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Philip Graham Ryken, President, Wheaton College

“These Conversational Commentaries absolutely deliver what they promise. They read like a wise friend sitting across the table explaining the text verse by verse, answering the questions that most naturally arise. While they offer sound scholarship, they eschew an overly academic tone. And while they ably cover the entire text, they are helpfully concise. I will pull these volumes off my shelf again and again.”

Nancy Guthrie, author; Bible teacher

1 Peter

Conversational Commentaries

Edited by Lydia Brownback and Megan Hill

Theological Review by Douglas Sean O'Donnell

Ephesians: Life Together in Christ, Megan Hill

1 Peter: Hope for Exiles, Lydia Brownback

1 Peter

Hope for Exiles

Lydia Brownback

1 Peter: Hope for Exiles

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*With gratitude to God
for
the life and ministry of the apostle Peter*

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Series Preface

So, you have a hunger for God's word. We know that's true because you've picked up this little commentary. Whatever your goal—diving deep on your own or leading a small-group Bible study—Conversational Commentaries are designed to serve as a companion in your study of Scripture.

There is no shortage of Bible commentaries, but this series offers something unique. Every volume is authored by a woman and has female readers in view as it explains and applies the biblical text. These volumes are *conversational*: Each author writes as though she is talking with friends over mugs of coffee and open Bibles. Every volume is also a *commentary*: a verse-by-verse explanation of one book of the Bible. Here you'll discover that every word of Scripture is more valuable than gold and sweeter than honey (Ps. 19:10)—and each verse is one you can understand and apply with the Spirit's help. Each Conversational Commentary is an accessible, affordable resource that provides depth and detail for women who want to grow in their knowledge of God's word. Although these books don't focus on academic terms or technical details about the original text, they will help you study the Bible in all its richness. These commentaries present sound biblical scholarship in language that

any Christian can understand. It's our hope that this series would help you grow in your knowledge of God's word, in your ability to study and teach it to others, and—ultimately—in your love for Christ, to whom all Scripture points.

How to Use This Series

As part of your daily, personal Bible study. While you're reading the Scriptures devotionally, these commentaries will help you understand and apply the verses (especially the confusing ones!) and see how they fit into the larger context of the chapter and book.

As a textbook for a small-group study. Each person in the group can read the commentary along with the assigned Scripture text, and you can discuss what you've learned when you meet together.

As research material for Bible teaching. Whether you're being called on to give a quick devotional or teach an entire book of the Bible, these commentaries will help you prepare to lead others through Scripture.

As a tool for evangelistic one-on-one Bible reading. When you're meeting with an unbeliever to walk through Scripture, these commentaries can help you answer questions about even the most difficult text.

As a resource for family worship. As you study the Bible with the people in your home, these commentaries will give you simple language to explain and discuss each verse.

As a book of answers to your Bible questions. When you are scratching your head about the meaning of a particular verse or idea in Scripture, these commentaries provide a bite-sized explanation.

LYDIA BROWNBAC AND MEGAN HILL

Overview

The New Testament Epistles

Before we dive into this letter, it's vital to say a general word about how to study the Epistles, which make up much of the New Testament. The Epistles teach about salvation in Christ Jesus and how we're called to live out our faith in day-to-day life. Because they were written to believers in the time after Christ's resurrection and ascension, the Epistles are some of the easiest books of the Bible for us to read. We feel a kinship with the original audience because they were in a situation similar to ours: They had believed the truth of Christ's death and resurrection, received the gift of his Spirit, and were seeking to walk by faith in this world until he comes again.

As we read a particular letter, we can expect that certain passages will immediately grip our heart—giving us some new insight about our Lord or a deepening conviction of how we need to mature in our walk with God. Such discoveries are exciting, and they draw us deeper into God's word to mine its riches. And the best part of studying an entire book is that we can begin to understand our favorite passages in light of the whole letter, which enables us to

build a rich, multidimensional understanding of Christ and of the whole Christian life.

We all know how to read a letter: Open the mailbox, see whom the envelope is addressed to, look at the return address, tear it open, sit down with a cup of tea, and enjoy it. The biblical epistles aren't all that different. If we gather a few basic facts about the letter's origin and recipients, and are willing to spend some time savoring its contents, we'll be on the right track. In order to understand the Epistles and rightly apply their messages to our lives, we must take into account three things: (1) the situation of the author, (2) the recipients of the letter, and (3) the letter as a whole.

1. *The situation of the author.* Who was the author? Also, when was the author writing, where was he writing from, and why was he writing? Such details are often revealed in the beginning of the letter, but sometimes at the end. Understanding the epistle's author will give you essential background to his letter's language and themes. It's important to mine this information at the very beginning of your study, and the "Big Picture" introduction (p. xv) will help you to get started.
2. *The recipients of the letter.* Was the author writing to the Jews, God's family from the days of Abraham? Or was the letter addressed to Gentiles, those brought into God's family through faith in Christ? Some letters are addressed to whole churches, and others are addressed to individuals. A number of the Epistles are called "circular letters," which simply means that they were intended to circulate among groups of believers in more than one place. A circular letter was carried by a courier to the nearest church on the address list, and from there it made its way from church

to church. Keep in mind too that the recipient or recipients of a particular letter had a unique background and understanding of God—a *frame of reference*. This frame of reference matters a lot because it's what guides our understanding of the letter and shapes how we apply it. When we read the Epistles, we are reading letters that were given to us by God for our edification, but they were also originally directed at a specific first-century audience. We're opening other people's mail, and knowing their situation helps us see how the letter speaks to our own.

3. *The letter as a whole*. Think for a minute about the zoom feature for a map on a phone. To figure out where you are going, you tend to zoom in close to see a particular street, trying to home in on your destination, but ultimately this street view makes sense only when you zoom back out to see the bigger picture, the entire area surrounding it. This is what it's like to study an epistle in context. With verse-by-verse commentary, you'll be able to zoom in, but in order to understand the close-up, you have to begin with the big picture. So for the "Big Picture" of this epistle, turn the page.

LYDIA BROWNBAC AND MEGAN HILL

The Big Picture of 1 Peter

Why Study 1 Peter?

Maybe you've noticed that we often worry more about what *might* happen in our lives than about what's actually happening. We find ourselves unnerved at the mere prospect of an illness, a loss, or a financial setback because these difficulties come with suffering. None of us wants to suffer, certainly, but we all do. It's a hard reality to face. But with Christ as our Savior, we don't have to dread suffering. God has good purposes for our pain. And he sets the limits on our difficulties, allowing only what is absolutely necessary to accomplish those purposes. Whatever trials and troubles the Lord allows are designed to shape us for life in his kingdom—now and for eternity.

The apostle Peter understood suffering, the kind that can rattle your faith at times and make you wonder whether walking faithfully with the Lord is worth it. But along the way, he came to accept—and actually embrace—the fact that commitment to Christ often increases rather than diminishes trials and troubles. Walking with Christ is costly, Peter discovered, but so totally worth it, and it's for this very reason that he wrote his two epistles, the first of which we explore in this volume.

Who Was Peter?

We first meet Peter in the Gospels. He was an ordinary fisherman. He had a wife, and he likely had children, although we aren't told. Peter's hometown was Bethsaida, a fishing village on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee.

John's Gospel tells us that when Jesus first saw Peter, he looked at him and said, "You are Simon the son of John. You shall be called Cephas' (which means Peter)" (1:42). Luke's Gospel relays that Peter was so amazed by a miracle Jesus performed that he fell down before Jesus and said, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord" (5:1–11). And Matthew tells us in his Gospel that when Peter heard Jesus say, "Follow me," Peter immediately left his boat and his nets and followed (4:18–20). So, from these gospel accounts, we see that Peter was all in with Jesus from the moment he met him.

The Gospels also give us glimpses into Peter's personality. One thing we see is that even though Peter struggled with fear, he wasn't shy when it came to communicating with Jesus. He was often the first one to speak up and ask a question or voice an opinion. And he wasn't afraid to ask for things! At the same time, Peter was a bit too self-confident—that is, until this weakness was exposed when he denied his Lord (Luke 22:54–62). Surely the lessons he learned in that most painful season of his life set the foundation for the emphasis on humility that we find in his letters.

Before Peter denied Jesus, Jesus told Peter, "Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers" (Luke 22:31–32). Peter did turn back to Jesus. His awful sifting had strengthened his faith, banished his fear, and humbled his heart. Afterward Peter lived in a new kind

of confidence—even in prison awaiting death, where he writes his epistles. We too can flourish just as Peter did, and for the same reason: Jesus holds us and will never let go.

Setting of 1 Peter

Peter writes, most likely from Rome, to Christians living in various regions in the northwest part of Asia Minor near the Black Sea.¹ The epistle is referred to as a circular letter, meaning that it circulated from church to church in the area to which it was sent. These regions—Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia—known altogether as Asia Minor, were located in modern-day Turkey. Of these regions, Asia (not the continent we know today) was the most culturally diverse. Cappadocia was the least populated. The land area of Asia Minor is a peninsula surrounded by three seas. “The picture that emerges of the regions to which Peter wrote is one of a vast geographical area with small cities few and far between.”² Although Peter’s earlier apostolic ministry was focused primarily on reaching Jews with the gospel (Gal. 2:6–10), comments in the letter indicate that the recipients of the letter were mainly Gentiles, although, no doubt, there were converted Jews among them as well.

Nero was likely the emperor of Rome when Peter wrote his letters. That’s important to note because Rome is the backdrop of these letters. Nero came to power as a teenager, and because he was so young, he ruled under the authority of his mother for several years before asserting his independence. Nero distrusted many, if not most, people throughout his reign, including family members, and

1 Sam Storms, *1 Peter*, in *Hebrews–Revelation*, vol. 12 of *ESV Expository Commentary*, ed. Iain M. Duguid, James M. Hamilton Jr., and Jay Sklar (Crossway, 2018), 292.

2 Karen H. Jobes, *1 Peter*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Baker Academic, 2005), 22.

perhaps for good reason. In those days, the assassination of rulers was a common occurrence. And Nero had numerous enemies. In AD 64, when a raging fire consumed much of the city of Rome, Nero's enemies tried to put all the blame on Nero himself. As a way to deflect this bad press, Nero in turn blamed the Christians, which kicked off wide-scale persecution that was characterized by hideous suffering. This was the world in which the apostle Peter conducted his ministry, and it gives us the background for both of his letters. He wrote this first letter a year or two before the great fire in Rome and the second letter a year or so afterward.

At the time Peter wrote this first letter, there was no government mandate against Christianity. No doubt some Christians were persecuted and punished for their beliefs, but life-restricting persecution was not widespread. Even so, they did experience verbal abuse and various kinds of discrimination. (Christ followers in Peter's day dealt with a lot of the same problems that we do!) They were socially ostracized for refusing to participate in the sins of their Roman culture, activities such as throwing criminals to wild beasts for sport while crowds cheered. Another reason Christians were scorned was their belief that Jesus is the only way to salvation. Their intolerance of other religions and lifestyles infuriated mainstream society. For all these reasons, contempt for Christians hung heavily in the air like humidity on a midsummer day.

Themes in 1 Peter

A quick read through Peter's first letter reveals an important theme—*suffering*. This isn't surprising, given the world he lived in. Peter wants to help fellow believers make sense of suffering and to show them how God works through it for his glory and the good of his people. Making sense of suffering, most especially the suffering that comes from

professing Christ Jesus as Lord, undergirds the entire letter. Peter is eager that suffering Christians remain firmly convinced that God hasn't abandoned them in their pain. To the contrary, their suffering is the instrument God uses to produce hope and to purge away the dregs of lingering sin that contaminate faithful living and Christian fellowship.

People who are banished, or exiled, from their homes experience great loss—a potent kind of suffering. For that reason, *exile* is a theme that underlies Peter's first letter. The recipients of the letter were trying to make life work in foreign, often hostile, places. So Peter uses these circumstances—life in exile—to frame the position of all Christians in every era until Christ returns. We are all in exile until we reach our forever home in heaven.

As we make our way through the letter, we also encounter the theme of *authority*. Peter shows why appropriate submission to authority glorifies God and leads to blessing. Another theme to watch for is *glory*. Peter points his readers to both the glory of God and the glory that awaits believers, not despite their suffering but actually because of it. By emphasizing glory, Peter encourages his readers to persevere, to hold fast to Christ when suffering threatens to snuff out their hope. And he fuels their endurance as he exhorts them to pursue humility, to trust God unswervingly, and to knit together their hearts and lives with fellow exiles. Here's how Sam Storms sums up the epistle:

From beginning to end Peter directs our attention to who we are in Christ and how we got there. Simply put, it is all of grace, that glorious and undeserved generosity and saving mercy of God that energizes our obedience and sustains us under the pressure of persecution and pain.³

3 Storms, *1 Peter*, 289.

1 Peter for You

The joy that accompanies salvation is richer than the happiness of earthly circumstances. Even so, the Christian life comes with suffering. Peter teaches us that we are to expect troubles of various kinds rather than be surprised by them. His epistle equips us to recognize that the “health and wealth” prosperity preaching we hear today is false. Of course, walking with Christ brings blessings, but the best of those blessings aren’t earthly success and happiness; they’re entering more fully into the riches promised to us in the gospel. Peter helps us recognize that these best blessings often come through seasons of pain and loss. Peter’s message is a great encouragement for Christians in today’s pain-avoidant cultures. Whether our suffering comes as a direct result of the faith we profess or from the general troubles of life in a sin-saturated world, we are called to cultivate holiness, humility, and hope—three spiritual fruits that grow in us as we hold fast to Christ. As you study 1 Peter, keep an eye on how these three fruits are threaded all through the letter. Holy, humble, hope-filled women know the joy of salvation, and they radiate to everyone around them that the gospel is indeed good news.

Outline of 1 Peter

1. Opening (1:1–2)
2. Called to salvation as exiles (1:3–2:10)
 - a. Praise for salvation (1:3–12)
 - b. The future inheritance as an incentive to holiness (1:13–21)
 - c. Living as the new people of God (1:22–2:10)
3. Living as aliens to bring glory to God in a hostile world (2:11–4:11)
 - a. The Christian life as a battle and a witness (2:11–12)

The Big Picture of 1 Peter

- b. Testifying to the gospel in the social order (2:13–3:12)
- c. Responding to suffering in a godly way (3:13–4:11)
- 4. Persevering in suffering (4:12–5:11)
- 5. Concluding words (5:12–14)

1 Peter 1

A Living Hope

I PETER 1:1–2

¹Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ,

To those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, ²according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood:

May grace and peace be multiplied to you.

Right out of the gate, Peter identifies himself as “an apostle of Jesus Christ.” *Apostle* wasn’t a job description—it was a calling, specifically a call from the Lord himself. A man couldn’t be an apostle unless he’d received this call and been with the resurrected Jesus in person (Acts 1:21–22). We know from the gospel accounts that both were true of Peter. Using this designation at the outset establishes his credentials. Noting his apostleship lends authority to the message he is about to deliver through the letter.

So Peter begins with the standard greeting of his time, identifying first himself and then those to whom he is writing. Peter's letter was sent to believers in the five Roman provinces named in verse 1. We need to linger a bit here on verse 1 because the fact that Peter refers to these believers as "elect exiles of the Dispersion" sheds light on why Peter is writing and the themes he addresses.

First, the people receiving the letter are "exiles," which means that they are far from home. Now, it could be that Peter used this word in a symbolic sort of way, simply pointing out that for the Christian, our true *home* is nowhere on earth; in other words, all believers live in exile until they get to heaven. And that is true! It's an important theme in this letter. But Peter's original readers were called not just "exiles" but exiles "of the Dispersion." In other words, it's likely that the Christians to whom he's writing had been legally dispersed out of Rome and made to live in one of the five outlying provinces—"Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia"—named in these opening verses.

Scholars aren't completely sure what led to the Dispersion, but an educated guess can be made from Roman history. As the empire expanded and incorporated more and more territories under its jurisdiction, Roman citizens were needed to settle the new territories and Romanize them. Understandably, many were reluctant to leave their homes for these newly formed Roman outposts, so Rome compelled underprivileged or undesirable classes of people to do so. Among them were Jews and Christians. We'd think that the chance to escape Roman scorn and contempt and the fear of worse persecution would have been welcome relief to these Christians, enough to ease the pain of leaving their home. But things weren't all that much better in these outlying regions,

whose residents were often resentful of outsiders taking over their towns and cities.¹

Despite these many challenges, Christians took root and flourished in Asia Minor. Residents of Cappadocia, Pontus, and Asia were among those present when the Holy Spirit's power came on those assembled at Pentecost so that they were able to speak in languages they'd never before known (Acts 2:8–11), and Pontus was the hometown of Aquila, who, along with his wife, Priscilla, worked with the apostle Paul (18:1–3). Galatia is known to us primarily from Paul's epistle to the believers there. Bithynia, along with Asia, is mentioned in Acts as a place Paul wanted to evangelize, but the Lord had other plans for the spread of the gospel at that time: "They went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them" (16:6–7).

Whatever the exact circumstances that led Peter's readers to become "exiles of the Dispersion," the upheaval surely brought about the pain of homesickness, even when they were able to settle in among fellow believers in these other regions. Yet this very experience of yearning for the comfort and familiarity of home would no doubt have prepared their hearts to take in an important theme in Peter's message—believers are not to strive to make their home here on earth, because they won't find it until they get to heaven.

Our own bouts of homesickness are meant to have the same effect. Getting married, changing careers, or serving on the mission field can take us away from the familiarity of home and leave

1 Karen H. Jobes, *1 Peter*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Baker Academic, 2005), 31.

us feeling deeply unrooted. This discomfort is an opportunity to reorient our understanding of what makes home truly home. For Christians, the real home is with Jesus in God's kingdom, which will culminate in the new heaven come down to earth.

Peter uses one more word to describe these exiles—"elect." Peter is writing to elect exiles. He's reminding them that though they are far from home, and perhaps from beloved relatives or friends, they've been brought into God's family through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. God elected them—in other words, he chose them—to belong. Homesick believers find comfort in knowing they have an eternal home. They belong to the Lord Jesus and have a permanent place among his people.

In verse 2, Peter dives right into some deep theology, basically outlining how God brings his elect people into his family. To identify someone as *elect* is to say that she is *saved*, a term we are more familiar with. Notice in verse 2 how each person of the Trinity factors into the salvation of God's people. Salvation happens, first, by God's "foreknowledge." This doesn't just mean that God knows in advance who will have faith in him. It means he actually determines to save particular individuals (his elect) by grace through faith. We know the Lord Jesus Christ in a saving way because God determined that we would be.

Peter adds that we are saved "in the sanctification of the Spirit." The Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, sanctifies those who are saved. *Sanctification* is a theological term that means "set apart." Believers are initially set apart when they are united to Christ by faith. When that happens, they are transferred from the realm of this world into the realm of God's eternal kingdom. Then, for the rest of their earthly lives, they are progressively transformed to be more and more like Jesus. The Holy Spirit is the active agent in

this transfer and in keeping them safe in God's family until they reach heaven.

Sometimes we are keenly aware that we've been set apart from the world. The way we speak, use our money, and raise our children often seems bizarre to our non-Christian neighbors. But even when we're doing many of the daily activities that everyone around us does, our set-apart-ness is still a spiritual reality because the blood of Jesus Christ—God the Son—is what atones for believers' sin, secures their redemption, and opens the way into God's kingdom. Every bit of believers' sin—past, present, and future—is covered by the blood Jesus shed on the cross. That's what Peter means in verse 2 by "sprinkling with his blood." The sprinkling is symbolic, but by the work of God it's also very real. Once we've been sprinkled with Christ's blood, God's righteous wrath is forever removed from us, so we don't have to shed our own blood and die to pay for sin.

Peter wraps up his opening words with the reason God saves sinners: We've been saved "for obedience to Jesus Christ." The obedience Peter has in mind might be *initial* faith—the obedience of responding by faith when we first turn to Jesus. Or it might be our commitment to biblical discipleship after we've come to Christ. Or perhaps Peter has both kinds of obedience in mind.

I PETER 1:3–5

³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, ⁵who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

Peter's joy in the gospel is evident as he dives into the body of his letter in verse 3. His focus in verse 3 is God the Father, specifically "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." Salvation comes from the Father through Jesus Christ. Peter emphasizes the resurrection of Jesus here and links it to Christian hope. It's a "living hope" because the resurrection is what guarantees life after death. Jesus was raised from death, and those united to him by faith follow his path from death to life. The apostle Paul writes, "You were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead" (Col. 2:12). From a spiritual standpoint, we have already been raised. But this is just the beginning. Those in Christ will be raised bodily when Christ returns. So the resurrection of Christ is our source of living hope both now and in the future.

Sufferers need hope, which is one reason Peter emphasizes it. The word "hope" occurs five times in the letter. The first reference, here in verse 3, points to the foundation of hope. In verse 13 he instructs believers to direct their hope toward the future. Peter links hope to the resurrection of Jesus again in verse 21. In 3:5 he describes the way women in the Old Testament placed their hope in God. And in 3:15 he points out how hope should factor into evangelism.

In 1:4 Peter identifies the substance of Christian hope, which is the "inheritance" that awaits believers in heaven. Have you ever inherited something—money or a valuable possession? In the Old Testament, Israelite families were given parcels of Canaan, the promised land, as an inheritance. The passing down of this inherited land from one generation to the next was vitally important because if a family lost its land or had no descendants to pass it on to, that family risked losing its unique identity. This backstory is likely why Peter uses the term "inheritance" to describe the hope of

eternity that comes with our salvation, and also why he describes it as “imperishable, undefiled, and unfading.”

The guarantee that we will inherit rests solely in God himself. It is his power that guards us, power that works through our faith. Believers “are being guarded,” or kept, for the fullness of their salvation, which we know partially now and will know fully when Christ returns “in the last time.” The salvation that awaits us when Christ returns isn’t a different salvation from the one we receive now; it’s simply the fulfillment of it. Everything we enjoy in our walk with God in this life is merely a foretaste of the delights in store for us in heaven.

I PETER 1:6–9

⁶In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, ⁷so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. ⁸Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, ⁹obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

A glorious future awaits us, but where can hope be found in the trials we experience in the present? In verse 6 Peter redirects his readers’ attention from the future back to the present. As he makes this transition, he notes that the recipients of his letter “rejoice,” despite present troubles, and this they do because they are convinced that the blessings of salvation far outweigh earthly difficulties. Even so, they need encouragement, and that’s what Peter offers in the rest of the verse. First, trials endure only “for a little while.” He writes

from an eternal perspective here. Some of our trials and troubles might last a lifetime, but in the light of eternity, everything that happens during our earthly life lasts no longer than the blink of an eye in comparison.

Second, God in his gracious sovereignty determines both the degree and the extent of our difficulties. When we experience painful things—a cancer diagnosis, the death of a loved one, a financial strain, or some injustice—it’s hard to think that God is in control and that he sent those things into our lives. They may even cause us to doubt his goodness. Peter helps us see how a good God allows trials and troubles. And no pain or grief can touch us apart from what he deems “necessary.” How comforting to realize that for every difficulty he allows in our lives, there are countless more that he has prevented! The necessity of the trials that God does allow is clarified in verse 7: Genuine faith is strengthened, not destroyed, in times of difficulty. Trials are designed to test believers’ faith.

God’s testings aren’t like school exams, where we have to prove our knowledge and skill. Tests of faith are God’s way of purifying and refining, which is why Peter describes this divine process as “tested by fire.” Peter illustrates this by pointing to the worth and beauty of gold, a value that is evident only after this precious metal has been heated so hot in a fire that all the impurities are burned away. This refining imagery is also found in the Old Testament (see, for example, Job 23:8–10; Ps. 66:10–12; Prov. 17:3). We can glean a vital truth from this passage: *Rejoicing in our salvation comes through understanding our salvation*. As we trust God in the midst of difficulties, we learn through experience that he is everything he has promised to be.

Third, the suffering we experience in the difficulties is what works to refine our faith. This is clear when Peter writes that “if necessary,

you have been *grieved* by various trials” (v. 6). While sorrow and pain can harden unbelievers and lead them to shake their fists in God’s face, hearts captivated by Christ cling to him more tightly when life is rough and learn to trust him more fully as he proves again and again that he is sufficient for every trial we face.

The end result of God’s purifying work is a faith that will share in the “praise and glory and honor” that Jesus receives when he returns, what Peter calls “the revelation of Jesus Christ.” So the more we rest our faith in God and all he is for us in Christ—even when we suffer—the more joy we’ll experience both now and forever.

In verses 8 and 9 Peter points out the way his friends have been holding tightly to their faith in their current difficulties. As he does, he shows how faith is linked to both love and joy. The recipients of the letter had never actually seen Jesus, but that didn’t hinder them from loving him, as Peter is quick to note: “Though you have not seen him, you love him.” For those with genuine faith, love for Jesus grows stronger in trials. As does faith: “Though you do not now see him, you believe in him.” Trusting Christians are not among those for whom seeing is believing. And faith like this rejoices in the midst of pain, even if the joy cannot be outwardly expressed. Such joy is “filled with glory.” This is just one place in the letter where Peter reveals that in ways we cannot know now, present suffering is somehow working for us future glory. We find this same teaching in the apostle Paul, who writes, “This light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen” (2 Cor. 4:17–18).

In God’s economy, his people’s suffering is never wasted. It’s always purposeful and eternally productive. And as believers faithfully endure, they are “obtaining the outcome of [their] faith” (1 Pet. 1:9). We need to be clear that this “obtaining” doesn’t mean that it’s

earned. Final salvation doesn't hinge on the measure of joy we demonstrate. Peter's point is that as we trust in God, even in the midst of difficulties, we are resting in the salvation we've already received through Jesus Christ, and what we are becoming in the process will be brought to completion and fully realized when he returns.

I PETER 1:10–12

¹⁰ Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, ¹¹ inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. ¹² It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look.

Although Christians suffer for their faith, they are incredibly blessed. Peter reminds them in verses 10–12 that they are privileged to know in full what God's people in Old Testament times knew only in part. The Holy Spirit, whom Peter calls the "Spirit of Christ" in verse 11, revealed to the Old Testament prophets many things about Christ—what he would suffer on behalf of sinners and how, afterward, he would be exalted and glorified. Even so, the prophets weren't shown the exact timing of Christ's coming or all the details of the gospel. They were made to know, however, that the partial revelation they received would be more fully revealed to later generations when Jesus came. Today revelation comes to people not through prophets but through the proclamation of the gospel as it is made effective by the Holy Spirit.

In verse 12 Peter gives us a glimpse into the spiritual realm. We see here that “angels”—spiritual beings who serve God—don’t have full knowledge of God’s plans. Even so, they have a keen desire to know the full wonders of the gospel (see also Eph. 3:7–10).

So we’re shown that even in the midst of trials and troubles, there are spiritual riches to comfort us. Christians possess knowledge of God’s redemptive plan in Christ, and they have assurance that they are secure within it. Living as we do on this side of the cross, we know the riches of the gospel in a way that those who lived before—even the prophets, who received their message from God himself—never did.

Privilege is a buzzword these days, but the term itself is nothing new. It has to do with benefits. We might say that privileged people are those who enjoy rights and rewards they haven’t earned. In that sense, Christians are the most privileged of all because they know the benefits—forgiveness, provision, joy, and an eternally happy home—that result from the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. How should we respond to the amazingly privileged status we’ve acquired through no merit of our own? That’s what Peter explains next.

1 PETER 1:13–16

¹³ Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. ¹⁴ As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, ¹⁵ but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, ¹⁶ since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”

Peter begins this new section with the linking word “Therefore,” which ties what he’s about to say to what he’s just finished saying.

He has reminded his friends that despite their current difficulties, they're in the best position they can possibly be in because Christ has redeemed them and blessed them with all the rights and privileges that accompany salvation. Now he explains how believers are to live in response. Christians are God's dear children, and with this great privilege comes great responsibility.

You might have heard pastors talking about the *imperatives* and the *indicatives* of Scripture. An *imperative* is a definite must-do, a requirement. The Bible, in both Testaments, is filled with imperatives. This might be depressing, were it not for all the *indicatives*. Indicatives in the Bible are declarations of wonderful promises and truths for God's people. Here in verses 13–16, some of these wonders are made clear. First, the “grace” we experience now is a foretaste of the blessed grace to come (v. 13). Second, Jesus will return for us, and we will see him in all his glory (v. 13). Third, we are God's children (v. 14). And as God's children, we've been equipped to imitate our heavenly Father. (vv. 15–16). These joyful truths (the indicatives) equip us to live out the instructions (the imperatives): guarding our thought life, resisting the pull of the flesh, and pursuing holiness.

Peter's directive in verse 13 concerns hope. As suffering believers set their thoughts on all he's been telling them, the pain they endure actually produces hope. It arises from trusting that God is working eternal glory for them through the difficulty. While it is quite natural to hope for relief in suffering, to set our hope on immediate relief—better circumstances of whatever sort—is actually to set it on something less good than what our all-knowing God intends. Hope in the future grace we'll receive when Christ returns is the only hope guaranteed not to disappoint.

The way we keep our hope set on the fullness of grace yet to come is through taking charge of our thought life. Social media

posts and an endless news cycle compete for our attention, not to mention the distractions of daily tasks and responsibilities. It's easy to fix our minds on what we can see all around us rather than on the invisible yet weightier reality of God's kingdom. A literal translation of Peter's words "preparing your minds for action" is, "Gird up the loins of your mind." The image Peter uses here doesn't fit easily into our Western way of thinking, but it made sense to the first recipients of his letter because it had to do with the clothes they wore. In those days people clothed themselves in long robes, and when they had to move quickly, they'd tuck those robes into a belt around their waist to avoid tripping. That's what Peter has in mind. In the same way people back then prepared for fast walking, Christians prepare their minds to stay focused on Christ.

What we think largely determines our beliefs, our emotions, and the choices we make. God's word in both the Old and New Testaments stresses the influence our thoughts have. Here is a sampling:

You keep him in perfect peace
whose mind is stayed on you,
because he trusts in you. (Isa. 26:3)

For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. (Rom. 8:5–6)

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. (Rom. 12:2)

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. (Phil. 4:8)

There is only one sure hope, and as we govern our thoughts and think clearly about reality from an eternal perspective—what Peter calls “being sober-minded” (see also 4:7 and 5:8)—we recognize where true hope lies, and we won’t be tricked into setting our hope elsewhere, on things that can’t deliver.

Peter has shown how hope grows. Now we see the part believers play in sustaining it. Obedience to God is vital in this regard. Obedience is also how faith is worked out visibly. Peter touches on an important aspect of obedience in verse 14: Christians are to guard against the pull of the flesh, what he calls “the passions of your former ignorance.” Without regeneration and the transforming work of the Holy Spirit, we don’t recognize that sin is vile, destructive, and ugly, and we see no compelling reason not to indulge in it. Apart from Christ, we remain ignorant of spiritual realities. In Christ, we’ve been delivered from the penalty and power of sin. Even so, we will battle its presence until we’re finally home in heaven. Peter’s readers needed this reminder—and so do we! Holiness is the goal we must aim for, seeking to reflect the character of Christ in all we think and do (vv. 15–16). Peter’s call to holiness comes from God’s command to his covenant people in the Old Testament: “I am the LORD your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy” (Lev. 11:44). God’s children in every age are commanded to be holy because he is holy. In this way we reflect the family likeness as “obedient children” (1 Pet. 1:14).

1 PETER 1:17–21

¹⁷ And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, ¹⁸ knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, ¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. ²⁰ He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you ²¹ who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

As children in God's family, we "call on him as Father," but he is also our judge. He is everyone's judge, and those who don't embrace Christ will experience the judgment of God's wrath against sin. Christians don't have to fear the judgment of God's wrath because the blood of Christ has atoned for their sin. Even so, God is not the indulgent type of father who winks at wrongdoing. In fact, because he loves his children, he disciplines them when they sin. In light of God's fatherly discipline, Peter says, "Conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile." By "fear," he means awe and respect, not terror. While all trials Christians experience are a form of God's discipline, as Peter has already told us, some discipline is directly linked to sin. In the same way that a good father disciplines a disobedient child, God disciplines his children so they won't continue in destructive paths (see Heb. 12:5–11). So with the reality of his fatherly discipline in view, we obey God, not to earn a

place in his kingdom but because we already have one and are his children.

Peter reminds us of this, pointing specifically to the security we have in being “ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, . . . with the precious blood of Christ.” Sin patterns and sin’s consequences can run from generation to generation in families (see Ex. 20:5).² Part of the reason why is that sin is woven into the fabric of the DNA we inherited from our very first ancestors, Adam and Eve. Ever since they sinned in the garden of Eden (Gen. 3:1–19), sin has been the default condition of every human being. Apart from God intervening to save, people remain enslaved to sin and often don’t even know it. Christians have been ransomed from the futility of sin.

When we see the word *ransom*, we might think of a suspenseful movie in which a member of a wealthy family gets snatched from bed in the dark of night, blindfolded, and taken forcibly to an abandoned building, held there until the family agrees to pay a hefty price for release. That’s a pretty good picture of what sin does. We were captives, held in bondage to our sin, until Christ paid the ransom that sin demands—not money but

2 The *ESV Study Bible* note on 1 Pet. 1:18 says, “Christ’s sacrifice breaks the inevitability and power of ‘generational sin,’ the idea that the sins of parents and grandparents are often repeated in later generations.” *ESV Study Bible*, ed. Lane Dennis et al. (Crossway, 2008), 2406. This note cites the second commandment from Exodus 20. Here’s the *ESV Study Bible* note on this commandment: “Human experience confirms that immoral behavior on the part of parents often results in suffering for their children and grandchildren. This is one of the grievous aspects of sin, that it harms others besides the sinner himself. But this general principle is qualified in two ways: First, it applies only to those . . . who persist in unbelief as enemies of God. The cycle of sin and suffering can be broken through repentance. Second, the suffering comes to the third and the fourth generation, while God shows steadfast love (v. 6) to another group of people, namely, to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.” *ESV Study Bible*, 176.

blood—by dying on the cross in our place. Peter likens Christ’s sacrifice to “that of a lamb without blemish or spot,” a reference to the kind of sacrifices God required under the Mosaic covenant and accepted as atonement for sins. The entire Old Testament sacrificial system pointed forward to the very thing Peter tells us here, that Jesus was the true unblemished Lamb, the sinless sacrifice, who made atonement. Those earlier sacrifices were never sufficient, which is why they had to be repeated year after year. Jesus’s sacrifice of himself atoned for the sin of God’s people for all time.

This was always God’s plan, which Peter clarifies here. He begins by pointing out in verse 20 that there was never a time when Christ himself and God’s plan of redemption through him didn’t exist. In other words, Christ’s sacrifice wasn’t a plan God came up with after sin entered the world. It was set before time even began, and then it came to pass in God’s perfect way and time for the sake of those he determined to save. And the plan has worked just as God intended. Through Christ’s death and resurrection, believers’ “faith and hope are in God.”

I PETER 1:22–25

²² Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, ²³ since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; ²⁴ for

“All flesh is like grass
and all its glory like the flower of grass.

The grass withers,
and the flower falls,
²⁵ but the word of the Lord remains forever.”

And this word is the good news that was preached to you.

Every single person ransomed by Christ is part of God’s family now, which means we have more brothers and sisters than we can count! And we are called to love our Christian family members. According to verse 22, living by faith—what Peter calls “obedience to the truth”—has a purifying effect on our souls. In other words, living by faith breeds love. Peter describes Christian love as “sincere” and “earnest,” a love free from unselfish motives, and he grounds it in our redeemed status.

The “imperishable” seed goes along with Peter’s description of the “living and abiding word.” The whole of Scripture and the gospel message it carries are imperishable seeds that take root and live and abide. The word “imperishable” implies never-ending life and vitality. It’s a powerful term that Peter uses three times in the letter. Christians’ inheritance is imperishable (v. 4); here in verse 23 God’s word is imperishable; and later, he describes beauty that is imperishable (3:4).

Building on the seed imagery, in 1:24 Peter uses garden imagery from Isaiah 40:6–8—“grass” and “flower”—to help us grasp that nothing in this life will last except for “the word of the Lord,” which is eternal. What an encouragement this is to place ourselves under biblically sound teaching and preaching! As he ends this section, Peter brings all this together and clarifies that the heartbeat of God’s “word” is the gospel, a term that means “good news,” and it is through this gospel word that we have been born again.