



hope

in exile

studies in 1 peter

A black and white photograph of a prison cell. The cell is dark, with light streaming in from a window on the right and a barred opening on the left. The walls are made of concrete, and the floor is also concrete. The window is covered with a metal grid, and the barred opening is also covered with a metal grid. The overall atmosphere is one of confinement and isolation.

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Introduction

The world seems to be going crazy all around us.

Our politics here in the U.S. have hit an unprecedented level of negative rhetoric and divisiveness. The moral climate seems to be dropping faster than the temperature of the globe is rising. Many of our cultural and artistic expressions are descending into the gutter, both in quality and in content. Socially, race battles that were fought generations ago have emerged once again, and we are being forced to recognize that we've never truly dealt with the effect nor the heart of our biases and ignorance. Economically, the middle class is shrinking, the disparity between rich and poor seems to grow daily, and most of America is drowning in debt. Globally, the unholy trinity of war, terrorism, and violence seem to be lurking in every shadow and around every corner.

And what about the church? Statistically, the church in America seems to hold very little distinction over the rest of culture: divorce rates are roughly equal, debt loads are similar, and even softer measures like morality and substance abuse seem to run in tandem. Do believers in Jesus actually hold any answers for the problems in this life, or is our only hope in eternity?

What if I told you the answer to all of these questions about our modern situation and very modern problems could be found in a letter written nearly 2,000 years ago?

Peter, the leader among the disciples and one of the leaders of the early church, penned the letter we now know as 1 Peter to a church that had been scattered by persecution, and continued to be threatened by it. His purpose was to encourage his readers and give them instruction as to how to live as exiles in a foreign land. Their exile, however, was not primarily about geopolitical location or

governmental regulation; rather, he addresses them as “sojourners and exiles” (1 Peter 2:11) within this world. The work of Jesus in their lives had so dramatically transformed their values and behaviors that they no longer fit in with the culture around them. As Paul stated to the Philippian church, they were no longer solely citizens of the Roman empire; their “citizenship is in heaven.” (Philippians 3:20)

We, too, are exiles in a foreign land. As the world changes all around us, believers in Jesus are faced with difficult choices: Do we insulate ourselves from the world around us, creating our own subculture? Do we jump headfirst into the world, being completely assimilated to the culture? Or is there another option?

Peter, echoing the high priestly prayer of Jesus in John 17, calls us to a third option: to live as exiles in this world. “In the world, but not of it.” We are called to engage the world around us completely, but never to compromise our values or the life of Jesus within us. Our calling is not to flow with the culture, nor to insulate ourselves as a Christian subculture, but to live counter-culturally. How do we do it? It’s only possible, Peter reminds us, when we are grounded in the living hope that we are freely given in Christ. We have hope in exile.

Writing to a scattered and persecuted church, you might expect that Peter would gently encourage them, filling their ears with platitudes and trying to make them feel better. His letter is certainly encouraging, but absent are the platitudes and empty sentiment. Instead, this great pastor understands that what a persecuted group of exiles really needs is a call to action. 1 Peter is nothing short of a field manual for the church in exile, filled with marching orders and challenges to stand firm in the face of suffering. In short, it’s exactly what we, nearly 2000 years later, need to hear.

My prayer for this study is that, as you engage this great letter for yourself, you will hear the voice of the Spirit spurring you to action. May the people of God, given hope through Jesus, stand firm for His glory in the face of a world gone mad.

Soli Deo Gloria,
Brian Kannel
York Alliance Church

How to Use This Book

This book is designed to be used as a companion resource to the 2017 Spring sermon series at York Alliance Church. Each Sunday's message will provide the central teaching of the Scripture passages for that week. You will receive most benefit from this study as you utilize it in conjunction with both the Sunday messages and a weekly LIFE group gathering, a small community with whom you are able to discuss and apply these truths. If you are unable to attend one of the Sunday morning gatherings for any reason, the sermon audio can be found at <http://www.yorkalliance.org/sermons/>

Please be aware that studying the Bible can be a challenging endeavor. Of course, there are very few worthwhile things in life that don't require some effort on our part. But beyond the difficulty of study in general is the fact that we have a very real enemy who is actively opposed to our understanding of the Word of God. Paul tells us that our battle is not "against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over the present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places." (Ephesians 6:12) Therefore, if you find yourself feeling discouraged, frustrated, or unable to understand something, I strongly encourage you to stop and pray. Ask God to guide your heart and thoughts and to give you understanding.

Also, don't do this study in isolation. While most will complete the actual study individually, I would encourage you to get connected to someone else who is doing this study and to connect with that person each week to talk about what you're learning. Along the way, if you have frustrations or are confused about something you're studying, that person can provide encouragement and guidance as you journey through the study together. However, if you get stuck along the way, you should feel free to skip a section and move to the next one.

This particular study guide has a few unique features to help you grow as a student of the Word as well as a disciple of Jesus. Therefore, a few notes may be helpful as you begin your study using this guide:

- Each week you will be asked to complete three activities: (1) read through the book of 1 Peter in its entirety¹, (2) study the specific passage in question, and (3) consider the message of the letter in our modern context.
- The study portion of each week’s assignment will use the “inductive” method of Bible study. Primarily this means that you will use a slow reading of the text, along with various other sections of Scripture, to understand the meaning of the passage.
- The final section of each week’s study is a letter written directly to York Alliance Church in 2017. The goal is to bring these ideas into the modern context with a pastoral heart, not to presume to speak on behalf of the Holy Spirit or in place of Scripture. As you read and meditate, recognize that the words are written by a fallen man and are not the infallible words of God.
- I encourage you to read each Scripture passage, as well as the various times you read the letter as a whole, in multiple translations. Remember that every translation is just that—a translation. Unless otherwise noted, this study will use the English Standard Version, which is a literal “word for word” translation. The New Living Translation is a “phrase for phrase” translation that is very readable but also quite accurate. Read key passages in both translations when possible. Both translations, along with dozens of others, can be found at www.biblegateway.com.
- Included with each study are blank sermon note sheets (for use on Sunday mornings and/or with the sermon audio available online) as well as a “Facilitation/Application” sheet.

If you have questions about how to best utilize this study guide, have comments on what you’re finding in it, or just want to report your experiences with using it, all are welcomed! Email me at bkannel@yorkalliance.org.

Lord Jesus, You have called us to be in the world, but not of the world. As we study this letter, may our hearts be captured once again with the living hope that we have in Christ and the surety of our inheritance in Him. May that hope give us the strength to stand firm as “exiles” in a foreign land as we live not according to the values of this world, but according the values of the Kingdom of God. Give us the grace to not only live as sojourners and exiles, but to live infused with such a hope that we will constantly be ready with an answer for the hope that we have. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.

You’ve Got Mail!

¹ For more information on this practice, see the next section “You’ve Got Mail!”

It's easy to forget that the words of Scripture were not originally penned so that we might study them word by word and phrase by phrase. Instead, they were written by a specific author in a specific time to a specific audience to fulfill a specific purpose. As such, they are best understood when we understand the form, author, audience, and purpose.

1 Peter is a book near the end of the New Testament in the Bible. It contains five chapters, eleven distinct sections (in the ESV), and 105 verses. It was written by the Apostle Peter, the leader of Jesus' disciples and one of the leaders of the early church. It is a much loved section of Scripture that has been studied for nearly 2000 years.

But first and foremost, it's a letter.

It's a letter written by a pastor to a church that had been scattered by persecution. Suffering through persecution was not yet widespread at the time the letter was written, but it was a very acute reality to those who suffered. This loving pastor had a specific message for his scattered flock. He took time to put it in letter form, assisted by his friend and fellow pastor Silvanus (likely the man referred to in the book of Acts as "Silas"), and had it delivered to each of the churches that were scattered throughout Asia Minor.

Author Jen Wilkin notes that, when we receive a letter, we don't "tear open the envelope, flip to the second page, read two paragraphs near the bottom, and set the letter aside."² So why would we do that with our study of Scripture? We often remove words from their context, pay little attention to the author, audience, or purpose, and then seek to apply them to our lives as though they were written primarily for us. Unfortunately, this removes the vital purpose of understanding

² Jen Wilkin, *1 Peter: A Living Hope in Christ* (LifeWay Press, Nashville, TN, 2015), pg. 5. I owe a huge debt of gratitude to Wilkin's fine study on this letter for a variety of the ideas, inspirations, and methods contained in this study. I've borrowed her language in many of the questions, used many of her icebreaker questions, and in general, relied heavily on her study. Her process is quite a bit more intensive than that found within this study, but if you desire a deeper study of the letter, I highly recommend you put this book down right now, purchase Wilkin's book, and use her study instead!

more about the God of the Universe and His working in the world, and replaces it with my purposes and desires.

It may seem that the weekly reading of the entire letter of 1 Peter is a bit much. You may be tempted to skip over that step each week. But resist the temptation! It's vitally important for us to understand the overall flow of the letter, the heart of the author (in this case, Pastor Peter), and the purpose for which the letter was originally intended. As we read the letter all the way through each week, at least eleven times over the course of this study, we will begin to understand the unified message of the letter, and through that, understand a bit more about the heart of God. Then, as we study each passage individually, the nuance and beauty of Pastor Peter's word to the church will begin to emerge out of the canvas like a finely painted detail in the middle of masterpiece.

This ancient letter begins the way our modern letters end—with the signature. "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ." The leader among the disciples. The one who betrayed Jesus on the night of His crucifixion. The one who spoke the holy confession that Jesus is the Christ, and then promptly thought that he knew better than Jesus, earning a rebuke as a satanic force. (Mark 8:27-33) The preacher at Pentecost that saw thousands convert to faith in Jesus. The apostle that Paul had to oppose "to his face" because, even after a direct word from God, he wouldn't accept Gentile converts completely. This is a letter written by both a great and greatly flawed man of God.

And then the address: "To those who are elect exiles of the dispersion." These believers have been spread throughout Asia Minor due to persecution, but God has not forgotten them. And neither has their pastor. They have been chosen by God, redeemed by Him, and now they are being called to live according to a set of values that are dramatically different than the world around them.

From there... well, that's where we're headed next. Peter's words still hold true nearly 2,000 years later, and we are certainly nothing more or less than the "elect exiles," chosen by God, yet often finding our values and lives at odds with the world around us. So, when you open to 1 Peter, it's not just a letter for the ancient church. It's a letter for you and me.

Week One: Elect Exiles

1 Peter 1:1-2

Strength to live as exiles in a foreign land doesn't come from self-esteem, good parenting, or a well organized life. Peter reminds a scattered and persecuted church that strength for living will only come through an understanding of God's work in our lives, the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in us, and the holiness that comes through the sacrifice of Jesus alone.

Read the entire letter of 1 Peter.

- What section of the letter sticks out the most to you this week?

- What section is the most unclear to you right now?

Read 1 Peter 1:1-2.

Peter is stated as the author of the letter.

- List some of the things you know about the disciple/apostle Peter. (You may know lots, or you may only know a little at this point!)

- Who is the audience to whom Peter is writing?

Read the following verses: 1:18, 2:10, 4:3.

- Based on the statements made in these verses, does it seem that these churches were made up primarily of Jewish believers or Gentile believers?

- What term does Peter use to describe the believers in these churches?

Look up both of these words in a dictionary and write down the definitions:

- Elect (adj.)

- Exile (n and v)
- In your own words, then, what is Peter saying when he describes these believers as “elect exiles?”

There is an important doctrine that Peter highlights in his greeting. Fill in the blanks below to help you see the doctrine:

according to the foreknowledge of _____,
 in the sanctification of the _____,
 for obedience to _____ and for sprinkling with his blood.

- What is the doctrine that Peter is illustrating in this verse?

The Father

- What divine ability does Peter attribute to the Father?
- In your own words, what does that mean? (Use a dictionary if necessary!)

The Holy Spirit

- What is the work that he attributes to the Holy Spirit?

Saginaw, Mount Wolf, Spring Grove, Hanover, Seven Valleys, Thomasville, Glen Rock, Shrewsbury, New Freedom, and various points near and far. You have been chosen by God to be redeemed by His love and grace. He has lavished His love on you, not because of anything that you've done, but because of His great mercy.

His choice of you is a blessing beyond compare; but from a worldly perspective, there are some challenges as well. You are blessed to no longer fit in with the rest of the world. You are blessed to live at odds with the prevailing culture and ideas of our day. You are blessed to never be able to fully settle in this life, because you will never be fully at home on this side of heaven. You are exiles, unable to dwell in the land for which your heart has been created, and unable to mold your heart to the culture that surrounds you. Congratulations.

Here's some great news: God is at work in you! The Father has not only chosen you, He knows everything about your life, from the largest problem you face to the smallest detail in the furthest corner of your mind. And He loves you just as you are. However, you are so loved that He would never leave you just as you are! The Holy Spirit is in the process of making you holy and setting your life apart to be used for His glory alone. This is a constant work, and He is doing it in you so that you will be able to obey Jesus more and more, because it's through obedience to Him that you'll really have joy. Even better, He has become the final and perfect sacrifice for you. Because of His sacrifice, every time you fall short, He makes up the difference. You have been made completely perfect through Him, even as you are in the process of being made perfect.

As you can see, you have already received incredible grace from God. When you think about all that He's done and all that He's currently doing in you, it's almost impossible not to just rest and trust Him in every circumstance. He's got this figured out, and He's working it out for your best. Be encouraged!

Thoughts about this portion of the "letter on a letter?"

How might these truths impact the way that I should live?



Elect Exiles

1 Peter 1:1-2

Sermon Notes:

LIFE Group Facilitation Sheet

Welcome one another in Jesus' name!

Icebreaker: "How many times did your family move growing up?"

Worship Jesus through Scripture, music, singing, and prayer. Be creative! Invite Him to the center of your gathering.

Word: 1 Peter 1:1-2

- How has God been at work around you?
- Has anything specific jumped out to you, either in this passage or in the study guide this week?
- What is your feeling when you hear that God has “chosen” you?
- In what ways are we “elect exiles?”
- What are some things that you learned about God in this passage?
- What comes to mind immediately when you think about the most important things about you? Why do those things come to mind?
- After giving it some thought, what really are some of the most important things about you? Why?
- Do you feel like your life is marked by grace and peace? Why or why not?
- How are we called to encourage one another in our “exile” in order to remain faithful? Does that happen in this group?

World: God has gifted us in incredible ways through His choice of us and His work in our lives. He has also invited us to pray according to His heart, and promised that He would answer! Think about those people to whom your life is connected who have specific needs. How might God reach into their lives and impact them both for this life and for eternity? Make a list of the first names of those people in your life, and commit to praying for them throughout this study. Ask God to bless them and to draw them to Himself!

Note: Please check www.yorkalliance.org, register for our weekly newsletter, and get information on coming events and activities.

Week Two: Salvation Present

1 Peter 1:3-12

The hope that we are given as believers in Jesus is an inheritance that will never fade away. This restoration of right relationship with God is the culmination of the longings of the prophets and the direction of the law, the pinnacle of the hopes of heaven. It's not just a past event or a future hope, but a present reality that is available to us only by faith.

Read the entire letter of 1 Peter.

- What are some themes that you are noticing as you read this letter?

- Do you find this letter to be encouraging or discouraging overall? Why?

- Write 1 Peter 1:3-5 in your own words.

Read 1 Peter 1:6-9.

- What is the purpose of suffering according to vs. 7?

- What does the phrase “if necessary” in vs. 6 say about God’s role in the suffering that we experience?

- Read James 1:2-4 and Romans 5:3-4. How do these verses expand your understanding of the role that suffering plays in the life of a believer?

- Write 1 Peter 1:6-9 in your own words.

Read 1 Peter 1:10-12.

- What three major events/concepts does Peter tell us were contained within the whole of the prophecies? (one in vs. 10, two in vs. 11)

- Read 1 Corinthians 1:16-19. How did the early church seem to be viewed by those in the mainstream culture?

- How does vs. 12 describe the view that angels have of believers in Jesus? How does that contrast with the world's view?

- Write 1 Peter 1:10-12 in your own words.

Application:

- What are some things that you are seeking to "inherit" in this life? List some of your priorities and things you focus on below.

- Evaluate the list you just made according to what will perish or fade away. Are there priorities that need to change?

- Think about a difficult situation that you're currently facing. How might God be testing and purifying your faith through this trial?

- How does understanding that we live in a privileged time, one that angels long to look into and experience, encourage you in your daily life?

A Letter About a Letter, Part 2

Dear ones, God has been so incredibly good to us! In many ways, we're no different than the world around us. We're certainly no more deserving of the abundant grace of Jesus—but He's given us His grace anyway. He has stepped into our broken lives and given us this incredible gift of salvation. We can tend to get jealous of those who have great riches or possessions, but those things are going to disappear. The gift we've received from God, our salvation, will never fade. In fact, God Himself is guarding our gift, and He's guaranteeing it!

We can certainly rejoice in this kind of salvation, even though things don't always go smoothly for us in the here and now. Brothers and sisters, please understand:

Even the suffering we experience flows through the hands of God. He is using the suffering that we experience to shape us, purify us, and make us more like Him. The pain may be difficult, but the end result will be worth it! So hang in there. There's a purpose even for your specific suffering, whether it's sickness, financial hardship, a painful work or family situation, depression, or just the overall difficulty of living in the midst of a broken world. Hang onto Jesus by faith, and this great reward will be yours.

Think about this: Everything that the prophets wrote, everything that the Old Testament stories symbolized, and everything that the law and the sacrificial system pointed to, is bound up in the salvation that you are now experiencing. The prophets would love to swap places with you, in spite of the suffering you are facing. They just pointed to salvation; you and I get to experience it! Even the angels are bending over and peering into your life with joy and bit of holy jealousy.

It's so easy to get our eyes off the incredible gift of this great salvation. We so easily get caught up in the day to day and moment by moment and forget the incredible gift of God we've received through Jesus. Take time to get perspective. Yes, things can be tough at times, and the suffering we experience is real. But if we can keep our eyes focused widely enough to understand the past work of Jesus and the future glory that is ours as a promised and guaranteed inheritance, our perspective on the present will likely be a bit different.

Thoughts about this portion of the “letter on a letter?”

How might these truths impact the way that I should live?



Salvation Present

1 Peter 1:3-12

Sermon Notes:

LIFE Group Facilitation Sheet

Welcome one another in Jesus' name!

Icebreaker: "Have you ever inherited something? What was it?"

Worship Jesus through Scripture, music, singing, and prayer. Be creative!
Invite Him to the center of your gathering.

Word: 1 Peter 1:3-12

- How has God been at work around you?
- Has anything specific jumped out to you, either in this passage or in the study guide this week?
- Do you tend to focus most on the past work of Jesus, the future glory of heaven, or the work that God is doing in your life in the present?

- What are some of the things that you long to “inherit” in this life? How many of those things will ultimately fade away?
- Think about a difficult situation that you’re currently facing. How might God be testing and purifying your faith through this trial?
- How does understanding that we live in a privileged time encourage you in your daily life?
- Are there specific ways that we could encourage one another in the midst of trials, particularly armed with an understanding of what God’s purposes are for our suffering?

World: As you put together a list of people that you’re going to pray for over the next several months, think about intentional ways that you could connect with one another. It seems far away right now, but think about an Easter or “Welcome Spring!” celebration, a Cinco de Mayo party (it’s a Friday this year!), or some kind of activity that could be a blessing to those in your life and could include other members of your group. Pray intentionally for opportunities to love and serve those around you!

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Week Three: So... Now Live!

1 Peter 1:13 - 2:3

- As you read through 1:13-2:3, what are the major areas in which Peter is challenging these believers to transformed behavior? (Hint: look at vs. 13-16, vs. 17-21, and 1:22-2:3)

Read 1 Peter 1:13-16.

- Is the holiness that Peter calls us to a qualification for our salvation, or a response to it? How do you know?

- As you read this section, does Peter call us to holiness in our (a) minds, (b) emotions, (c) actions, or (d) all of the above? What words or phrases give you this answer?

- What does Peter say should be our motivation for pursuing holiness?

- Write 1 Peter 1:13-16 in your own words.

Read 1 Peter 1:17-21.

- What are the two different descriptions of God in vs. 17?

Read the following verses and note what they tell us about the Father:

- Matthew 6:26
- Matthew 7: 9-11
- Luke 6:35-36
- Romans 8:15-16
- 1 John 3:1

Now read the following verses and note what they tell about the Judge:

- Psalm 75:7
- Matthew 25:31-46
- 2 Timothy 4:8
- James 4:12
- 1 Peter 4:5
- Why might Peter refer to God as both Father and judge?

- In vs. 17, on what does Peter say that the judgment will be based?

- In vs. 21, where does he say that we should place our hope? Why is our hope not in our deeds?

- Write 1 Peter 1:17-21 in your own words.

Read 1 Peter 1:22-2:3.

- What is the only directive/instruction within vs. 22-25?

- What is the foundation for this love for one another, based on both vs. 22 and again in vs. 23?

- What three words/ideas does Peter use to describe the Word of God in vs. 23-25? How does this tie to 2:2? Do these ideas expand the way that you view the Word?

- What are some practical ways that you love others within the body? What are some ways that you have been loved by others in the body?

- In what ways do you find it most difficult to love others in the church?

- Do you love others because of summoning up the desire to love, or out of an enjoyment of the love of God toward you? How could you embrace the latter more fully?

- What are some of the perishable things that demand your attention and/or your affection? How do those things inhibit your ability to love other people?

- What are some of the things in which you place your hope? Think honestly about your life. What circumstances, achievements, relationships, etc. would bring you hope?

A Letter About a Letter, Part 3

Do we really believe the truth about the salvation that we have in Jesus? If we do, then we should prepare ourselves to really live like it! We can place our hope in so many different things: money, a good house, car, or job, the right relationships, a healthy and happy family, an organized life, a healthy lifestyle... and all of those things can be good! But the only place we can truly have hope is in the salvation that is ours in Jesus, and the secure inheritance that will never fade away.

So if we really believe this salvation, the first thing that will change is our behavior. We'll start to act like Jesus, not so that we can earn His approval, but because He's already given it to us. Our motivations used to be for material things, or acceptance by others, or security, or comfort, or pleasure. But now our only motivation is Jesus Himself, because He's given us all that we need! That is, if we really believe this salvation.

If we really believe this salvation, we'll recognize that God has come near to us through Jesus and invited us into His family as our Father. But He's also holy and righteous and will judge us accordingly. He'll judge us based on our deeds because our deeds flow out of our belief in Him and in this great salvation He's offered us. It's certainly not that we earn anything by our deeds; but they do show us what we believe. When we truly experience the salvation that comes through the shed

blood of Jesus as our sacrifice, our hope is in Him and our actions start to reflect Him as well.

Not only does our behavior look different and our attitude toward God change, but the way that we engage one another will be transformed as well. When we truly believe this great salvation, we can truly love one another because our hearts are no longer pulled toward all of the other things in life that are fading away. At one point we used people to get things, but now, we can use things to bless people! We know the things will fade away, but the people never will.

So if we really believe the truth about this salvation, we need to immediately change the way that we interact with one another. We should wish the best for one another, not the worst. We should tell the truth to one another and live that truth out in front of one another. We should be thrilled for what others have, even as we learn to be content with what we have. And the words we speak about one another should always be full of grace.

It doesn't always happen like that, which shows us that there are still parts of us that don't really believe the gospel. Honestly, many of us are still babies when it comes to faith! We need to grow up. That should be the longing in our hearts and the desire of our lives. How do we do it? We need to crave the Word of God even more than a baby craves milk from its mother. His Word is our source of life, and it's the only way that we'll grow up into maturity. Do you really long for it? If you've tasted it once, that longing is there inside of you. If you don't long for His Word and growth to maturity, it may be that you've never truly experienced Him. The door is wide open! He's inviting you in.

Thoughts about this portion of the "letter on a letter?"

How might these truths impact the way that I should live?



So... Now Live!

1 Peter 1:13-2:3

Sermon Notes:

LIFE Group Facilitation Sheet

Welcome one another in Jesus' name!

Icebreaker: "What was/is your favorite meal?"

Worship Jesus through Scripture, music, singing, and prayer. Be creative!
Invite Him to the center of your gathering.

Word: 1 Peter 1:13-2:3

- How has God been at work around you?
- Has anything specific jumped out to you, either in this passage or in the study guide this week?
- Is the holiness of God always our motivation for pursuing holiness? What are some other motivations for pursuing holiness?
- Is it harder for you to identify with God as Father or God as Judge? Why is that? How might you bring these two aspects of God more into balance in your life?
- What are some practical ways that you love others within the body? What are some ways that you have been loved by others in the body?
- In what ways do you find it most difficult to love others in the church?

- Do you love others because of summoning up the desire to love, or out of an enjoyment of the love of God toward you?
- What are some of the perishable things that demand your attention and/or your affection? How do those things inhibit your ability to love other people?

World: The natural outflow of the hope that we have in Jesus is a love for God and for His people. However, that love doesn't end at the borders of the church—every person has the possibility of being a child of God! So, now that you've spent time encouraging one another within this group, how might you reach outside of this group? Think about one practical way that you can share the hope of Jesus with someone this week, and then pray that God would give you opportunity to love them in that way!

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Week Four: A Living Temple

1 Peter 2:4-12

God commanded the construction of both the tabernacle and the temple with great detail and beauty because it was the place where He would meet with His people. Now, through the grace of Jesus, God is building a new temple—this time

out of His people! The church is intended to be the living temple in which the world is able to meet with God, and we are a kingdom of priests, helping others connect with Him.

Read the entire letter of 1 Peter.

- Is there a part of the letter that has taken on a deeper meaning for you as you've read it again and again?

- Are there other sections of Scripture that come to mind as you read 1 Peter? If so, which ones?

Read 1 Peter 2:4-12.

- What is the overall idea that you think Peter is trying to communicate in this section?

Read the following verses.

- Hebrews 10:10, 14
- Romans 12:1-2

- What's the nature of the sacrifice we are called to offer as living stones?

Jesus as the cornerstone isn't the only "stone" metaphor that Peter uses for Jesus. How does he describe Jesus in vs. 8?

Peter is not the only New Testament writer to use this image for Jesus. Read Romans 9:30-33 and 1 Corinthians 1:22-23.

- Based on these passages, what do you think Peter means when he says: "They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do." (vs. 8b)

- Now read Matthew 10:35-37. How does this highlight the nature of Jesus as the "stumbling stone?"

Juan Sanchez makes the powerful observation: "[Jesus] is not willing to be just one brick in our own building—he calls us to be built into His. And to everyone who hears that, it is either the most wonderful news, or the most offensive."³

- Write 1 Peter 2:4-8 in your own words.

³ Juan Sanchez, 1 Peter for You, (The Good Book Company, 2016.), pg. 81.

Read 1 Peter 2:9-12.

- What is the general idea that Peter is communicating in these verses?

These verses are deeply connected to the Old Testament scriptures. Read the following passages carefully, noting the details of what's being said and how they tie to this section of 1 Peter.

- Exodus 19:5-6
- Isaiah 43:19-21
- Hosea 1:6-2:13

- How does 1 Peter 2:9 state the fulfillment of Exodus 19 and Isaiah 43? How might this have felt to a marginalized and persecuted church in the midst of a powerful pagan empire?

- When you read 1 Peter 2:10 in the light of the Hosea passage, what ideas stick out to you?

- What is God's purpose for the church according to vs. 9?

- If our role is to "proclaim the excellencies of [God]" in the world around us, why are vs. 11-12 important exhortations for us?

- Write 1 Peter 2:9-12 in your own words.

Application:

- Whose fame are you living for? What glory are you pursuing? Be honest—think about the patterns of your mind and behavior and answer accordingly.

- What kind of rejection have you faced as a “living stone?” How does that rejection help you understand better how to follow Jesus, and how does it impact the way that you value the community of believers around you?

- In what ways is your life a “spiritual sacrifice acceptable to God through Jesus Christ?” Are there areas of your life that you tend to hold onto instead of offering them to Him?

- Are there areas in which the grace of Jesus through the cross is a stumbling stone to you?

- How does Peter's explanation of the church influence your view of the church? Does it change the way you participate in the church?

- In what ways is your life a declaration of the gospel to others? How could your life be a stronger declaration?

- Do you tend toward seclusion and insulation from the culture or inclusion and assimilation with the culture? What are some specific ways you can live as a sojourner and exile in the world around you?

- Have you ever given up a pastime or behavior because it might send the wrong message to the unbelieving world around you? Is the Lord showing you anything right now that you need to consider giving up?

A Letter About a Letter, Part 4

Friends, our view of church is way too small!

We so often get caught up in the process of church: Worship gatherings, LIFE Groups, ministry activities, and relational connections. There are times that we view church as a product or service, and evaluate it as such. Does it meet my needs? Is it enjoyable? Do things happen according to my preferences? Do I like it here?

It's not that those questions are unimportant, it's just that they're not the point. More accurately, they cheapen "we the church" into a commodity that can be shopped for and transferred from as desired. What is the church really?

At the center is, and will always be, the person of Jesus. He is the foundation of the church and the cornerstone that holds everything else together. In His incarnation, heaven and earth meet together. When we see Him, we see God. When we come to Him, we are no longer searching for God outside of us, but we are indwelt by the His very presence. At that point, we become a "temple" of sorts; a place that God dwells, and a place where others can experience Him. Our lives become a testimony of His goodness and grace.

Because of this, when all of us as believers join together, we are a living display of His kingdom alive here on earth. The church isn't just a nice place to go on Sunday morning or a network of people through which we can develop friendships—we are a living example of God's reign to the watching world. You, then, as believers in Jesus, are His chosen children, chosen to lead others toward an experience of His love and grace. You are made holy through His work, which is both an eternal work and a work that is happening moment by moment as He changes your desires,

passions and behavior. You belong to Him, and His desire for you—for all of us together—is to proclaim His glory through our mouths and through our lives. We have been the recipients of amazing grace, and we get to the display that reality to the world through our lives!

That's why it's so important that we don't live like the rest of the world. They are living without real hope, because true hope can only come through Jesus. They are driven by pleasure, comfort, material gain, power, and ease. We can't live like that! Our lives are supposed to be dramatically different, and when we truly experience Jesus, they are different at the core. That core difference needs to work its way into the whole of our lives. So live according to the ways of Jesus, particularly among the watching world. It will frustrate them at times, since your lives will look so different from theirs. They will say that you're out of sync and out of step, and they may even say that your way of life is evil. Let your life speak for itself. They will see how you love God and love people, and someday, the testimony of your life will not only speak, but bear fruit.

Thoughts about this portion of the "letter on a letter?"

How might these truths impact the way that I should live?



A Living Temple

1 Peter 2:4-12

Sermon Notes:

LIFE Group Facilitation Sheet

Welcome one another in Jesus' name!

Icebreaker: "What is the most amazing building that you've ever seen?"

Worship Jesus through Scripture, music, singing, and prayer. Be creative! Invite Him to the center of your gathering.

Word: 1 Peter 2:4-12

- How has God been at work around you?
- Has anything specific jumped out to you, either in this passage or in the study guide this week?
- What kind of rejection have you faced as a "living stone?" How does that rejection understand better how to follow Jesus, and how does it impact the way that you value the community of believers?
- Whose fame are you living for? What glory are you pursuing?
- In what ways is your life a "spiritual sacrifice acceptable to God through Jesus Christ?" Are there areas of your life that you tend to hold onto instead of offering them to Him?
- Are there areas in which the grace of Jesus through the cross is a stumbling stone to you?
- How does Peter's explanation of the church influence your view of the church? Does it change the way you participate in the church?
- In what ways is your life a declaration of the gospel to others? How could your life be a stronger declaration?
- Do you tend toward seclusion and insulation from the culture or inclusion and assimilation with the culture? What are some specific ways you can live as a sojourner and exile in the world around you?

World: God has chosen us to "proclaim his excellencies" to the world around us. How might this group do that? Who has God placed on your heart or in your

path? Think about the list you made a few weeks ago. Are there ways that you might show/proclaim the excellency of Jesus to those people as a blessing to them? Plan and pray, and then step into God's work.

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Week Five: Freely Submit

1 Peter 2:13-25

The freedom that we are given through Christ is complete and all-encompassing. When we use that freedom to submit to the authorities over us, even when they are unjust, it is a powerful testimony to a watching world. Understanding who we are in Christ and our imperishable inheritance in Him gives us the grace to image Jesus by humbly serving those around us.

Read the entire letter of 1 Peter.

- Is there a new portion of the letter than has specifically resonated with you this week?

- Is there a part of the letter that has taken on a deeper meaning for you as you've read it again and again?

Read 1 Peter 2:13-25.

- What is the overall idea that you think Peter is trying to communicate in this section?

- How might this section fit into Peter's overall objective to encourage believers and call them to action in the face of suffering and difficulty?

Read 1 Peter 2:13-17.

- What are the first images and ideas that come to your mind when you think of the idea of submission or word submit? Are they positive or negative?

- What reasons does Peter give for submitting to human authorities? (vs. 13, 15)

- Are there other reasons beyond “for the Lord’s sake” that people might choose to submit to the governing authorities? What are some of them?

- How does the freedom that Peter speaks about in vs. 16 tie to the idea of submission in the rest of the passage? Read 1 Corinthians 9:19-23 for insight.

- Write 1 Peter 2:13-17 in your own words.

Read 1 Peter 2:18-25.

- To whom is this section addressed? To which categories of people might this passage apply today?

- How does Peter describe the feeling of God in vs. 20 when believers do what's right and suffer for it? Why might this be?

- Read Jesus' words in Luke 6:27-36. What are some of the ideas that overlap between Jesus' words and Peter's words?

- Read vs. 22-23. After what behaviors of Jesus are we encouraged to model our lives?

- In vs. 24b-25, Peter is subtly referencing Isaiah 53. Look up that passage and note any words/phrases that are echoed in 1 Peter 2:13-25.

- Write 1 Peter 2:18-25 in your own words.

A Letter About a Letter, Part 5

My friends, this is a tough one. Our world is so stuffed full with the idea of what we “deserve” and “my personal rights.” But the way of Jesus is different. It’s so counter-cultural that it will be hard to understand it, let alone obey it. But it’s good, and as we live in Jesus’ ways, we will point the world back to Him.

You have been given freedom through Jesus. Now, use that freedom to freely submit to the governing authorities around you. The good ones and the bad ones. The just and unjust. As long as they aren’t calling you to disobey God Himself, submit to them. You can certainly use your freedom to work for the rights of the poor and marginalized, and you can use your voice to speak up about what’s right. But in the end, the powers that are in authority over you, though they themselves have been created by God, are placed there by His will, so you need to respect them. In fact, respect everyone. Yes, love the church. Yes, absolutely fear God. And yes, honor the governmental authorities that are over you.

In a democracy, there are those in authority over us that were our choice and those who were not our choice. Even more, there are those that are good leaders and others who are bad leaders. No matter—obey them both. In fact, when you suffer through your righteous submission to those in authority over you, God is pleased. It’s like you’ve chosen to obey Him by submitting to the authority that He’s put in place, even at the cost of your own comfort. Isn’t that what Jesus did? He suffered in your place, and by doing so, He taught all of us how we are supposed to live as well. He didn’t sin, but He was sinned against. He didn’t hate anyone, but He was certainly hated. Even in the worst of suffering, He didn’t lash out at those around Him. Instead, He quietly trusted His Father, who was and is completely able. He didn’t just trust Him for the moment; He trusted Him for eternal justice and judgment.

He suffered and died for you and for me. It wasn’t justice. It was mercy. In His death we are able to die to our own desires and live to His ways. He chased after us, even

into the midst of this unjust and broken world. Because He did, we can return to the love of God.

Thoughts about this portion of the “letter on a letter?”

How might these truths impact the way that I should live?



Freely Submit

1 Peter 2:13-25

Sermon Notes:

LIFE Group Facilitation Sheet

Welcome one another in Jesus' name!

Icebreaker: "What traffic law are you most likely to break?"

Worship Jesus through Scripture, music, singing, and prayer. Be creative! Invite Him to the center of your gathering.

Word: 1 Peter 2:13-25

- How has God been at work around you?
- Has anything specific jumped out to you, either in this passage or in the study guide this week?
- How does living in a democracy change the way we think about submitting to governmental authorities?
- How does Peter intend for us to use our freedom to honor God?
- How might we be tempted to use our freedom to cover evil?
- Are there ways in which you are avoiding walking in Jesus' footsteps and thereby avoiding suffering?
- How does this passage help you prefer Christ over your own comfort?
- Are there specific ways that we can encourage one another to live as believers in the midst of our broken world and under broken authority structures?

World: The call to submit to ruling authorities is, at the heart, a call to give up our own comforts and desires. We tend to avoid suffering, even if it means disobedience, instead of following God and enduring suffering as a result. One of the ways that we do this the most often is a lack of willingness to share the gospel with the world around us. We are afraid of rejection or suffering in some way, so we are quiet. Quietly disobedient. Ask God to show you areas in which He's called you to speak, and pray for the courage to step into those this week. Pray specifically for any opportunities that you know will be coming this week.

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Week Six: A Marriage Mystery

1 Peter 3:1-7

The difficulty of the marriage relationship has its root in Genesis 3. A desire to dominate and control, or a proclivity to be dominated or controlled, is deep within each of us due to sin. God's plan is dramatically different--a mutual submission to one another that weaves our lives together and parallels the beauty of Jesus' love for the church. The marriage relationship has a unique opportunity to display Jesus to the world.

Read the entire letter of 1 Peter.

- What section of the first two chapters has been most impactful for you to study?

- What section of the last three chapters are you most looking forward to really digging into?

Read 1 Peter 3:1-6.

- When you think about the idea of a “submissive wife,” what is the image that comes to your mind?

- What is the first word that Peter uses in vs. 1? What idea is he drawing a parallel from in the last chapter?

- Like governmental systems, marriage is a system that God has put in place. With that understanding, what is the underlying reason that a wife should submit to her husband? (See 1 Peter 2:13 for a hint!)

- What word does Peter use to describe the beauty of “a quiet and gentle spirit” in vs. 4. By contrast, what is he saying about physical beauty?

Many scholars have pointed out that 1 Peter 3:1-7 displays an undoing of the curse of Genesis 3.

- Read Genesis 3:1-19. What word is used in vs. 16 for the woman’s attitude toward her husband?

- Now read Genesis 4:7. The same Hebrew word appears in that verse as well. How would you paraphrase Genesis 4:7?

- Based on that understanding of the word, how would you paraphrase Genesis 3:16?

- Write 1 Peter 3:1-6 in your own words.

Read 1 Peter 3:7.

- What is the first word that Peter uses in vs. 7? What is the parallel between the first six verses and this verse?

- How are husbands commanded to live with their wives? What do you think Peter means by that statement?

- What two reasons are husbands given to treat their wives respectfully? What does 1 Peter 2:13 imply is the foundational reason?

- What implication does the statement “they are heirs with you of the grace of life” have for husbands and wives?

- Write 1 Peter 3:7 in your own words.

A Letter About a Letter, Part 6

We are to submit to the governing authorities for two main reasons: (1) God placed them in the positions they are in, and (2) it is a clear and vital witness to the outside world about the beauty of Jesus. That same reality carries over into the marriage relationship as well.

From the beginning, God has structured marriage in a certain way. It's not a matter of who is "in charge" and who isn't—it's a matter of roles and the way that God intended creation to work. Husbands and wives are called to submit to one another out of the reverence and fear they have for God. However, if the husband doesn't fear God, the wife shouldn't run the other way, and she shouldn't nag him about his faith. She should simply love him. In the same way we are called to submit to the governmental authorities over us, she should gladly and freely submit to her husband. With all of her deepest needs met through Jesus, she is an amazing position to love and serve her husband. That, in turn, will draw him like a magnet to the Lordship of Jesus. And, for the most part, she won't need to say a word. No nagging necessary.

Wives, the world around you says that you should spend your time, money, and energy on attracting your husband with your exterior beauty. Now, don't get me wrong—God is the Author of beauty, and He made you beautiful. But the reality is that our exterior beauty is fading away. It won't last forever, and if that's your entire focus, what will you have left? Instead, focus on spiritual beauty. Through submission, respect, love, and grace, cultivate a beauty that exudes from the inside out. You'll find that to be a beauty that will never fade. In fact, the Scriptures tell us that Sarah was exceedingly beautiful externally. However, her interaction with her husband Abraham shows an interior beauty that was even greater. Live like her and you don't need to fear.

Husbands, this isn't just about your wives. In fact, God's design for marriage actually starts with you! You need to love your wives just like Jesus has loved you. That means living with a deep understanding of who she is and what she needs, and then doing everything you can do to meet those needs. The respect she shows for you is a starting point, but you need to take a step beyond that: Honor your wife in the way that you live. God has made you to be physically stronger—never use that strength to dominate your wife, but instead, use it to serve her. Remember that

there is no hierarchy in heaven. You will both be citizens together in eternity, resting in the light of the glory of God. Since you will be co-worshippers then, be co-worshippers now. Living right, particularly as it relates to your wife, will make a life of worship the most natural thing in the world.

Thoughts about this portion of the “letter on a letter?”

How might these truths impact the way that I should live?



A Marriage Mystery

1 Peter 3:1-7

Sermon Notes:

LIFE Group Facilitation Sheet

Welcome one another in Jesus' name!

Icebreaker: "What older couple has been most formative in your life?"

Worship Jesus through Scripture, music, singing, and prayer. Be creative! Invite Him to the center of your gathering.

Word: 1 Peter 3:1-7

- How has God been at work around you?
- Has anything specific jumped out to you, either in this passage or in the study guide this week?
- What are some ways that wives try to control their husbands? What are some ways that husbands try to control their wives?
- What are some ways that wives can submit to the leadership of their husbands? What are some ways that husbands can honor their wives?
- What are some ways you might focus on physical beauty/appearance?
- What are some ways that you might enhance spiritual beauty?
- Be honest: Which one do you spend more time on each week?
- In what ways does our group reflect the eternal reality of heaven? In what ways don't we reflect eternity? What's one way that we can interact together in a way that points others toward the reality of heaven?

World: Our relationships as believers should be a living testimony to the love and grace of Jesus. As such, one of the greatest testimonies we have before the watching world is our interaction as a community. Take time to look at the calendar and plan a "Welcome Spring" party. Maybe you want to do cookout, a party in a park, or some other kind of themed gathering. It really doesn't matter what you do, so be creative! Then, invite people from your list (and others!) to experience this community. Pray about what this gathering might look like, and then pray over your invitations. Be a blessing!

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Week Seven: Righteous Suffering

1 Peter 3:8-22

There is little doubt or disagreement that the world is broken. Our response to that brokenness is what sets followers of Jesus apart from the rest of the world. Responding to suffering and pain with righteousness and hope speaks a loud testimony of the grace of Jesus. Despite circumstances, we always have the opportunity to do what's right.

Read the entire letter of 1 Peter.

- Go back and underline every reference to suffering in the letter. How many did you find?

- Is there a verse or short section of verses that is really sticking out to you? If so, consider memorizing that section during the last portion of this study.

Read 1 Peter 3:8-22.

- What are the main ideas that Peter is trying to communicate in this section?

Read 1 Peter 3:8-12.

- What are the five characteristics of life that Peter lists in vs. 8?

- Can you see any commonality between these traits?

Edmund Clowney observes: "These are not virtues chosen at random. Like the fingers of the hand, they radiate from one centre and work together. The key to them all is the love of grace: they reflect the grace, love, and compassion of Jesus Christ."⁴

Read the following passages:

- Romans 12:9-19
 - Ephesians 4:1-3, 31-32
 - Colossians 3:12-15
 - 1 Thessalonians 5:13-22
- What commonalities do you see between these passages and 1 Peter 3:8?
- What does Peter say is our motivation for blessing in vs. 9? Read Psalm 34, from which is where Peter is quoting the next several verses.

At first glance, this would seem to be advocating a kind of "works righteousness," where blessing will come to us as a result of our behavior. However, look back at 1 Peter 1:4. The word translated "inheritance" in 1:4 is the same word that is translated "obtain" in 3:9.

- How does that impact the way that you understand this passage?

⁴ Edmund Clowney, *The Message of 1 Peter*, (InterVarsity Press, Downer's Grove, IL., 1988.), pg. 137.

- Write 1 Peter 3:8-12 in your own words.

Read 1 Peter 3:13-17.

- Peter begins this section with a rhetorical question—but one in which the obvious answer isn't true. What's the question? Who is the clearest example of this conclusion not being an accurate one? (If you need a hint, look at vs. 18)

- Read Matthew 5:10 and 10:26-33. How do Jesus' words relate to Peter's?

- What does it mean to "in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy" in vs. 15? Look at another translation in order to help you with your answer. How does this prepare us to have an answer for the hope we have?

- Write 1 Peter 3:13-17 in your own words.

Read 1 Peter 3:18-22. This is a notoriously difficult passage to understand, so it's important to understand the big picture ideas that Peter is trying to communicate.⁵

- What is the overall idea that Peter is trying to communicate in vs. 18-22?

- How does this relate to Peter's overall purpose for writing the letter, as well as the topics that Peter just covered in vs. 8-17?

- Why did Christ die on the cross? (vs. 18)

- What is baptism a picture of? Look at Romans 6:4 and Colossians 2:12.

- What does Peter mean when he says that baptism saves us? What couldn't he have meant? Why?

Application:

- Which of the list of five characteristics from vs. 8 is the most difficult for you to practice with other believers?

⁵ Because of the difficulty and lack of clarity of vs. 19-22, we will simply seek to understand the main ideas of the passage for the purposes of this study and not seek to tackle the intricacies and possibilities within the text. Even the great Martin Luther made this comment on this passage: "A wonderful text is this, and a more obscure passage perhaps than any other in the New Testament, so that I do not know for a certainty just what Peter means." For a solid treatment of all of the options and some good insight into the passage, see Clowney, *The Message of 1 Peter* (The Bible Speaks Today) and Grudem, *1 Peter* (Tyndale Commentaries).

- How would your life, conduct and words be different if you really did not fear anything because you knew that the worst that can happen cannot happen—that you cannot lose God’s love for you?⁶

- What are some steps that you can take so that you will be prepared to give an answer for the hope that you have?

- What is the difference between giving a defense and being defensive? How might you stay away from defensiveness when you’re being challenged?

- Have you ever been persecuted for doing good or for defending your faith? How did that experience affect your faith?

⁶ This great question is taken from Juan Sanchez, *1 Peter For You*, (The Good Book Company, 2016.), pg. 129.

of the body. Therefore, within the church, guard your unity, be sympathetic to one another, love one another as brothers and sisters, have hearts that are tender toward one another, and be humble. This is how Jesus acted toward us, and He's model for living this way with one another.

When we're dealing with the rest of the world, we need to be careful not to act like they do. When someone is cruel to us, hates us, or acts unjustly toward us, we need to bless them. It's in our willingness to bless even those who live as our enemies that we show that we've received the imperishable inheritance as a gift from Jesus. And we don't need to worry—God is watching us, and He will help us!

The best way to avoid suffering is simply to be good to everyone. However, even then, there will be times that we suffer. When that happens, Jesus promised that we'll be blessed! Our lives and our eternity are safe with Him, so we never need to have any fear. There's no real harm that anyone can cause us! And when you're in the middle of suffering, the attitude of hope that you have in spite of the circumstance is bound to create some questions. People will be bound to ask about your hope, so be ready to talk about it! When you do, don't rub it in their face, but instead, gently point them toward Jesus, respecting them in the same way that He respected you. That's why you should always respond to evil and slander and persecution with righteousness and blessing—you will allow the Holy Spirit to convict in His perfect timing and not get in the way.

Friends, suffering is going to come. Sometimes it will be on a large scale; often, it will be on a small scale. Attacks on your character, your beliefs, or your decisions will be commonplace. You'll be passed over for promotions, excluded from social groups, and talked about behind your back. These things are inevitable. However, make sure it happens because you've done good, not because you've done evil. Live as righteous people, always seeking to honor God with you lives, and let Him decide when you should suffer; and when you do, do it with grace.

We have a wonderful model in this: Jesus Himself. He suffered once so that we could have hope in the midst of our suffering, as well as having eternal hope through our reconciliation with God. Through faith in Him, our flesh has died and our spirits have come fully alive. That's the heart of baptism, and the heart of what it means for us to walk in the footsteps of Jesus. He is ruling now in heaven, and He is our hope, even in the midst of suffering.

Thoughts about this portion of the “letter on a letter?”

How might these truths impact the way that I should live?



Righteous Suffering

1 Peter 3:8-22

Sermon Notes:

LIFE Group Facilitation Sheet

Welcome one another in Jesus' name!

Icebreaker: "Who was your favorite teacher?"

Worship Jesus through Scripture, music, singing, and prayer. Be creative! Invite Him to the center of your gathering.

Word: 1 Peter 3:8-22

- How has God been at work around you?
- Has anything specific jumped out to you, either in this passage or in the study guide this week?
- Which of the list of five characteristics from vs. 8 is the easiest for you to practice with other believers? Which is the most difficult? Why?
- How would your life, conduct and words be different if you really did not fear anything because you knew that the worst that can happen cannot happen—that you cannot lose God’s love for you?
- What are some steps that you can take so that you will be prepared to give an answer for the hope that you have?
- What are some things that you’ve learned through suffering in your life?
- How can we help and support one another as we endure suffering?
- If we never endure suffering in the world around us, what might this say about the way that we’re living?

World: Continue planning your party/spring event, and continue to pray for those in the world around you. This week’s study is a great reminder that, when you invite people or talk with them about engaging the community of faith, it might not always go well. That’s OK! In fact, Jesus promised it would happen. So take time to pray for encouragement and boldness for one another, and then look for ways to share the hope that you have as you go through this week.

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Week Eight: Counter-Cultural Community

1 Peter 4:1-11

Standing against the flow of culture has the potential to isolate and wear down the individual believer. However, God has not left us alone, but has given us the gift of community. In the church, Jesus has created a new society of people who operate according to different values and motivations, together becoming a display of the glory of Jesus.

Read the entire letter of 1 Peter.

- Continue to memorize the verses/passage that you determined that you were going to memorize last week.

- Is there a portion of the letter that stuck out to you this week, even though you've already read it seven times before this week?

Read 1 Peter 4:1-11.

- What are the main ideas that Peter is trying to communicate in this section?

- How does the first section of the text (vs. 1-6) relate to the second section (vs. 7-11)?

Read 1 Peter 4:1-6.

- What way of thinking does Peter call us to arm ourselves with in vs. 1?

Read the following verses:

- Matthew 10:22
- Acts 14:22
- Romans 8:17
- Philippians 1:29, 3:10-11
- 2 Timothy 1:8, 3:12

- What do these passages tell you about how Christians should expect to live in the world?

- What two responses does Peter tell us that we should expect from unbelievers when we flee from sin? (vs. 4) Why might they respond that way?

1 Peter 4:6 can be difficult to understand because of both culture and language. Culturally, early Christians believed that Jesus was coming back very soon, and many believed that this would happen before they died. In fact, others in the culture would mock their belief in the resurrection when believers died, saying that it disproved the resurrection.⁷ From a language perspective, “judged in the flesh” could be replaced by “died” and “live in the Spirit” could be replaced by “resurrected in eternity.”

- Based on these understandings, how might you interpret Peter’s words in vs. 6?

- Write 1 Peter 4:1-6 in your own words.

⁷ Jen Wilkin, 1 Peter: A Living Hope in Christ, (LifeWay, Nashville, TN, 2015.), pg. 108.

Read 1 Peter 4:7-11.

- What disciplines/activities does Peter commend to us in the light of the return of Christ? What reason does he give for commending them?

Activity/Discipline

So that.../Because...

vs. 7

vs. 8

vs. 9

vs. 10-11

- Which one of these does Peter highlight as the most important? Why?

- What do you think "show hospitality" means?

If you have access to a Bible dictionary, look up "hospitality." If you don't, do an internet search for "hospitality definition Bible dictionary."

- Based on what you read, why might those who show hospitality grumble?

- Why does God give spiritual gifts according to Peter? (vs. 10) Is this different than your understanding about the use of spiritual gifts? Why or why not?

- Peter only mentions a few spiritual gifts here. Think about others that you are aware of and list them below. Look at Romans 12:6-8 and 1 Corinthians 12:8-10 to help make your list.

- What does Peter say is the ultimate goal of the community of faith, and of the use of our spiritual gifts in serving one another?

- Write 1 Peter 4:7-11 in your own words.

Application:

- In what ways are you pursuing the will of God? In what ways are you pursuing the will of man? How can you tell the difference?

- What spiritual gift(s) do you have? You might need to ask others within your community what they see as your gifts—that’s often one of the best ways to understand what our spiritual gifts are.

- How are you currently using your gifts to serve the body? What is one way that you could serve the body with the gifts that you’ve been given if you aren’t doing so already?

- How does the body of Christ benefit if you use your gifts for the right reasons? How do they suffer if you use your gifts for the wrong reasons?

A Letter About a Letter, Part 8

It’s not a popular idea, but we should expect to suffer. Jesus suffered when He was in the flesh, and we should be prepared to do the same thing. We can get so caught up in the materialism and comfort of our culture and lifestyles that the idea of suffering starts to feel like it’s a long way off. However, it’s often through our suffering that we find victory over sin. Our suffering moves our focus off of our own lives and onto the will and ways of God. When we avoid suffering, we shouldn’t be surprised that our flesh has more power over us than we’d like...

So what does that suffering look like? It could be as simple as the consequences for not living like the rest of the world lives. We live in a world driven by sexuality and pleasure as the ultimate good; when we enjoy sexuality within the bounds created by God and subjugate our pleasure to the glory of God, we will face criticism from those around us. The world doesn't simply have a drink. Instead, there is an all-out pursuit of drunkenness! Whether it's sex or food or drink, the flesh is king in the world around us; the idol at which the world bows. When you live as a sojourner and exile in this fallen world (not insulating yourselves in a false subculture of "Christianity") and then don't bow at their idol, you will suffer. They will be surprised, sure, but they will also be angry. Your righteousness convicts their unrighteousness without so much as a word. But don't worry—eternity will tell the real story. Don't be concerned that you suffer in this life and then pass into death, because after death is eternity in glory, and that will far outweigh any suffering you face on earth.

Since Jesus' triumphant return is coming, live like it. Most importantly, love one another within the church. You'll be pressed on from the outside, so make sure the inside is a good place to be. If you love well, the other details will work themselves out. Sacrifice your time, resources, and energy for the sake of all of those in need, and do it with joy. You've been given gifts from the ultimate Gift-Giver, so use them to serve one another! He's not only given you gifts, He's given you the strength to use them. So use them in a way that serves the body of Christ and glorifies Jesus. He will be glorified forever and ever, so let's start now!

Thoughts about this portion of the "letter on a letter?"

How might these truths impact the way that I should live?



Counter-Cultural Community
1 Peter 4:1-11

Sermon Notes:

LIFE Group Facilitation Sheet

Welcome one another in Jesus' name!

Icebreaker: "What's your favorite gift you've received in the past year?"

Worship Jesus through Scripture, music, singing, and prayer. Be creative! Invite Him to the center of your gathering.

Word: 1 Peter 4:1-11

- How has God been at work around you?
- Has anything specific jumped out to you, either in this passage or in the study guide this week?

- Are there times you've experienced a reaction from unbelievers based on behavior in which you won't engage? What has that reaction been like?
- Have you ever been mocked or ridiculed for your beliefs? How did you respond? Why might the community of faith be important during those times?
- How could being self-controlled and sober-minded aid our prayers?
- What would practicing real biblical hospitality without grumbling look like for you within your situation and culture?
- What spiritual gift(s) do you have?
- How are you currently using your gifts to serve the body? What is one way that you could serve the body with the gifts that you've been given if you aren't doing so already?

World: We've been looking at the reality that the beauty of the community of faith is a powerful testimony to the grace of Jesus. Continue to pray for those around you, and creatively brainstorm ways that you can invite people into situations where they can experience your community. As you plan, pray for those you will invite, and ask God to open eyes to the beauty of His church.

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Week Nine: A New Way of Life

1 Peter 4:12-19

- What word does Peter begin this section with? What does that say about his motivation in what he's about to say?

- What does the fact that we are often surprised when we are faced with trials say about our expectations for the Christian life?

- Why does Peter say that we should rejoice in persecution? (vs. 13-14)

- Read James 1:2-4. How does he expand on Peter's encouragement?

- Why does Peter say that we will be blessed if we are insulted for the name of Christ in vs. 14? What will happen to us?

- What does Peter remind us about God's role even in our suffering in vs. 19?
- What is his final word to these believers about what they should do when they experience suffering?
- Write 1 Peter 4:12-19 in your own words.

Application:

- Do you anticipate suffering within your Christian journey? Why or why not?
- As you read this section, as well as the rest of the letter related to suffering, are you more encouraged or discouraged? Why?
- Read Philippians 3:7-11. Do you find yourself longing to experience suffering as a Christian? Does that seem like a right or wrong desire?

- Can you think of a time that you were ashamed to be a Christian?

- Think about your own life. Have you experienced any kind of suffering for being a Christian? Why do you think this is?

A Letter About a Letter, Part 9

My dear friends and loved ones, you should expect that faithfulness to Jesus will bring suffering. If you haven't experienced it yet, you will. You should be prepared for it, because it's inevitable for the faithful followers of Jesus. Suffering is part of the way that our loving Father tests and disciplines us. He shapes us through our suffering and purifies us, making us more like Him. So don't be surprised when it happens to you.

In fact, you should rejoice when you suffer for His name! Our suffering for His sake is a tangible reminder that we belong to Him, and that one day we will rejoice with Him. When we are insulted, marginalized, or ostracized for His Name, we can be assured that His Spirit rests on us; the same Spirit that rested on Jesus. He is right there with us in the middle of our suffering.

Now before we get carried away with the "rejoicing in sufferings" thing, let me just make one small exception: some of you deserve to suffer. There's no joy in suffering for evil behavior. Don't confuse the right consequences for your sin as the righteous suffering of God's servants. They aren't the same thing! Live your life so

that you will be unashamed. Then, when you suffer as a Christian, you will glorify God by bearing His Name: Christian. Little Christ.

The final judgment starts here, with us. The suffering we experience is a part of that judgment, and it's part of what God allows in order to purify us and make us more like Him. But just imagine—if this is the judgment for the people of God, how tough will it be for those who are outside of His household? There is great difficulty and pain even in our salvation, and we have been made righteous through Christ. What about the rest of the world?

When we get it all in perspective, it turns out that we can embrace suffering. We know that God is faithful, so we simply continue to do good, even in the midst of our suffering. We can rest assured that God is in it. So we should prepare ourselves for suffering, and we should expect it to come.

Thoughts about this portion of the “letter on a letter?”

How might these truths impact the way that I should live?



A New Way of Life

1 Peter 4:12-19

Sermon Notes:

LIFE Group Facilitation Sheet

Welcome one another in Jesus' name!

Icebreaker: "What are your plans for Easter? Do you have specific traditions?"

Worship Jesus through Scripture, music, singing, and prayer. Be creative! Invite Him to the center of your gathering.

Word: 1 Peter 4:12-19

- How has God been at work around you?
- Has anything specific jumped out to you, either in this passage or in the study guide this week?
- Do you anticipate suffering within your Christian journey? Why or why not?
- As you hear this section, as well as the rest of the letter related to suffering, are you more encouraged or discouraged? Why?
- Read Philippians 3:7-11. Do you find yourself longing to experience suffering as a Christian? Does that seem like a right or wrong desire?
- Can you think of a time that you were ashamed to be a Christian?

- Think about your own life. Have you experienced any kind of suffering for being a Christian? Why do you think this is?
- How does being a part of a community like this make going through suffering easier?

World: As we approach Easter, there are many people within each of our circles of influence who would love to attend church at Easter, but just aren't sure where to start. Consider a simple invitation to one of our Easter gatherings, or maybe to an Easter party or gathering that your group is holding. Pray intentionally for those you might invite, and ask God to prepare their hearts to hear the Word and to be embraced by His people.

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Week Ten: A Word to the Elders

1 Peter 5:1-4

One of the greatest gifts to the local body of Christ is a group of godly Elders. Elders are called to care for the body, lead the organization of the church, and humbly and eagerly serve. However, the most important role they have is to be an example

to the flock. Elders, deeply aware of their own imperfection and sin, say with the Apostle Paul: "Follow me as I follow Christ."

Read the entire letter of 1 Peter.

- Continue to memorize the verses/passage that you've been working on over the last few weeks.

- What aspects of your faith journey have been deepened through the reading of this letter over these past weeks?

Read 1 Peter 5:1-4.

- How would you summarize Peter's main points in this passage?

- What three qualifications for speaking to Elders does Peter list?

- Why do you think he chose to list those three?

- What are the wrong motivations that Peter lists for eldership? (vs. 2-3)

- Why might Elders be tempted to lead with those wrong motivations? Consider each one of them:
 - 1.

 - 2.

 - 3.

- What are the three parts of the job description Peter gives to Elders? (vs. 2-3)

- Write 1 Peter 5:1-4 in your own words.

Application:

- In what ways do you see the church as prone to wander, and therefore in need of Elders/Shepherds?

- In what ways can the flock behave that can make the job of an Elder easier?

- In what ways could the flock help an Elder not slip into serving with the wrong attitudes and motivations?

- Do you think it would be easy or difficult to be an Elder? Why? (Hint: In addition to practical considerations, read Hebrews 13:17)

- What are some ways that you can pray for you Elders and leaders?

A Letter About a Letter, Part 10

This section of the letter is really for Elders, but everyone else can certainly listen in. I hope that by hearing these words you'll be able to pray more effectively for your Elders and leaders.

I want to challenge each of you as Elders out of my role as an Elder just like you. Like each of you, God has called me into this role of leadership, and I have sought to humbly fulfill it as best I can. I pray that you would do the same, giving your energy and passion to this role that God has asked you to fill.

Be conscientious and caring Shepherds for the flock at York Alliance. Train your gaze on the flock so that you will quickly recognize the sick and hurting, the strays, and those who are perpetually on the outside. Remember that God has called you to lead. Don't hesitate to step into that role of leadership—the people need earthly shepherds, and when you hesitate to lead, the flock will wander aimlessly. Trust the calling that you've been given.

Don't lead as though you're being forced to lead. This is a tough one, but if you don't desire this role, it's best for you to step out of it. We need to be willing shepherds because this job has no room for hesitation. And don't lead because you will gain something from it. Power, influence, and notoriety are all bad motivations. Instead, be eager to serve in the role you've been given, not for earthly gain, but in order to serve Jesus and His body. Finally, don't exercise your authority in a domineering way. If you need to remind people of your authority and position, you've already lost. Rather, live and lead as examples to the flock. Make every

aspect of your life worthy of emulation, even your repentance. You will, of course, fall short. When you do, make sure that your humility is just as evident as the rest of your leadership. Newer believers, struggling Christians, and those who just aren't sure where to go next should all be able to look to you as an example of how to live. I pray that the testimony of your life and leadership will be like the Apostle Paul: "Follow me as I follow Christ."

Remember that, although this job doesn't pay in earthly terms, your heavenly reward will be unimaginable. Serve with the end in mind. One day Jesus, our Chief Shepherd, will return. At that moment, every ounce of service, every difficult conversation, every hour spent crying out in prayer, every Board meeting, and every minute spent leading, serving, and loving will all be worth it. It's a great blessing that we can serve together, and I'm incredibly thankful for each one of you. Let's continue to love and serve for the glory of our Good King.

Thoughts about this portion of the "letter on a letter?"

How might these truths impact the way that I should live?



A Word to the Elders

1 Peter 5:1-4

Sermon Notes:

LIFE Group Facilitation Sheet

Welcome one another in Jesus' name!

Icebreaker: "Who is the first Christian leader that had a profound impact on your life?"

Worship Jesus through Scripture, music, singing, and prayer. Be creative! Invite Him to the center of your gathering.

Word: 1 Peter 5:1-4

- How has God been at work around you?
- Has anything specific jumped out to you, either in this passage or in the study guide this week?
- In what ways do you see the church as prone to wander, and therefore in need of Elder/Shepherds?
- In what ways can the flock behave that can make the job of an Elder easier?
- In what ways could the flock help an Elder not slip into serving with the wrong attitudes and motivations?
- Do you think it would be easy or difficult to be an Elder? Why?
- What are some ways that you can pray for you Elders and leaders? Take time to do that as a group!

World: Continue to pray for those in your circle of influence, and if you haven't yet held some kind of spring gathering, now is a great time to do that! Encourage one another in the relationships that God has given to you, and spend time in groups of 2 or 3 praying blessing for people by name. Ask God to give you a boldness and passion for loving those around you.

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Week Eleven: A Word to the Church

1 Peter 5:5-11

Peter's word to the scattered and persecuted church in exile is a powerful word to the church today: be humble, be alert, and stand firm. We are called to live in the temporal world with an eye fixed firmly on the eternal. Our hope is found in the power and authority of Jesus alone.

Read the entire letter of 1 Peter.

- Continue to memorize the verses/passage that you've been working on over the last few weeks.

- In this last reading of the letter, list a few of the most important ideas that have stuck with you throughout your study.

Read 1 Peter 5:5-11.

- How would you summarize Peter's main points in this passage?

- What is the primary directive of vs. 5? What are some ways that you can practically “clothe yourself in humility” toward one another, and toward those who are in authority over you?

- Use the following chart to look at the flow of Peter’s instruction to the church. Summarize each statement as you read the verse:

(vs. 6) _____, so that _____.

(vs. 7) _____, because _____.

(vs. 8) _____, because _____.

(vs. 9) _____, knowing _____.

(vs. 10) _____, God will _____.

- If you view these five verses as a pathway, where does the path start? Where does it lead? What are the dangers along the way?

Start:

End:

Dangers/Pitfalls:

Application:

- What anxieties do you have when you think about submitting to the authority over you? What does it practically look like to cast those anxieties on Jesus?

- In what situations is it most difficult for you to humble yourself?

- What are some practical ways that you resist this devil in your day to day life?

- How does the promise of eternity with Jesus encourage you to suffer well? In what situations does that promise seem insufficient?

- How has the book of 1 Peter helped you to engage suffering with hope and joy?

A Letter About a Letter, Part 11

Allow me to take this final moment to write directly to you, the flock called York Alliance Church. God has called me, along with our team of Elders, to sacrificially lead you. My constant prayer is that we will do that in submission to Jesus and with His wisdom and strength.

Follow your leadership with humility and grace. If we interact together in humility, regardless of our position, we will find ourselves unified and on the side of the Lord. It's a terrifying thought that, when we are proud, God is opposed to us. Therefore, live with humility, recognizing the grace that comes when God is on your side. When you allow your own preferences to fall to the side and live with humility for the sake of others, you can trust that God will ultimately exalt you. Trust God, not your own ability to manipulate the situation. When you are anxious or concerned, whether about your own life or about the church, prayerfully give those anxieties to Him. Remember that your leaders have been given to you as servants of God; when you are anxious, humbly communicate your anxieties to them as well.

Be careful not to dwell on your anxieties. You also have a very real enemy, and he's constantly on the prowl, looking for an opportunity to pounce. So keep your head about you, and keep your eyes wide open. If you focus on your anxieties and concerns, you're liable to miss temptation before you're knee deep in it. Don't take your enemy lightly. Instead, resist him! Stand firm! Remember when you're tempted and when you suffer, you're far from the first to do it. Faithful Jesus followers all over the earth and throughout history have suffered just like you. So don't be discouraged. We all will suffer for a while, but in time, all that has ever been wrong will be made right. Jesus is coming again! He will take care of everything.

In the meantime, live your lives as those who have been exiled from your proper home. You are living in a world that rejects everything you value and values

everything that you reject. You will be tempted to create your own little “Christian” world and escape into it; but you would never fulfill God’s calling to proclaim His glory in the world! You will also be tempted to just “go with the flow” in the hopes that you could have an influence on those around you; but when you become so much like them, you lose your message! Instead, embrace your calling to live as elect exiles. You have been chosen and loved by God, and the hope you have is not based on anything this world can offer. Trust in Him alone. He is the only One worthy of our praise and devotion, and the only One who can truly satisfy.

May the grace and peace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

Thoughts about this portion of the “letter on a letter?”

How might these truths impact the way that I should live?



A Word to the Church

1 Peter 5:5-11

Sermon Notes:

LIFE Group Facilitation Sheet

Welcome one another in Jesus' name!

Icebreaker: "What is the most unpleasant job you've ever had to perform?"

Worship Jesus through Scripture, music, singing, and prayer. Be creative! Invite Him to the center of your gathering.

Word: 1 Peter 5:5-11

- How has God been at work around you?
- Has anything specific jumped out to you, either in this passage or in the study guide this week?
- What anxieties do you have when you think about submitting to the authority over you? What does it practically look like to cast those anxieties on Jesus?
- In what situations is it most difficult for you to humble yourself?
- What are some practical ways that you resist this devil in your day to day life?
- How does the promise of eternity with Jesus encourage you to suffer well? In what situations does that promise seem insufficient?
- How has the book of 1 Peter helped you to engage suffering with hope and joy?

World: The summer is rapidly approaching! Start to think with your group about the best ways to reach out to the world around you this summer. Should you have a regular gathering that you can invite neighbors to? Is God calling you to reach out in some way to the kids or families in your circle of influence? Prayerfully and creatively consider ways that God might be calling you to make an impact on the world around you.

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Acknowledgements

The book of 1 Peter has been a uniquely engaging study in lots of ways. When I sensed God's direction to preach this book this spring, I had no idea that I would be planning an extended sabbatical immediately following the completion of preaching this series. With that reality in mind, there have been so many moments when I've marveled at God's timing in leading us to this book at this moment. (For those of you who thought that this was impeccable planning on my part, sorry to disappoint!) This is definitely the right message for us at just the right moment.

The idea of writing a letter that parallels Peter's letter to the church is one that I first developed when writing on Paul's letter to the Philippians. I chose to use this structure again because Peter's letter lends itself to being "translated" into our modern situation, but also because it gave me the opportunity to express my heart (using Peter's outline and structure) leading into sabbatical. As such, since you've gotten this far in the book, I would encourage you to read through the letters one after another, just as though you are reading Peter's letter to the church. You'll find a unified message, and I hope one of encouragement in the midst of our broken world.

There are so many people to thank every time a book is completed, and this one is no exception. I need to start by thanking someone I've never met: Jen Wilkin. Jen is a Women's Ministry leader at The Village Church in Texas, and she's written an incredible inductive Bible Study on 1 Peter that was published by The Gospel Coalition last year. As I've said throughout this study guide, I've relied heavily on her great questions, use of language, and ways of thinking throughout this entire book, and there's no way to properly cite all of the ideas that I've used of hers. From icebreaker questions to Scripture references, her study has helped me think and

has had a significant influence on all that you hold in your hand. If you want a deeper study of 1 Peter, I would highly recommend picking up her study and working through it. It's not easy, but it's worth it!

I also want to once again thank Marty Krebs for his great cover and graphic work. Marty, it's a great joy for me to be working with you again on these projects, and your creativity and eye for design brings a high level of professionalism to this kind of a project. Thanks so much for your great work! I'm also thankful to our Elders who continue to have the vision required to grant me the time to write studies like this. Books like this would never happen if I didn't step back from some of the day-to-day duties for a few weeks to devote time and effort to them. Related to that, a huge thank you to our York Alliance staff who keep things moving during these "dreaded" writing periods. Nancy and Re, thanks for shielding me when necessary and communicating with me as needed. Mike and Tim, thanks for picking up the ample slack during these weeks of study and writing. Chris and Beth, thanks for your grace when I'm not as available as I'd like and not as responsive as I should be. You all have a part in each of these works.

As always, I'm thankful for the music that provides the creative soundtrack for these writing projects. This time around, I've begun experimenting with Amazon Playlists, and have loved hearing bands like The Lumineers, Mumford & Sons, Of Monsters and Men, and Bon Iver. But, of course, there was lots of room for some old and new favorites: Josh Garrels, the Gray Havens, Sandra McCracken, Rich Mullins, the Hamilton soundtrack (parental advisory on the lyrics—for real!), Mount Valor (Kyle Novy), Grace VanderWaal, and JJ Heller. Although I've only met a few of you and don't really know any of you, you've made writing more enjoyable and kept me company on many late nights.

Finally, I need to thank my family. This was the most intense writing schedule I've had in a long time, and I feel like I probably need to re-introduce myself to all of you. Thank you all for your grace and support as I write, but even more, as I lead. Tia, Ethan, Josiah, and Micah, watching you guys grow up and mature physically and spiritually is my greatest earthly joy. I can't wait to spend the summer with you guys! Amanda, you have given me grace upon grace throughout this process and about sixteen just like it. Thank you for loving me in the midst of all of this craziness. Summer is coming.

Grace and peace,

Brian Kannel

January 20, 2017

The world seems to be going crazy all around us.

Our politics here in the U.S. have hit an unprecedented level of negative rhetoric and divisiveness. The moral climate seems to be dropping faster than the temperature of the globe is rising. Many of our cultural and artistic expressions are descending into the gutter, both in quality and in content. Socially, race battles that were fought generations ago have emerged once again, and we are being forced to recognize that we've never really dealt with the effects nor the heart of our biases and ignorance. Economically, the middle class is shrinking and the disparity between rich and poor seems to grow daily, and most of America is drowning in debt. Globally, the unholy trinity of war, terrorism, and violence seem to be lurking in every shadow and around every corner.

And what about the church? Statistically, the church in America seems to hold very little distinction over the rest of culture: divorce rates are roughly equal, debt loads are similar, and even softer measures like morality and substance abuse seem to run in tandem. Do believers in Jesus actually hold any answers for the problems in this life, or is our only hope in eternity?

What if I told you the answer to all of these questions about our modern situation and very modern problems could be found in a letter written nearly 2,000 years ago?

Peter addresses his original audience as “sojourners and exiles” in this world. The gospel values run in opposition to the values of the world, and these believers feel as though they're living in exile. Just like us. What's Peter's purpose? Give them “Hope in Exile.” May our study of the letter do the same for us.



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