

Day 1

Learn: Pray for understanding and then read 1 Peter 1.1-2. Peter had been one of Jesus' closest followers, and now was one of the top leaders in the early church. He originally ministered out of Jerusalem, but later went to Antioch [in what is now Syria], Corinth [in Greece], and Rome. He apparently wrote this letter from Rome. We know his readers were Christians, because Peter calls them "chosen" or "elect." These Christians were scattered throughout what is now northern Turkey. It is likely they had been deported out of Rome because the Romans thought their evangelism was troublesome. The Romans deported troublemakers to remote areas where they needed colonists. The areas Peter names were all places where the Romans were building new cities in the first century. And we know from Acts 18.1 that the Romans also had deported Jews from Rome a little earlier. Peter calls the believers "exiles," which was a word used for people residing temporarily in a place where they were seen as foreigners and did not have citizenship. The native peoples in these areas would resent and feel threatened by the Christian immigrants, and would persecute or at least ostracize them. In this letter, Peter will use the physical exile of his readers to argue that all Christians should see themselves as exiles, citizens of Heaven who temporarily are residing in a sinful culture here on Earth. Peter reminds these believers that they have been chosen by God, saved by Christ, and set apart by the Holy Spirit: so even though they are suffering from being deported and persecuted, they can trust that God loves them and they are important to God.

Reflect: When suffering or struggling in life, have you ever doubted God's love for you or wondered if you had done something that had caused God to stop caring? Does it help to realize that no matter what happens in your life, God the Father has chosen you, Christ has died for you, and the Holy Spirit has set you apart for salvation and obedience? Allow the truth of God's evident love to sink in and protect you for when you experience trials.

Day 2

Learn: Pray and then read 1 Peter 1.3-5. Peter says God gives believers a new birth. When we are born, we inherit from our ancestors a corrupted human nature [or spiritual nature], which we call "inherited sin." Then we all commit acts of sin, which is anything against the character or will of God. And God holds all people accountable for mankind turning away from God in the first place, which we call "imputed sin." But God mercifully is willing to forgive all this sin and give us a new spiritual birth! Right from the beginning of mankind's waywardness [recorded in Genesis 3], God has promised to provide a way of salvation. Throughout the Bible, throughout history, the one requirement to receive this gift has been to believe in the known details of the promise. Today, we know the gospel promise is that the Son of God – part of the triune godhead of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – came to earth and was born as Jesus, a unique man who was also divine; that Jesus lived the only perfect and pure human life [which only he could do, being also divine], and then willingly went to his sacrifice on the cross to pay the penalty for our sin, and was resurrected on the third day. His resurrection gives us hope for two reasons. First, Christ's resurrection proves his identity as the Son of God, proves God the Father accepted his sacrifice on our behalf, and proves his victory over sin and death [see 1 Corinthians 15.17]. Second, Christ's resurrection gives us hope for our resurrection, because Jesus promised that he would resurrect his people when he returned [John 6.40].

Reflect: Are you clear on your need for a savior? Are you clear on who Jesus is and what he did for you? Do you believe that Jesus' sacrifice paid the penalty for *your* sin, and thus you are now saved by God and given a new birth? Can you see how assurance of your salvation and anticipation of your future resurrection should inspire hope and joy?

Day 3

Learn: Pray and then read 1 Peter 1.1-5 again. Peter says we are promised an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading. This inheritance is guaranteed to always be there waiting for us. Peter also says we are "shielded by God's power," so we can have assurance that we will be resurrected to experience this wonderful inheritance from God. When we accept the gospel promise and experience the new spiritual birth, the Holy Spirit comes to dwell inside us, to protect us and preserve our faith, so that our salvation is permanent and we cannot lose it [see also Ephesians 1.13-14]. In that moment of initial faith, when you experience the new birth, you are "justified," which means you are declared righteous in God's sight. In that moment, God accounts to you the righteousness of Christ, because you believe in the promise that Christ has paid the penalty for your sin. Even so, you continue to struggle with sinfulness, because you still have your corrupted human nature, patterns of wrong thinking, and bad habits. For this reason, the Holy Spirit begins a process called "progressive sanctification," which is a process of cleansing and purifying you so that you are more like Christ, more like the image of God you were created to be. In this sense, your salvation continues over your lifetime, as you

become more godly and less sinful. If you die before Christ returns, you will go to Heaven and be “glorified,” which is the completion of the purification process of your character, but you will be without your body. When Christ returns to Earth, however, he will resurrect and redeem your body, and then you will be complete as God intended for you, and your salvation process will be done. So if you believe in the gospel, you are saved right now, and because you are saved, you will experience the cleansing process, and all of that will bring you to completion when Christ returns. This is why Peter says you are protected by God’s power until this moment of complete salvation.

Reflect: Do you believe that God has a wonderful inheritance waiting for you? Can you believe that you are certain to go to Heaven and that Christ will resurrect your body from the dead, so that you will finally be pure and whole, the way God designed you to be? Do these promises help you feel hope and joy, even though life here on Earth can be difficult? Do you think God deserves our praise and thanks for these promises and this salvation? Can you see how focusing on what is to come can comfort you more than dwelling on your circumstances now?

Day 4

Learn: Pray and then read 1 Peter 1.6-9. We have been talking all week about how blessed we are, but we still suffer in this life. Peter and the rest of the New Testament teach that even as God’s chosen people, we will suffer. Beyond the normal trials of life, the culture will reject and persecute us, Satan and his demons will rise against us, and we will struggle to live up to God’s elevated standards. Yet, Peter says we should rejoice even when suffering, because we know we ultimately will be delivered. Our problems are real and painful, but they are temporary, whereas our salvation is assured and our deliverance will be permanent. By continuing to rejoice in our relationship with God and our salvation as his gift, even when suffering, we prove the genuineness of our faith. Peter says this genuineness of faith is more precious than refined gold, because even refined gold will be destroyed in the end, but genuine faith, refined through suffering, is eternal. And by proving our faith, we will receive praise, glory, and honor when Christ returns.

Reflect: We all suffer. We all feel sadness, frustration, and discouragement. But can we press on in these moments, without giving up, without giving in to despair? Can we continue shining God’s light in our community, in part by experiencing hope and transcendent joy even when we suffer, because we know we are chosen, loved, saved, redeemed, cleansed, and in the family of God? How well do you experience hope and joy when times are hard? How can you help yourself to experience hope and joy even when suffering?

Day 5

Learn: Prayerfully read 1 Peter 1.10-12. The Old Testament prophets tried to understand who would be the Messiah [which means Christ], and when he would come. They predicted a lot, including that Christ would suffer for our sins and thereby provide healing and peace to his people. God revealed that their message would help us understand who Christ is and what he has done, and to confirm that Jesus indeed is the promised Christ, since he fulfilled so many of their prophecies and gave signs for future fulfillment of the others. Peter’s readers, like people today, might have wondered how a poor man who was crucified by the government could be their savior, but the prophecies of the Old Testament predicted this horrible death and thus illuminated the gospel message of Christ dying to pay the penalty for our sins. Peter’s original readers received these prophecies and the gospel from the apostles and their envoys, who – like the prophets – were inspired by the Holy Spirit. We have received these prophecies in the Old Testament, and we have received what the apostles and their envoys wrote in the New Testament. This gospel is so wondrous, even angels desire to understand it. The prophets longed for Christ to come, the angels wish they could understand the idea of salvation, but we get to experience it. While the prophets had to look forward hopefully to the day Christ would come, we benefit from knowing he has come and has completed the sacrifice that makes our salvation possible.

Reflect: Because of our beliefs, we might lose status in our society, as Peter’s readers had, we might lose status in the workplace, at school, or even within our families, but do you find it encouraging to know we have a high status in God’s eyes, since we have greater privileges than either the Old Testament believers or the angels, in that we get to experience first hand what it is like to be certain of salvation and to be empowered to obedient life?

One main point of this passage is that we can expect to suffer, but we always can trust that God loves us, because we know God the Father chose us, Christ died for us, and the Holy Spirit set us apart for salvation and obedience. Another main point is that we can experience hope and joy even when suffering, because we know that ultimately we will be delivered through death into God’s presence and the wonderful inheritance he has waiting for us. As you reflect on these truths, you should learn to experience hope and joy more consistently, even when times are hard. That doesn’t mean you will stop hurting, but that you will persevere through the pain with your hope and joy intact, and also with your faith and obedience to that faith intact. May God bless you as you reflect on the important revelation in this letter.