
Day 1

Learn: Prayerfully read 1 Peter 5.1-4. The house churches where the exiles lived might have been functioning well enough to have official elder leadership, or Peter might have been addressing the wise older men of the church who would have naturally become the leaders among the people. In the Greek text, there is a connection between this passage and the previous: God is sifting the church, therefore the elders should willingly engage in shepherding the flock, even if by doing so they draw persecution to themselves. Thus they would be protecting the flock spiritually and proving their own faith as they follow Christ by being willing to suffer for righteousness [1.7; 4.13]. Identifying himself as their fellow elder let them know that Peter understood what they were going through and was living by example, boldly leading the church even though it would bring him persecution and eventually martyrdom. It also reminded them that their ministry as local elders was an extension of the ministry of the apostles. Jesus, the Great Shepherd, commissioned Peter as under-shepherd [John 21.15-19], and Peter in turn was commissioning these local elders as fellow under-shepherds for the local flock. Doing Christ's work [not seeing this ministry as their own, but his], they would all receive a crown of glory when Christ returned. In Greco-Roman society, leafy crowns were given for victory in athletic competitions: Peter assured the elders of victory through perseverance in the faith and ministry, because victory depended on Christ, not on their own human abilities. Since Peter said he was a fellow elder and a fellow partaker in the glory to come, probably he meant us to understand that he was a *fellow*-witness as well. The Greek word for witness here [μάρτυς = MAR-tuss] can mean a literal witness or it can mean one who testifies to something; in legal terms there might be no difference, but perhaps what Peter was saying was that he and the elders of the local church were joined in testifying to the truth of the message he had just shared with them in this letter.

Peter's instructions to these elders is revealing for spiritual leaders today, especially pastor-elders in the church. Spiritual leaders should be willing to shepherd the flock, not doing it grudgingly; this should be a ministry they love and want, out of love for Christ and love for his people. Such shepherding includes overseeing the church, protecting its doctrine and ensuring the effectiveness of its ministries in support of the Great Commission. Spiritual leaders should be eager to serve others, not seeking their own gain; this is a ministry for the benefit of others, not for self. Spiritual leaders should lead by example, not just command others; they must exemplify what they believe and be willing to do what they ask of others. Spiritual leaders should lead as Christ led, and note that the flock is God's, not theirs.

Reflect: Even if you are not a pastor-elder in your church, this passage can be useful to you: it can help you identify good pastor-elders in your community and it can show you what you should aim for as you grow in your spiritual leadership. Do you testify to the truths that Peter has taught in this letter? Are you eager to be a servant leader so God can bless others through your efforts? Do you lead by example and try to follow Christ's leadership example?

Day 2

Learn: Prayerfully read 1 Peter 5.5-7. Those who are younger in the faith [not yet of pastor-elder caliber] should submit to the authority of the pastor-elders in the church. It is possible that the church in northern Turkey did not have organized leadership yet, in which case Peter would have assumed the wise older men of the community would be recognized as the spiritual leaders, and so the younger people would submit to them. Everyone is to act humbly toward each other, not arrogantly. A pastor-elder must be servant-hearted, not domineering [v.3], and a member of the church must be submissive, not contemptuous toward leadership. Those who stayed humble even amidst their struggles would be walking with God and could count on his favor, as this quotation of Proverbs 3.34 attests. Perhaps Peter quoted the Old Testament here to prove that this command was God's way, since it went against the ways of Greco-Roman society; it is another reminder that living as citizens of Heaven is different from conforming to local culture. Humbling ourselves under God's mighty hand might refer to accepting our lowly status in the secular community, accepting the trials of life that God allows us to suffer, with the promise that he will exalt us when Christ returns. In any case, we humble ourselves by casting our cares on God, knowing that he cares about us. This relationship between vv.6-7 is not brought out well in some translations, but the implication in the Greek is that we humble ourselves by actively turning to God for help in our present suffering, trusting in his deliverance to endure through these trials and in his ultimate deliverance out of the suffering of this world and into our glorious inheritance in Heaven and resurrection when Christ returns.

Reflect: What do you think it looks like to be humble toward one another? Are you submissive to church leaders, following their lead and obeying their biblical teachings? If casting our cares on God is an example of humbling ourselves before him, then dwelling in our anxieties is actually an example of pride, showing we still feel we are self-reliant and cannot rest easy in God's hands. How well do you cast your cares on God?

Day 3

Learn: Prayerfully read 1 Peter 5.5-11. In Greek, the name “Satan” means “adversary” and the term “devil” means “slanderer.” We have a real spiritual adversary and his threat to us also is real: Satan [like a lion] is looking for believers [sheep] to destroy. It is not just coincidence that Christians face persecution or that secular culture advocates sinful attitudes and actions. In addition to the influence of corrupted human natures, there also is the influence of the Devil and his demonic helpers, who somehow manage to construct organized resistance against the followers of Christ, even if it appears uncoordinated on a human plane. As a roaring lion, Satan’s hope is to demoralize believers and the church, to rob them of their hope and joy, so they will be vulnerable to temptation, deception, and distraction. We have already learned that God will use our suffering for good if we depend on him, but here we see that the immediate cause of our suffering often is our evil adversary, and his goals are not for our good.

In context of depending on God in faith, Peter commands believers to resist Satan. If we remain firm in our faith – that is, if we remain firm in putting all our hope and trust in deliverance through Christ, remain firm in trusting God to see us through our present suffering and ultimately to deliver us out of the suffering of this life and into our inheritance in Heaven and resurrection when Christ returns – then we can maintain our hope and joy and resist Satan’s work to demoralize us, distract us from our purposes, tempt us into conformity to the world, and deceive us regarding God’s love and other important doctrines. To accomplish this, we have to have our minds under control so we can be alert to the attack, similar commands as those given earlier in the letter with regard to keeping our hope in God’s deliverance through Christ [1.13] and remaining in prayer [4.7]. We also can gain strength by remembering that our suffering is not unique, it is a universal part of Christian life, so it does not indicate God has abandoned us, rather it indicates we are following Christ sufficiently to stir up our spiritual antagonists and the disbelieving pagans in our culture. When the time is right, suffering here will end, and God will complete our salvation through “glorification” [the completion of our transformation in character to be like Christ] with him in Heaven and then redemption and resurrection of our bodies when Christ returns. Peter here reminds us that God is the sole source of grace, of deliverance, and that he already has called believers to himself, so there is no need to fear just because we are suffering; and we should take heart that our suffering is brief compared to an eternity of bliss with God. Also, God is the all powerful forever – greater than the mightiest adversaries or nations – so we can trust in his promises, and that should give us courage to carry on in faith.

Reflect: Back when discussing v.1.13, we said good ways to keep focused on God’s grace were to be involved in daily Bible study, prayer, worship, scripture memorization, and Christian fellowship; have you taken steps to make these activities more regular in your daily life? Only if we can stay focused on God’s promises, and stay prayerfully alert, can we resist spiritual attacks in faith. What steps do you want to take to better prepare yourself?

Day 4

Learn: Prayerfully read 1 Peter 5.12-14. The usage of the Greek suggests Silvanus [or Silas, depending on your translation] was the courier of the letter to these scattered believers. Silvanus might have done the actual writing too. He was a faithful leader in the early church [Acts 15.22; 16.19-37; 17.4-15; 18.5; 2 Corinthians 1.19; 1 Thessalonians 1.1; 2 Thessalonians 1.1]. Gospel writer John-Mark, apparently now a disciple of Peter’s, was also with them as they wrote. Historically, we believe Peter was writing from Rome, from which place the exiles had been deported. Peter sends greetings from the church there. It is unclear why he referred to Rome as Babylon; perhaps he merely referred to the capital of the empire into which the readers had been exiled by the name of the capital of the empire which had exiled the Judeans centuries before. Peter wrote to encourage the readers by testifying to the truth about God’s grace: as we discussed at the beginning of the letter, if we can truly understand the depth and assurance of our salvation, then we can stand fast by trusting in God’s promise of deliverance and continuing to walk with God in faith and obedience. We can *hope* for peace in this life, but we can be *assured* of our peace with God. When we gather to celebrate this truth and worship God with praise and thanks, we should greet each other affectionately.

Reflect: Has this study changed your expectations about, or reactions to, suffering in this life? Did it encourage you?

Day 5

Learn: Prayerfully read 1 Peter as a whole letter [it is only a few pages long]. Several of the early church councils met in the provinces where these readers lived [in Nicaea and Chalcedon]. Christianity took strong hold in these areas, the churches became healthy and strong a few decades after Peter sent this letter, suggesting the truth Peter shared was powerful in the lives of his readers.

Reflect: What important truths did you learn in this study? Have you changed your thinking or behavior?