a "résumé" of sufferings Paul had endured during his missionary journeys. He "boasted" about this in order to deflate the claims of false teachers who were setting themselves above the Corinthians and confusing them. Spiritually, Paul knew he was "talking crazy," but it was necessary to assert his apostolic authority in order to keep the gospel pure. His commitment and sacrifice spoke volumes about his apostolic call!

What had Paul suffered? He'd been imprisoned, beaten, stoned, and shipwrecked. His life had been at risk again and again. He'd endured hunger, thirst, and exhaustion. He'd worked incredibly hard for the churches under his care. By worldly standards, these aren't reasons to boast, but in Christ's service they're badges of honor. Paradoxically, events that appear to be defeats can be evidence of God's power! In fact, one of the purposes of spiritual power is to develop patience and endurance (Col. 1:11).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

We're about two weeks into our month's study of the Christian journey. Reflect on what we've seen in Scripture so far, and on what you've learned personally. What characters, stories, or biblical truths have really hit home for you? How has the idea of pilgrimage changed your perspective on life?

1 Peter 5:1-7 One of the most famous incidents from the Presidency of Harry Truman had nothing to do with politics or international diplomacy. A music critic who attended a 1950 performance by Truman's daughter, Margaret, criticized her singing. The feisty President told the man, ""Some day I hope to meet you. When that happens, you'll need a new nose and a lot of beef steak for black eyes!""

While Truman's fatherly defense of his daughter's singing may be admirable, that's not the kind of response we usually expect from mature leaders. Peter counseled the opposite frame of mind for those who would lead God's people: gentleness and humility should mark the person whom God calls to a shepherding ministry.

Today's text is another example of Peter's own heart and experiences shining through. Peter was trained and commissioned by the Chief Shepherd, Jesus Christ. And in his restoration after the denials, Jesus told Peter three times to feed His sheep out of love for Him (see the July 4 study).

So here was the great apostle, urging his fellow elders to lead the church with eagerness, love, and humility. Sheep must be led, not driven, if they are to stay together and not become scattered and lost.

Peter called himself a witness of Christ's sufferings. He could have added that he was also a participant in those sufferings. He implies as much when he says he will share in Christ's glory, which according to 1 Peter 4:13 is the reward of those who share in Christ's sufferings.

The apostle then turns from leaders to young men (v. 5), those who would someday become the elders. They need to learn humility and submission while they are young, even as all of us in the body of Christ need to practice humility.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Why would we choose to drag around a load of cares when God has offered to take it from us? 1 Peter 5:7 is an offer that no believer in his or her right mind would refuse. Yet we worry all the time because many of us are more practiced at worrying than we are at trusting God with our concerns.

1 Peter 5:1-11

Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care ... not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. - 1 Peter 5:2-3

TODAY IN THE WORD

T. S. Eliot's play, *Murder in the Cathedral*, based on actual events from the twelfth century, dramatizes a confrontation between King Henry II of England and the Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Becket. The two men had been friends; in fact, Henry had appointed Becket to his position. After taking office, however, Becket became more serious about his religious faith and decided he owed his allegiance first to God, not the king. Since the two men disagreed on what was best for the nation, conflict followed. In the end, four of Henry's knights murdered Becket as he prayed in Canterbury Cathedral. Prior to his death in the play, Becket faced four tempters who showed him the depths of his own sinfulness and helped prepare him spiritually for martyrdom.

Many critics consider *Murder in the Cathedral* a masterful study in spiritual leadership. According to today's reading, church leaders should be humble and steadfast shepherds. Three pairs of opposites clarify the responsibilities involved: not compelled but eagerly, not greedy but serving, and not overbearing but setting a good example. In the first, there is no sense of obligation but an openhearted willingness to answer the call and do the "noble task" of leadership. In the second, the point is selflessness, turning the world's idea of the purposes of power on its head. In the third, the point is humility, again turning worldly values upside-down and reminding us that in the kingdom of God it is the last who are first (Mark 9:35).

Shepherds see to it that both they and those whom they lead pursue and embody the spiritual qualities listed here, including humility, faith, self-control, alertness, perseverance, and hope. God has promised to restore those who suffer, while the Chief Shepherd Himself will give a crown of glory to faithful under-shepherds (cf. John 10:1-18). Unlike Olympic laurel wreaths, this crown "will never fade away."

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

The drama by T. S. Eliot in today's illustration was turned into a classic movie, *Becket* (1964), starring Richard Burton and Peter O'Toole. Another classic movie, *A Man For All Seasons* (1966), is also based on a play and tells a similar story of a confrontation between political (Henry VIII) and spiritual (Thomas More) power. Both movies are likely to be available at your local library or media outlet. These dramatic performances can enhance our resolve to live faithfully even when tested.

1 Peter 5:1-4

To the elders among you, I appeal: ... Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care. - 1 Peter 5:1-2

TODAY IN THE WORD

In the July 15, 1974 issue of Time magazine, historians were asked how they would answer the questions: "What makes a true leader? Who are the true leaders of history?" One British military historian, Correlli Barnett, responded this way: "Greatness has nothing to do with morality. A leader gets people to follow him." According to Barnett, Napoleon, Hitler, and Al Capone were all great leaders.

We come to a different exposition of leadership in today's reading. Peter appeals to the elders of the churches, exhorting them toward Christian leadership. Reminding them of his own witness of Christ's suffering and promise of glory, Peter declares: "Be shepherds of God's flock" (v. 2). Peter remembered well the calling that Christ gave him in John 21:15-19, and he extends that call to the elders of the churches in Asia Minor. Christ's command to feed His sheep was not just for Peter or the apostles; all subsequent leaders of the church are called to care for and nourish God's people.

What are the marks of a true shepherd? Scripture first describes the attitude of leadership. True leaders do their work willingly, not out of a sense of obligation (v. 2a). Second, Scripture explains the purpose of leadership. Rather than leading in order to serve one's own needs (e.g. in striving only for monetary gain), a true leader is "eager to serve" (v. 2b), focusing on the needs of others first. Third, Scripture indicates the manner of leadership. A true leader does not "lord it over" others, seeking power and authority; rather, they offer a humble "example to the flock" (v. 3).

Finally, a true shepherd of God's flock will always remember that there is a Chief Shepherd to whom they are accountable (v. 4). Ultimately, it is Christ's church, not ours. And Christ is the true Shepherd of His people. Any leader of Christ's church is only an under-shepherd of that one great "Shepherd and Overseer of your souls" (1 Peter 2:25).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

As we come to the final Sunday in Advent, today's passage fittingly calls us to remember both Christ's first coming as a humble and serving Shepherd, and his second coming when that "Chief Shepherd appears" (v. 4). As you contemplate the attitude, purpose, and manner of Christ's leading of His church, recognize what a high (and challenging) call the leaders of your own church have received. Pray for them, and find some way to encourage them this week through a personal note, phone call, or conversation.

1 Peter 5:1-7

Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. - 1 Peter 5:7

TODAY IN THE WORD

After Franklin Roosevelt was afflicted with polio in 1921, he worked hard to regain the use of his legs. But he was never again able to walk without the aid of braces and canes. Friends and associates said Roosevelt handled his handicap with grace and good humor. One friend said that Roosevelt "had accepted the ultimate humility which comes from being helped physically."

We can learn a lesson today from the late president's reaction to his disability. It's hard to ask for help, and it's even harder to accept the fact that we need help every day of our lives. It takes "ultimate humility" to admit that we can't make it on our own--but the people who recognize their need are the ones who get the help they need.

Spiritually, we're in the same situation that Franklin Roosevelt was in physically. We are dependent, and 1 Peter urges us to humbly confess our need to God and to receive His help.

Suffering has a way of making us aware of our complete dependence upon God, as it must have done for Peter's audience. But that's the place where God wants us to be, because it's at our point of weakness that His power takes over (see 2 Cor. 12:9). One way the Lord meets our need is through gifted and compassionate spiritual leaders who, like Peter, serve as shepherds under the "Great Shepherd," Jesus Christ.

Peter wrote with firsthand knowledge of what it takes to serve the Lord as a shepherd of His people. Three motives disqualify a person from leadership: compulsion, a sense that "I must do this even though I don't really want to" cash, a desire to get wealthy at the expense of the flock; and command, the desire to boss people around and feel important.

These negative motives are offset by positive ones: a willingness to be used, an eagerness to serve, and leadership by example rather than barking out orders. Peter had developed these qualities of spiritual leadership under Jesus' ministry and in the decades that followed.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

The final verse of today's reading is a great way to begin a new week of work and summer activities.

1 Peter 5:5-7 A young man who had been invited to a dinner given by the South African statesman John Cecil Rhodes arrived by train and had to go directly to Rhodes's house in his travel-stained clothes. To the young guest's horror, he found a room full of people in full evening dress. Soon Rhodes appeared, wearing an old suit. He had heard of the young man's problem and wanted to spare him further embarrassment.

Rhodes literally clothed himself with humility, a clear picture of what the apostle Peter is speaking about in today's text. Clothing ourselves with humility toward others puts us on their level, in their shoes, and keeps us from lording it over other Christians or flaunting our position.

The only way to live in humility is to "put it on" every day the way we get up in the morning and put on our clothes. Humility should be another identifying mark of Christians, part of our daily uniform that identifies us the way a ball player's uniform reveals his team or a soldier's uniform signals his allegiance.

Who is our best example of humility? Christ Himself set the standard. Paul tells us in Philippians 2:8 that Jesus, though fully God, humbled Himself all the way to death on a cross. If Jesus could do that, no attitude or act of humility is beneath us!

Even more strongly, Paul makes the point about the One we are to imitate when he writes in Romans 13:14: "Clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ." When you put on Christ, you put on humility.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Humility is one virtue that seems to look best on others. But the Bible says we need to look in the mirror and make sure we are wearing humility as part of our own "outfit." Humility can be elusive: as someone has said, the minute you think you have it, you've lost it."

1 Peter 5:5-7

Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. - 1 Peter 5:7

TODAY IN THE WORD

A famous bumper sticker, begun in the 1970s, quips: "Question Authority." Often attributed to Timothy Leary, one of the leaders of American counter-culture, this slogan of skepticism and suspicion of all forms of authority has permeated contemporary culture, including the church. In many denominations today, the spiritual authority of the Bible and the Christian tradition have consistently been undermined by an aggressive assertion of individualism. No one has a right to tell anyone what to believe or how to act.

Today's passage challenges this call to "question authority," with an exhortation to submission and humility. Yet, as we saw in yesterday's reading, the authority that we are called to submit to is not authoritarian or tyrannical leadership, but a leadership of love, care, and humility. In the face of this kind of leadership Peter calls on "young men" and "all of you" alike to "clothe yourselves with humility toward one another" (v. 5). Why?

Earlier in our study of 1 Peter, we've been given the example of Christ as the ground and foundation of Christian humility. Today we are offered an additional reason: our attitude of humility or pride does something to our relationship with God Himself. God "opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble" (v. 5, quoting Prov. 3:34). Humility before our leaders and one another, says Scripture, expresses our humility "under God's mighty hand" (v. 6). So while our humility toward one another may place us in lower positions, in the end, God honors that Christ-like attitude by lifting us up (v. 6). And that God-given exaltation, rather than our self-exaltation, will be much more valuable.

Finally, our text teaches us that Christian humility enables you to "cast all your anxiety on Him" (v. 7). The proud person refuses help from anyone else. The humble person is able to seek help from another. The humility that Peter calls for here allows us to come to God with all our cares and worries in life, and to entrust them to Him, confident in His care.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Today's passage begins by urging an attitude of humility among all Christians, but ends by reminding us that such humility carries over into our relationship with God. Only the humble person can truly bring cares to God in full confidence. Do you have concerns or anxieties that you are not bringing to God but trying to "solve" by your own power? Perhaps you can find time today to list such concerns on paper, and then entrust them to God, resting in the assurance that He truly cares for you.

Excerpt: "One of the most famous incidents from the Presidency of Harry Truman had nothing to do with politics or international

diplomacy. A music critic who attended a 1950 performance by Truman's daughter, Margaret, criticized her singing. The feisty President told the man, ""Some day I hope to meet you. When that happens, you'll need a new nose and a lot of beef steak for black eyes!""

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TODAY ALONG THE WAY

The final verse of today's reading is a great way to begin a new week of work and summer activities.

1 Peter 5:8 British writer G. K. Chesterton was almost as well known for his absentmindedness as he was for his wit. Chesterton often forgot to keep appointments, and once on a lecture tour he had to wire his wife to ask her where he was supposed to be next! Another time, Chesterton astonished his publisher by arriving on time for a meeting, only to hand the man a letter explaining why he could not keep the appointment!

Failing to pay attention to dates, places and times can cause embarrassment and missed appointments. But failing to be alert in the spiritual realm can lead to real disaster. That's because our enemy the devil is always on the prowl, ""looking for someone to devour"" (v. 8).

The apostle Peter's exhortation to spiritual alertness is a message we need every day. But it's especially timely for us now, after nine days of looking at the nature of our enemy and getting some glimpses into spiritual warfare.

Peter's description of Satan as an adversary who means business fits with everything we have learned about the devil's nature. But Peter also lets us know that Satan's power is limited and that we can successfully resist and defeat him in the power that God supplies.

How do we know this? Because our fellow Christians throughout the world (v. 9) are fighting and winning the same battle. In other words, we are not the first believers to engage in spiritual warfare. The testimony of saints has always been that God gives victory.

But the main reason we can be victorious against Satan is found in verse 10 of our text. We have the promise that God Himself will sustain us in any trial of suffering and make us ""strong, firm and steadfast.""

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

When it comes to dealing with the devil, aren't you glad that we can come to the ""God of all grace"" for help?

We need God's grace every day as we try to live for Him. Where do you feel a particular need for grace today? You can turn that need into a specific prayer request for God's help. Simply come to Him and say, ""Dear God, today I pray for Your grace to help me _____."" Fill in your area of need, and thank Him for His promise to supply.

If they had to guess, most people would probably say that older people need more sleep than younger people. Not so, according to one source. This expert says that as we grow older, we not only need fewer hours of sleep per night, but we also need fewer hours

of deep sleep. People in their 60s need only half as much deep sleep as they did in their 20s.

There may be some good news for us here, because all of us are growing older every day. And according to the apostle Peter, we need to increase our level of alertness!

Peter isn't talking about physical alertness, of course; but the analogy applies. If we knew that a thief or some other intruder was coming to our house tonight, we would definitely stay awake to watch. And we would be alert if we knew a wild animal was loose in our neighborhood.

Spiritually, that is exactly what is happening. The devil is always on the prowl, but the antidote to his prowling is for us to be alert and strong, not to hide in fear. For the first time in his letter, Peter suggests in verse 9 that Satan is at the bottom of much of the suffering which Christians endure.

Does this invalidate all those references earlier in 1 Peter to trials and persecution being sent from God to refine and purify His children? Not at all.

Satan may stir up trouble against us, but God can and will overrule the enemy's evil purpose. God will give the faith to withstand Satan; and when the trial is over, God will ""restore you and make you strong."" No wonder Peter ended his exhortations with a doxology of praise!

The apostle's concluding remarks are also worth noting. Silas was a faithful co-worker of Peter's, and John Mark was a great example of someone who initially collapsed under trial (Acts 13:13; 15:36-40) but who later proved to be a faithful worker (2 Tim. 4:11).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

We can assume that, given Peter's own denials, he was able to sympathize with Mark's early failure in the ministry.

Have you ever been disappointed by someone you counted on for something? You would be unusual if you said ""no."" When someone lets us down, it's tempting to mark the failure up against that person's record and keep it there

1 Peter 5:8-11

And the God of all grace ... will himself restore you and make you strong. - 1 Peter 5:10

TODAY IN THE WORD

In her book on suffering, *Affliction*, Edith Schaeffer proposes thinking of our response to suffering as a way to participate in God's victory over the Devil. When we respond to suffering by cursing or blaming God, we add to a larger spiritual tapestry that Satan delights in. However, when we respond to suffering with faith and trust in our loving God, we participate in a victorious tapestry of Satan's defeat. Schaeffer suggests that from an earthly perspective, our suffering may not make sense, but from a heavenly one, God can make it into something beautiful and glorious.

Schaeffer's tapestry illustration fits well with today's exhortation about standing firm in the face of suffering. Scripture tells us that vigilance is needed for the Christian life; much is at stake, not only the physical suffering we may endure, but spiritual danger as well. Peter says, "Your enemy the devil prowls around ... looking for someone to devour" (v. 8). In other words, the trial of suffering brings not only the challenge of facing physical or social pain, but also the danger of letting suffering turn you from God Himself. Nothing would please the Devil more than to have Christians curse God in their suffering.

With that in mind, then, Peter urges us: "Resist him, standing firm in the faith" (v. 9). How do we do that? Scripture offers two suggestions. First, remember that you are not alone. Your experience of suffering for Christ is not unique. Rather, you are part of a large family that suffers as well, and that prays for you in your time of need (v. 9).

Second, God Himself will support you. He is the "God of all grace;" He has "called you to His eternal glory," and He Himself "will restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast" (v. 10a). The world may seem to have all the power, but in the end, it is God who has "the power for ever and ever. Amen" (v. 10b). Rest in that assurance.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Perhaps you know someone who needs to hear these words today. In addition to comforting them over their physical or social pain, use today's reading to encourage them about the spiritual reality of suffering. Remind them that our suffering carries spiritual implications, either bringing pleasure to the Devil who delights to devour us, or bringing God glory and honor. Finally, remind this loved one that the "God of all grace" will never abandon us, but will make us strong and one day bring us to His eternal glory.

1 Peter 5:12-14

I have written to you briefly, encouraging you and testifying that this is the true grace of God. - 1 Peter 5:12

TODAY IN THE WORD

Because of the quality of ink, pens, and parchment in the ancient world, letter writing was no easy task. Even the highly educated often required the help of an amanuensis, or secretary, in drafting an epistle. If an amanuensis was used, it was not uncommon for the “sender” to attach a brief greeting at the end of the letter in his or her own hand. Letter writing was not a solitary affair, but often involved several people working together.

When we come to the end of 1 Peter, we likely have an example of this joint effort for letter writing in antiquity. Peter tells us that “with the help of Silas ... I have written to you briefly” (v. 12a). Not only did Silas help to pen the letter, many commentators also think that he was probably the letter-bearer to the churches in Asia Minor. In other words, without the help of his “faithful brother” Silas, Peter could not carry out his ministry and care for the churches. Such a picture of joint effort is an apt portrait of the communal life in Christ depicted in the final words of 1 Peter.

This care for the broader church community is expressed again in Peter’s explanation for his writing: to encourage them and to testify that “this is the true grace of God” (v. 12b). In the painful trials this community faced, Peter sends a word of hope, encouraging them to “stand fast” in the faith (v. 12c).

Christ’s church, though separated by miles, can still encourage one another. Writing all the way from Rome (the typical referent behind “Babylon” in v. 13), Peter reminds his audience that they stand together, both being chosen by God. Peter also reminds them that the Christians in Rome have not forgotten their brothers and sisters across the Mediterranean, but wish them Christ’s peace. In turn, Peter exhorts his audience to extend the same kind of encouragement and love to one another with the “kiss of love” (v. 14). What a picture of the unity of Christ’s church!

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

With the fast-paced world of cell phones, e-mails and text messaging, the age-old activity of letter writing has fallen out of fashion. Yet who of us doesn’t delight to receive in the mail a hand-written letter from a dear friend? Find time this week to sit down and hand-write a letter to a friend, family member, or church leader and let them know that you are thinking of them. Express your love and care for them, encouraging them to “stand fast” in the “true grace of God.”

1 Peter 5:8-14 During the Vietnam War, a group of army recruits was learning about weapons. As they handled new M16 rifles while sitting in the safety of the classroom, the recruits weren’t taking the instruction very seriously. Suddenly, the drill sergeant slammed his fist on the table and shouted, “Gentlemen, I survived a tour of duty in Viet-nam, and knowing how to use my weapon was one reason I made it. Now it’s your turn.” The startled recruits gulped, fell silent, and began paying attention as the sergeant continued his demonstration.

When you’re facing a powerful enemy, there’s nothing like having someone who can stand up and say, “Ladies and gentlemen, I’ve been in the battle. Let me tell you how you can defeat the enemy.” That’s what Peter was doing for his readers.

Remember that the recipients of this letter were living in various provinces throughout Asia Minor (1 Peter 1:1)--the devil’s “battlefield,” if you will. Peter knew that Satan was a dangerous enemy bent on destroying believers, and the apostle had the spiritual scars to prove it. We need to read Peter’s teaching against the backdrop of his own failure to humble himself before God and to resist Satan when he denied Jesus three times.

But while we cannot afford to underestimate the devil’s power, the Bible teaches that the only influence he has in our lives is the influence we allow him to have. When we are on guard against his tricks and determined to resist him in God’s strength, Satan is a toothless lion.

One of the weapons the devil uses to try to break believers down is persecution. This was happening to Christians in the Roman Empire of Peter’s day. But these Christians could be victorious, and so can we, because we serve “the God of all grace” (v. 10). He not only helps us stand, but He will bring the suffering to an end after “a little while” and will replace it with “eternal glory.”

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

All of us want to be “strong, firm and steadfast” in our faith (v. 10).

Dan Duncan sermon notes.
Believers Chapel, Dallas, TX

1 PETER 1:17-25

LIVING IN FEAR AND HOPE

Introduction

One of the statements that Franklin Roosevelt is best known for was given in his First Inaugural Address, on March 4, 1933, in the depths of the Great Depression.

He stated his belief that "the only thing we have to fear is fear itself." And from that, we would assume, he believed fear was bad.

The Bible doesn't teach that. It does teach that Christ has freed us from the fear of death that enslaved men (Heb. 2:15).

And Jesus would frequently greet His disciples with the words, "Fear not." There is fear that is wrong for Christians. We have eternal hope (Matt. 14:27; Matt. 10:26-28).

But there is also fear that is right. We are to fear God. And Peter instructs us to live in fear -- "conduct yourselves in fear," he says (17).

He states this as a further basis for a godly life. In the previous verses, he gave the motivation for holiness from the greatness of our salvation.

v.17 Now he gives motivation for godly living from the fear of judgment. Verse 17,

Read v.17

Christians face judgment. Not the Great White Throne Judgment; not eternal judgment. We have been delivered from that. We should not fear the wrath of God.

2

But we will still be judged. That is often a neglected truth in the church. We don't like to speak of judgment. It seems so negative. But the New Testament teaches that plainly.

In Romans 14:12; 1 Corinthians 3:10-15; 2 Corinthians 5:10, we are told that -- "we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ," to be recompensed for our deeds good and bad.

God's judgment is fair. Peter describes him as "the One who impartially judges according to each one's work."

He doesn't play favorites. He is the perfect judge. "Each one" of us will give an account of our thoughts and deeds in this life, and be judged accordingly.

And the word "each one" indicates that Peter is not restricting this to non-believers. He is writing of believers, and he meaning is individual, personal. (Grudem, 81)

This is not a reference to final condemnation. Every believer has been delivered from that. Christ bore that on our behalf on the cross. It refers to the final accounting of our lives.

And it probably shouldn't be limited to the future judgment. God disciplines His people now, in the present time. (Grudem, 81)

Peter speaks of that later in 4:17. And in Hebrews 12 we read of God disciplining His people in the present, as a father disciplines his sons (5-11).

That should cause "fear," which leads to circumspect, correct conduct. That's what Peter urges -- "conduct yourselves in fear";

That is, fear God's discipline. (Grudem, 81)

Fearing God is not just an Old Testament concept. The New Testament requires it as well. Not dread. Not as a person might fear a cruel tyrant, but as one fears the rod.

And there are examples of that from the New Testament. In Acts 5 we read of Ananias and Sapphira being struck dead for lying to the Holy Spirit.

3

The result was -- "great fear came over the whole church, and over all who heard of these things" (5:11).

In 1 Corinthians 11:30, Paul writes that "many" of the Corinthian Christians are weak, and "a number sleep," meaning are dead due to discipline for abusing the Lord's Supper.

God deals with the church in that way and for the good, to produce maturity and growth. And He will deal with you and me, for our good, always for our good -- to correct.

But He produces good through hard and painful experiences, and a wise person tries to avoid them by living an obedient life. That's what Peter is advising.

Now that does not contradict loving God. A healthy fear of discipline is not a cringing fear of God. In fact, godly fear is a fear of displeasing God due to love for Him. (Grudem, 82)

Now that is how we are to live, "during," what Peter calls our "stay on earth," our sojourn here.

So Peter says -- "If you address as Father the One who ... judges," meaning, if you call on Him, if you pray to Him, you should know that He is also the impartial judge of all men, and conduct yourselves in fear. (Grudem, 80; Blum, 224)

v.18 Then he continues in verse 18 -- "knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers."

In other words, since God redeemed you from a futile way of life, He won't be pleased with you if return to it in disobedience. Our redemption is reason for godly fear. (Grudem, 83)

Redemption is one of the most important words or ideas in the Bible. A better translation is ransom. He ransomed us from a futile way of life.

4

ill. In the early 1900s (1916), B.B. Warfield wrote an article on this subject entitled "Redeemer"; And "Redemption"; in which he discussed the importance and meaning of the term.

He preferred the words "ransom" and "ransomer," to "redeemer" and "redemption," since the word "redeem" comes from the Latin and means to buy back, while "ransom" better reflects the meaning of the Greek word (lutrousthai) "to buy out of." (The Person and Work of Christ, 330)

It goes back to the institution of slavery in the ancient world. A person could become a slave through war or through debt or by birth.

But a price for the slaves freedom could be paid by another person, who bought them out of bondage. (Blum, 224-5)

That's the meaning in Matthew 20:28 -- "the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

The point of Warfield's article was not to criticize the word

"redeem," but to expose the danger of losing the meaning of the word, the idea of redemption, and how our salvation occurs.

The error he focused on was a trend in Germany to translate

"redeem" by the word "deliver," to speak of Christ as our

"Deliverer," and His saving work as "deliverance."

It's not a bad word. Christ is our "Deliverer." But the word doesn't

go far enough. It is loose, and doesn't explain how the

deliverance happened.

In Warfield's words, it "left wholly unnoted the central fact that it

was an act of purchase." (340)

A person can deliver someone by his strength, or words, or

influence. And if that's the meaning, then it could be a deliverance

from wrong ideas by a change of mind and heart. (342)

5

That was the idea being pushed in Germany, and that had already

taken hold when Warfield wrote. It is not Christianity.

The deliverance of Christ is salvation out of sin and its

consequences by the payment Christ made. And that must be

stressed to understand salvation and atonement.

He redeemed us. He ransomed us, or bought us out of a "futile

way of life." And did so at a high cost.

ill. There is an illustration of this idea from Homer's Iliad. The

Greek word lutron, or "ransom" is all the way through the story.

But at the end, after Achilles killed Hector, Hector's father, Priam,

the king of Troy came to the Greeks to reclaim the body of his

son.

The title of that chapter (Il. 24) is "The Ransom of Hector" (Ektoros

lutra). (L-S. 1067)

And to ransom or buy the body of his son out of the Greek camp,

Priam brings a wagon load of treasure to Achilles, who accepts

the ransom price, and releases the body of Hector to Priam.

Now our redemption or ransom was similar to that. As Peter

states, it was a redemption "from," or literally "out of" a "futile way

of life." Not simply away from it, but "out of" it (ek).

It gives a vivid picture of a people being physically removed from

one place to another, from sinful patterns of life, to a place of

obedience to God. (Grudem, 83)

This life from which they were redeemed was one they inherited

from their "forefathers." It was a way of life that had the heavy

weight of tradition.

One of the most binding, enslaving principles is tradition. For

Jews and Gentiles alike, it is hard to break with ancient traditions

and customs and wisdom. They have a strong hold on people.

6

But God broke the power that the old way of life had on these

people. He ransomed them out of it.

Not with "silver or gold," like the Trojan king did his son. Not with

a tangible treasure, but a spiritual one, and one infinitely more

valuable.

v.19 It was "the precious blood" of Christ, verse 19, which means

His death, which was a sacrificial death, a violent death.

He poured out His lifeblood to deliver us from sin and judgment by

bearing our penalty in our place as our Substitute, and in that way

remove the guilt of our sin, so that we are legally accepted by God

-- justified.

And the value or acceptability of the ransom Christ paid is emphasized by the description of it as being "of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ." That is an allusion to the sacrifices of the Old Testament, which required a lamb or a goat "without defect" (Num 16:14). And Christ is the fulfillment of that. He is the "Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (Jn. 1:31; Rev. 5:9). Christ was perfect, without moral flaw. He was obedient to His Father, and so, was able to offer Himself up as a Substitute for our sins, because He had none of His own. This was the blood of the God-Man, the Son of God, and so the value of the Lord's death was infinitely precious to the Father. The value of gold and silver is great but limited. The value of Christ's blood is not. It is infinite, and sufficient for an infinite number of sins, and so, more than sufficient for ours. v.20 This redemption was God's plan of salvation from all eternity. Christ, Peter says in verse 20, "was foreknown before the foundation of the world."

7

That means, He was chosen to be redeemer, or predestined to be the Savior from all eternity. Peter was not stating that God knew Christ before the creation of the world. That would be stating the obvious, and it's an idea that makes no sense in this context. (Grudem, 85; Blum, 225) Peter is indicating purpose. And in connection with the previous verse about redemption, what he means is that God the Father foreknew Christ as the suffering Savior. It is a way of saying that the Father chose the Son from all eternity to be the Savior of the world. (Grudem, 85) Even if we took this word "foreknow" as meaning "foresight," it would have the idea of predestination, because since God knows events before they occur, they must occur just as He knows them, otherwise, He doesn't know them. Foreknowledge in the sense of prescience, or prevision, or foresight implies certainty every bit as much as foreordination does. (Grudem, 85) This is about foreordination. Christ was foreknown, or chosen to be the Savior from all eternity. The cross of Christ was no afterthought. It was planned from all eternity. That's plain in Peter's sermon and then his prayer in Acts 2:23 and Acts 4:27-28. The cross was according to God's "predetermined plan," and it was "predestined to occur." And here Peter says it was "for your sake." God's plan was personal. It was not some general plan, for everyone indiscriminately. It was personal and particular. The Father had Peter's readers specifically in mind, as He did us, and all those He sent His Son to redeem, or ransom from sin -- cf. Matt. 1:21. (Clark, 57)

8

And in personalizing God's plan of salvation, Peter was stimulating or motivating them to obedience. (Blum, 225) v.21 He continues to do that in verse 21, where he states that our confidence in God. Christ was chosen to be our Savior. And by believing in Him we

believe in God. Jesus Christ is the means of reconciling us to God. (Blum, 225)

Now that we believe in God, our hope is in Him. He raised Christ from the dead and glorified Him, seated Him in heaven. And that is the assurance that He will raise us up.

So -- our "faith and hope are in God." And hope stimulates obedience.

So after telling his readers to live holy lives in verses 14-16, because God tells us to be holy; and then giving a basis for obedience in the fear of God's discipline and displeasure at sin, since He redeemed us from that, he ends by reminding us that we trust in God.

The God whom we fear is the God whom we trust. Our hope is in Him who planned our salvation from all eternity, who accomplished it in Christ, and will only bless us.

So we should be obedient, holy.

v.22 In the final verses Peter urges his readers to love one another. They can do that because they are pure.

Read v.22

It's not altogether clear whether Peter is speaking of justification or sanctification when he writes that they have purified their souls in obedience to the truth.

We are justified through faith in the gospel, and have a righteous standing with God. And that is the basis for new conduct, and loving the brethren. When converted, we are new creatures.

9

But we don't purify or justify or regenerate ourselves. God does that. We are said to be active agents in our sanctification.

In James 4:8 we read the same word, "Cleans your hands." In 1 John 3:3, John writes that we purify ourselves with the hope of Christ's return.

Paul uses a different word in 2 Corinthians 7:1, but the same idea when he writes -- "let us cleanse ourselves from all defilements." And since Peter has already used the word "obey" in regard to Christian conduct in verse 14, it may be better to understand his meaning here in regard to Christian growth, sanctification.

(Grudem)

By obedience to the Word of God they were growing. And the result of sanctification is love for the brethren. So they were to love them.

v.23 The ground of this work in their lives; the basis for the change is given in verse 23. It is the new birth.

Read v.23

The "new birth" begins new life in the child of God, spiritual life.

When we are born again, we become new creatures. That is the basis for our response of faith and obedience to God's Word.

And the new birth happens in connection with the Word of God, either spoken or read. It is what Peter calls "seed which is...imperishable." (Maybe not. This may be seed of life)

As the gospel is given, the Holy Spirit makes the heart receptive to it. He always attends the Word. He ministers to it.

That is why in Isaiah 55:11, the Lord promises that when His Word goes forth, it will not return "empty, without accomplishing" what He desires.

The Holy Spirit makes it effective. That is the reason that Peter describes it as "the living and enduring word of God." The Holy Spirit makes it a powerful instrument in our lives.

That can't be said of any other word, any other book than the Bible. It is unique literature. And that is the reason we must constantly be reading and obeying it.

Wayne Grudem has a good observation. He wrote;

"The implications for evangelism are obvious: ultimately it is neither our arguments nor our life example that will bring new life to an unbeliever, but the powerful words of God himself -- words which we still have preserved today in Scripture.

"It is in reading or hearing these words that people are given new life." (91)

The new birth is a supernatural work. And the Word of God is the supernatural instrument in producing it.

It is the means of our regeneration, justification, and sanctification.

It produces changes. So we should devote ourselves to it.

And the changes that result from it are permanent. That seems to be the point or implication of Peter's description of the Word being "imperishable" and "enduring."

The new birth and new life is imperishable. That means that the relationship we have with one another as Christians are permanent.

And so, we should love one another because we have all been born into a new relationship with one another that is forever.

Vv.24-25 To emphasize the permanency of the Word, Peter quotes Isaiah 40:6-8, in verses 24 and 25.

Read v.24-25

11

Isaiah and Peter witnessed the phenomenon described here every spring, as the arid region around Jerusalem would burst forth with grass and wild flowers, filled with color.

And then after a few days, the hot winds would sweep off the desert and wither everything.

They saw in that a picture of human life. The glory of man's achievements fade, but God's Word abides. And the things done in obedience to God's Word abide. So be obedient.

May God enable us to do that, and live for what is permanent.

LET'S REPAY