THE FIRST LETTER OF PETER

The King's Living Hope

1 Peter, Unfiltered

For teens who think they've heard it all

BILL McLEOD

Papa Bill Books

The King's Living Hope: The First Letter of Peter, Unfiltered

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All Scripture quotations in this book are from the NIV. Some are abridged, with omissions marked by ellipses; paraphrases are not placed in quotation marks.

Pronouns referring to God the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are capitalized for reverence in the author's own words. Inside Scripture quotations, capitalization and wording follow the 2011 NIV exactly.

AI Disclosure. This book was written by Bill McLeod with the assistance of artificial intelligence tools for drafting, research, and editing. All content was reviewed and approved by the author, who takes full responsibility for it. Readers are encouraged to open the Scriptures and study them for themselves.

A WORD TO THE READER

Before You Start

If you've read the earlier books in this series, you know the saying by now: "If you want to get something done, hire a teenager while they still know it all." It's been in every book. Peter would probably laugh at that one. He was the disciple who always spoke first, jumped first, and thought later. Jesus picked him anyway.

Peter is one of the most relatable people in the Bible. He walked on water and then sank. He said Jesus was the Messiah and then, minutes later, told Jesus He was wrong. He swore he'd never abandon Jesus and then denied knowing Him three times in one night. And then Jesus rose from the dead, found him on a beach, and gave him a second chance.

Years later, Peter wrote this letter to believers who felt like outsiders. They were mocked for their faith, misunderstood by their neighbors, and pressured to go back to the way they used to live. If you've ever felt like you don't fit in because of what you believe, this letter was written for people like you.

Peter doesn't promise that following Jesus will make life easy. He promises something better: a hope that's alive, a God who cares about every worry you carry, and a future no one can take from you.

So read it like a letter from someone who failed big and was forgiven bigger. Let's go.

How This Book Works

This book walks through all five chapters of 1 Peter, in order, one chapter of this book for each chapter of the letter. Each one explains what Peter is saying in plain language and adds background about the Roman world and the lives of the first readers.

Before chapter 1, a section called Setting the Scene tells Peter's story, explains the debate about who wrote the letter and when, and introduces the readers, the exiles scattered across what is now Turkey. Read it first.

Each chapter ends with a Key Verse quoted word for word from the New International Version (NIV), the same translation used for every Scripture quotation in this book (pronouns for God are capitalized in the author's own words out of reverence; inside Scripture quotations, capitalization follows the NIV exactly); Real Talk questions to think through alone or argue about with friends; and a Try This challenge.

This book quotes 1 Peter sparingly and explains it mostly in my own words, so keep a Bible open next to it. Read each chapter of the letter first, then the chapter here. Don't take my word for it. Take His.

FOR THE ADULTS

A Note for Parents and Youth Leaders

Thank you for putting this book in a teenager's hands. Like the earlier books in this series, on the Gospels, Acts, Paul's letters, Hebrews, and James, it's written for readers who can smell a sermon coming a mile away. I've tried to write honestly, directly, with some humor, and with real respect for what these readers can handle.

This book follows the letter format of the earlier volumes, walking through 1 Peter chapter by chapter. I've quoted the letter sparingly and relied mostly on paraphrase, background, and discussion material. Wherever Scripture is quoted directly, in the chapters and in the Key Verses, the wording is from the New International Version (NIV).

Several passages call for special care. The instructions to slaves (2:18–25) and to wives and husbands (3:1–7) are explained in their first-century setting, with the range of Christian interpretations, and with a clear statement that these verses never require anyone to stay in an abusive situation. The difficult passage about Christ preaching to the spirits in prison (3:18–22), and the verse about baptism (3:21), are presented with the main Christian views, without endorsing one.

I've also described the debate over whether Peter wrote the letter himself, with the help of Silas, or whether a later follower wrote it

in his name, and the reasons most interpreters take Babylon (5:13) as a code name for Rome.

Several passages are highlighted as especially relevant for teens: living hope in hard times (1:3–9), identity as God's people (2:4–10), being ready to explain your faith with gentleness and respect (3:15), resisting peer pressure (4:3–4), and bringing anxiety to God (5:7). The box on 5:7 encourages readers to seek help from trusted adults and professionals for anxiety; prayer and good care go together.

The Real Talk questions are designed for discussion. They work well for a youth group, a small group, a family dinner table, or a car ride. Don't rush to the right answer. Let them wrestle. Faith that has been thought through tends to last.

My prayer is that every reader who feels like an outsider will discover that they belong to God's people, and that their hope is alive.

Grace and peace,

Bill McLeod

Papa Bill Books

BEFORE YOU OPEN THE LETTER

Setting the Scene

Simon the Fisherman

Peter's real name was Simon. He was a fisherman from the town of Bethsaida, on the Sea of Galilee, and later lived in nearby Capernaum with his wife and his mother-in-law (Mark 1:29–31). He ran a fishing business with his brother Andrew, and with two other brothers, James and John (Luke 5:10). He was a working man with rough hands, not a scholar.

Jesus gave Simon a new name: Cephas in Aramaic, or Petros in Greek. Both mean rock (John 1:42). That's like calling someone Rocky. It was a strange name to give a man who often seemed anything but steady. But Jesus saw who Simon would become.

The Disciple Who Spoke First

In the Gospels, Peter is almost always the first to speak. He asked to walk on the water with Jesus, did it for a few steps, then panicked and started to sink (Matthew 14:28–31). He was the first disciple to say out loud that Jesus was the Messiah (Matthew 16:16). Moments later, when Jesus said He would suffer and die, Peter pulled Him aside and told Him off, and Jesus rebuked him (Matthew 16:21–23). At the Last Supper, Peter refused to let Jesus wash his feet, then asked Jesus to wash his whole body (John 13:6–9). When soldiers came to arrest Jesus, Peter pulled out a sword and cut off a man's ear (John 18:10).

Then came the worst night of his life. Peter had promised he would never deny Jesus, even if it meant dying. But that same night, in the courtyard of the high priest, he denied knowing Jesus three times. When the rooster crowed, he remembered what Jesus had predicted, went outside, and cried bitterly (Luke 22:54–62).

The Second Chance

After the resurrection, the angel at the tomb told the women to tell the disciples and Peter that Jesus was alive (Mark 16:7). Notice that Peter is singled out. The risen Jesus appeared to Peter personally (Luke 24:34; 1 Corinthians 15:5). Later, on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, Jesus cooked breakfast for His disciples over a charcoal fire, like the one Peter had stood next to when he denied Him. Three times Jesus asked Peter whether he loved Him. Three times Peter said yes. And three times Jesus gave him a job: take care of My sheep (John 21:15–17). Three denials, three restorations.

Afterward, Peter became a bold leader. He preached the first sermon after Jesus' resurrection on the day of Pentecost, and about three thousand people believed (Acts 2). He was arrested, beaten, and thrown in prison, and kept preaching (Acts 4–5; 12). He was the first to welcome Gentiles into the church, in the home of a Roman officer named Cornelius (Acts 10). He wasn't perfect. Paul once confronted him publicly for refusing to eat with Gentile believers (Galatians 2:11–14). But Peter kept growing. He traveled as a missionary, and his wife traveled with him (1 Corinthians 9:5).

Peter in Rome

The New Testament doesn't describe Peter's death, but it hints at it. Jesus told Peter that when he was old, someone would stretch out his hands and lead him where he didn't want to go, which John

explains as a reference to the kind of death Peter would die (John 21:18–19). Early Christian writers agree that Peter died as a martyr in Rome. A letter called 1 Clement, written from Rome around AD 96, mentions the deaths of Peter and Paul. Later writers say Peter was crucified under the emperor Nero, sometime between AD 64 and 68. A later tradition, from a book called the Acts of Peter, says he asked to be crucified upside down because he didn't feel worthy to die the same way as Jesus. That story is uncertain, but it shows how Peter was remembered. St. Peter's Basilica in Rome is built over the place where, according to tradition, he was buried.

Who Wrote 1 Peter?

The letter opens by naming Peter, Jesus' apostle, as its writer (1:1), and near the end the writer calls himself an elder like the leaders he's addressing, and someone who saw Christ suffer (5:1). It was accepted early and widely. Second Peter refers to an earlier letter (2 Peter 3:1). Polycarp, a church leader who died around AD 155, quotes from it, and by the late second century, Irenaeus names Peter as its author.

Some modern scholars think a follower of Peter wrote it in his name after his death, perhaps between AD 70 and 95. They point out that the Greek is polished and elegant, and that the writer quotes the Old Testament from its Greek translation, called the Septuagint. Acts describes Peter and John as ordinary men without formal religious training (Acts 4:13). Some also think the letter sounds a lot like Paul, or that the persecution it describes fits a later time.

Others answer that Peter, from a region where Greek was widely spoken, had had thirty years of ministry to improve his Greek, and that the letter itself mentions a helper. Near the end, Peter says he

wrote the letter with the help of Silas (5:12). Silas, also called Silvanus, was a trusted leader from Jerusalem and Paul's traveling companion (Acts 15:22, 40; 1 Thessalonians 1:1). If Silas helped write the letter, that might explain both the polished Greek and the echoes of Paul. Others think the phrase means Silas carried the letter rather than wrote it. Christians on all sides agree that the letter belongs in the Bible and carries Peter's voice. In this book, I call the author Peter.

Greetings from Babylon

At the end of the letter, Peter sends greetings from a woman in Babylon, chosen along with the readers, and from his son Mark (5:13). What does he mean? The ancient city of Babylon, in modern Iraq, was largely abandoned by Peter's time, and there's no early tradition that Peter went there. There was also a small Roman fort called Babylon in Egypt, but again there's no early link to Peter. Most interpreters, ancient and modern, think Babylon is a code name for Rome. In the Old Testament, Babylon was the great empire that destroyed Jerusalem and carried God's people into exile. The book of Revelation uses Babylon as a name for Rome (Revelation 17–18), and some Jewish writings did too, especially after Rome destroyed Jerusalem in AD 70. For readers who saw themselves as exiles, it made sense to call the capital of the empire Babylon.

The woman is probably not a real person but the church in Rome. In the Bible, God's people are sometimes pictured as a woman or a bride. Some think it refers to Peter's wife. Mark was not Peter's biological son, but a younger believer he loved like a son. This is very likely John Mark, whose mother's house in Jerusalem was where Peter went after escaping prison (Acts 12:12). An early

church leader named Papias said that Mark wrote his Gospel based on Peter's preaching.

When Was It Written?

If Peter wrote the letter, it was probably written from Rome in the early 60s, shortly before Nero's persecution of Christians in AD 64. That year, a huge fire destroyed much of Rome. The Roman historian Tacitus says that rumors blamed Nero, so Nero blamed the Christians and had many of them executed in horrifying ways. The letter speaks of a fiery ordeal (4:12) that may have been coming soon, or already starting. If a follower wrote the letter in Peter's name, it may come from between AD 70 and 95.

The Readers

Peter writes to God's chosen people living as exiles in five Roman provinces: Pontus, along the Black Sea coast, then Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. These were all in what is now Turkey. The order of the names may trace the route a messenger would have taken, landing at a port in Pontus, traveling in a loop, and leaving from Bithynia.

The readers were probably mostly Gentiles, people who weren't Jewish. Peter talks about the empty way of life they inherited from their ancestors (1:18), and about the time they used to spend doing what pagans do (4:3). He says that once they weren't a people at all, but now they're God's people (2:10). But Peter uses words and images that originally described Israel to describe these new believers: chosen, scattered, exiles, a holy nation.

Exiles and Strangers

Peter calls his readers exiles and foreigners. In the Roman world, those were legal and social categories. A resident foreigner lived in a place but didn't have full citizenship, rights, or belonging. Some scholars think many of Peter's readers really were displaced people and outsiders. Most think Peter also means it in a spiritual sense. When these people became Christians, they became strangers in their own hometowns. They stopped joining in festivals for the gods, family celebrations with sacrifices, and wild parties. Their neighbors found them strange, suspicious, even dangerous. Their true home was now with God. Christians have described themselves this way ever since: citizens of heaven, living as foreigners on earth.

Why Were They Suffering?

Peter's readers were suffering, but probably not mainly because of official, empire-wide persecution. That came later. Most of their suffering was social: insults, slander, suspicion, exclusion, family conflict, and occasional violence. Romans thought religion held society together. If you refused to honor the gods, you might bring disaster on everyone. Christians were accused of being atheists, because they rejected the gods, and of being antisocial.

About fifty years after Peter's letter, a Roman governor named Pliny the Younger wrote to the emperor Trajan from Bithynia, one of the provinces Peter wrote to. Pliny explained that he was executing people simply for admitting they were Christians, unless they cursed Christ and offered sacrifices to the gods. Christianity was spreading so fast that the temples were nearly empty. Pliny's letter shows that the trouble Peter warned about only got worse.

Peter's Fingerprints

Read 1 Peter closely, and you'll notice echoes of Peter's own story. He tells church leaders to be shepherds of God's flock (5:2), the same job Jesus gave him on the beach. He calls Jesus the living Stone, and calls believers living stones (2:4–5). Remember, Jesus named him Rock. He tells believers to clothe themselves with humility (5:5), maybe remembering the night Jesus tied a towel around His waist and washed his feet. He calls himself a witness of Christ's sufferings (5:1). He knew what it was like to fail Jesus, and to be forgiven.

The Map

Chapter 1: A living hope, joy in trials, and being holy.

Chapter 2: Living stones, a royal priesthood, and following Jesus' example in suffering.

Chapter 3: Wives and husbands, suffering for doing good, being ready to explain your hope, and Jesus' victory.

Chapter 4: Living differently, loving deeply, and not being surprised by suffering.

Chapter 5: Shepherds and humility, anxiety and the roaring lion, and God's promise to restore.

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CHAPTER 1

A Living Hope

1 Peter 1

Peter opens his letter the way people did in the ancient world, by naming himself first. He's an apostle, someone sent by Jesus. Then he names his readers. He calls them God's chosen ones, living like exiles, scattered across five provinces in what is now Turkey.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Chosen and Scattered**
>
> Those two words seem to pull in opposite directions. Chosen sounds like being picked first for the team. Scattered sounds like being lost, alone, far from home. Peter says his readers are both. They may feel like outsiders in their towns, but God picked them. If you've ever felt like you don't belong at school, on a team, or even in your own family, Peter has a word for you: God chose you. You belong to Him, wherever you are.

Peter explains that God the Father knew and chose them, that the Spirit set them apart as His own, and that the purpose was for them to obey Jesus and be made clean by His blood. Then he greets them with a wish for grace and peace, overflowing.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Father, Spirit, and Son**
>
> In just one verse, Peter mentions God the Father, the Holy Spirit, and Jesus Christ, each with a different role in our salvation. The Father chooses. The Spirit makes us holy. The Son's blood cleanses us. Peter isn't writing a theology textbook, and the word Trinity doesn't appear in the Bible. But

passages like this one are part of why Christians came to believe that the one God exists as three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

BACKGROUND CHECK **What Does Chosen Mean?**

Christians have discussed for centuries what it means that God chooses people. Some, following thinkers like Augustine and John Calvin, believe God chooses specific people for salvation based on His own purpose and grace, not on anything He sees in them. Others, following thinkers like Jacob Arminius and John Wesley, believe God chooses based on His foreknowledge of who will freely respond to Him in faith, or that He chooses a people, the church, and individuals become part of it by faith. Catholic and Orthodox Christians have their own ways of holding God's grace and human freedom together. All agree that salvation starts with God, that He offers it freely, and that people must respond to Him. Peter's point here is comfort, not a puzzle: God knew you and wanted you.

Then Peter bursts into praise. Thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus! Because He's so merciful, He has caused us to be born all over again, into a hope that's alive, because Jesus came back to life. And we have an inheritance waiting for us, one that will never die, rot, or lose its color. God is guarding it in heaven, and He's guarding you too, by His power, through your faith, until He reveals the full rescue at the end of time.

BACKGROUND CHECK **A Living Hope**

Why does Peter call it a living hope? Maybe because he remembered what dead hope felt like. On the night Jesus was arrested and the day He died, Peter's hopes were crushed. He had left everything to follow Jesus, then denied Him, and then watched Him die. Then, three days later, the tomb was empty, and Jesus was alive. Peter's hope came back to life when Jesus did. That's the kind of hope Peter is talking about. It isn't wishful thinking, like hoping it doesn't rain on the weekend. It's confidence based on something that already happened: Jesus rose from the dead.

BACKGROUND CHECK **An Inheritance That Lasts**

Everything you own will eventually break, wear out, get lost, or go out of style. Phones get slow. Shoes fall apart. Clothes that were cool two years ago now look embarrassing. Even the people we love will eventually die. Peter says God has something waiting for you that will never break, decay, or fade. And it's not just stored up somewhere. God is keeping it safe for you, and keeping you safe for it.

Peter knows his readers are hurting. You have reason to celebrate, he says, even though right now, for a short time, you've had to grieve through many different kinds of hard times. Those hard times test whether your faith is real, the way fire tests gold. Gold is valuable, but it won't last forever. Your faith is worth much more. When it comes through the fire, it will bring praise and glory and honor on the day Jesus is revealed.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Refined by Fire**

In the ancient world, gold was purified by heating it until it melted. The impurities rose to the surface, and the goldsmith skimmed them off. What was left was pure gold. Peter says hard times work like that. They burn away what's fake and show what's real. That doesn't mean God enjoys watching you suffer, or that every bad thing is a test. But it means suffering is never wasted. God can use even your worst days to make your faith stronger and purer.

You've never seen Jesus, Peter says, and yet you love Him. You can't see Him now, and yet you trust Him, and you're full of a joy so glorious that words can't describe it. You're already receiving the goal of your faith: the rescue of your souls.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Loving Someone You Can't See**

Peter had seen Jesus with his own eyes. He had eaten with Him, walked with Him, and watched Him die and rise again. His readers never had. Neither have we. Peter isn't saying they're second-class believers. He's amazed by their

faith. Jesus said something similar to Thomas: people who believe without seeing are blessed (John 20:29). If you sometimes wish you could just see Jesus to be sure, you're not alone. But you can know Him and love Him now, through His word, through prayer, and through His people.

Peter says that the prophets in the Old Testament spoke about this rescue. They searched and studied carefully, trying to figure out when and how it would happen. Christ's Spirit, working within them, told them ahead of time about the Messiah's suffering and the glory that would come after. God showed them that they were serving future believers, not themselves. Even angels want to understand these things.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Angels Are Curious**

This is an amazing idea. Angels, who live in God's presence, long to peer into what God has done for human beings. They've never needed to be rescued from sin. They've never experienced grace the way we have. Your salvation is something even angels find fascinating.

So, Peter says, get your minds ready for action. Stay clear-headed. Put all your hope in the grace you'll receive when Jesus comes back. Like obedient children, don't let your old desires shape you, the ones you followed before you knew better. The God who invited you is holy, so let every part of your life be holy too. Peter quotes Leviticus, where God tells His people to be holy because He is holy.

BACKGROUND CHECK **What Is Holy?**

Holy means set apart, different, belonging to God. In the Old Testament, special objects in the temple were holy because they were reserved for God's use. Peter says you're like that. You belong to God, so your life should look different. That doesn't mean being weird or acting better than everyone else. It means letting God shape how you think, talk, act, and treat people, instead of just going along with whatever everyone else is doing.

Peter reminds his readers that God judges everyone fairly, without favorites. So live with reverence during your time here as foreigners. You know that you were bought back from the pointless lifestyle your families passed down to you. You weren't bought with silver or gold, which don't last, but with Christ's precious blood, like a perfect lamb with no flaws. God chose Him before the world began, and revealed Him now, at the end of the ages, for you. Through Jesus you trust God, who raised Him from death and gave Him glory, so everything you trust and hope for rests on God.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Ransomed**
>
> The word Peter uses for bought back is the word for redeem, or ransom. It was used for paying to free a slave or a prisoner of war. Peter says that Jesus paid the price to set us free. And the payment wasn't money. It was His own life. The picture of a perfect lamb points back to the Passover in Exodus, when the blood of a lamb protected God's people and led to their freedom from slavery in Egypt (Exodus 12). Jesus is the true Passover Lamb.
>
> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Empty Inheritance**
>
> Peter says his readers had inherited an empty, pointless way of life from their families. Every family passes things down: traditions, habits, attitudes, and sometimes harmful patterns like anger, addiction, or bitterness. Some of what we inherit is good. Some isn't. Peter's good news is that Jesus can break the chains of what you inherited. You don't have to repeat your family's mistakes. You can start a new pattern with God's help.

Since you've been made pure by obeying the truth, Peter says, and you now have real love for other believers, love each other deeply, with all your heart. You've been born again, not from seed that dies, but from seed that lasts forever: God's word, which is alive and never ends. Peter quotes Isaiah, who compares human beings to grass and wildflowers that wither and fall, while God's word lasts

forever. And that word, Peter says, is the good news that was preached to you.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Grass and Glory**

Isaiah's picture is a reminder that fame, beauty, popularity, and success fade quickly. Think about how fast viral videos and trends come and go. Today's celebrity is tomorrow's trivia question. Peter says that what's built on God's word lasts. That's worth remembering when you're tempted to build your life on likes, followers, looks, or status. Those things wither. God's word doesn't.

KEY VERSE

Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

1 Peter 1:8–9 (NIV)

REAL TALK

1. What's the difference between a living hope and wishful thinking?
2. Have you ever been through something hard that made your faith stronger? What happened?
3. What does it mean to you to be holy? What would it look like this week?
4. What patterns or habits have you inherited from your family, good and bad?

TRY THIS *Make a list of five things you're hoping for right now. Then write down what Peter says is waiting for you in God's inheritance. Each morning this week, read 1 Peter 1:3–9 and thank God for one thing in it.*

CHAPTER 2

Living Stones

1 Peter 2

Peter starts this chapter with a list of things to get rid of: every kind of evil, lying, fake behavior, jealousy, and trash talk. Instead, like a newborn baby who desperately wants milk, crave the pure spiritual milk that will help you grow. After all, you've already experienced how good the Lord is.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Hungry Like a Baby**
>
> If you've ever been around a hungry newborn, you know they don't politely wait for lunch. They scream until they're fed. Peter says that's how we should want God's word: not as a chore, but as something we need. If you don't feel that hunger yet, that's normal. Appetite often grows as you eat. Start small, a few verses a day, and see what happens.

Then Peter uses one of his favorite pictures: stones. Come to Jesus, he says, the living Stone. People rejected Him, but God chose Him, and He is precious to God. And you are stones too, living ones, and God is building you together into a spiritual house, to serve as holy priests, offering spiritual sacrifices that please God through Jesus.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **A Rock Named Rock**
>
> Peter must have smiled as he wrote this. Jesus had named him Rock. Now he tells all believers that they're stones too. In Matthew 16:18, Jesus told Peter that on this rock He would build His church. Christians have understood that verse in different ways. Catholic tradition sees it as giving Peter a unique

leadership role, continued by the bishops of Rome. Many Protestants and Orthodox Christians understand the rock as Peter's confession that Jesus is the Messiah, or Peter as the first of the apostles, with the foundation shared among them. Here, Peter himself points to Jesus as the living Stone, and to every believer as a stone in God's house.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Living Stones**

A pile of bricks isn't a house. Stones become a building when they're put together. Peter says that Christians are like that. You can't really follow Jesus alone. God is building His people together into a temple where He lives. Each stone is different in shape and size, and each one matters. You're part of something much bigger than yourself. And unlike ordinary stones, you're alive.

Peter backs this up with three quotes from the Old Testament. Isaiah says that God is laying a precious, chosen cornerstone in Zion, and that whoever trusts in Him won't be put to shame. The Psalms say that the stone the builders threw away has become the most important stone in the building. And Isaiah says this stone will make people trip and fall. The NIV footnotes trace these to Isaiah 28:16, Psalm 118:22, and Isaiah 8:14. To people who trust Jesus, Peter explains, He is precious. But people who reject Him trip over Him, because they refuse to obey the message.

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Cornerstone**

In ancient buildings, the cornerstone was the first stone laid, and the most important one. The builders lined up every other stone with it. If it was crooked, the whole building would be crooked. Jesus is the cornerstone of God's people. Everything lines up with Him. The builders, Israel's religious leaders, rejected Him. But God made Him the foundation of everything. Jesus Himself quoted this psalm about Himself (Mark 12:10–11).

Then Peter tells his readers who they are, in one of the most powerful passages in the Bible. You're God's chosen people. You're

priests who belong to the King. You're a nation set apart for Him, His own treasured possession. God did this so you could tell others about the amazing things He has done, the One who brought you from the dark into His incredible light. Once you were nobodies, but now you're God's people. Once you didn't know God's mercy, but now you've experienced it.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Who You Are**

Peter takes titles that God gave Israel at Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:5–6) and gives them to a group of mostly Gentile believers, many of them poor, mocked, and looked down on by their neighbors. Think about what that would mean to them. The world said they were nothing. God said they were royalty. If you struggle with who you are, with your worth, your looks, your popularity, or your failures, read 2:9 again. This is God's description of His people. It's who you are if you belong to Jesus.

BACKGROUND CHECK **A Royal Priesthood**

In the Old Testament, only certain men from the tribe of Levi could serve as priests. They offered sacrifices and went into God's presence on behalf of the people. Peter says all believers are now priests. Christians understand this in different ways. Protestants often speak of the priesthood of all believers, meaning every Christian can come directly to God through Jesus, without a human go-between, and every Christian has a ministry. Catholic and Orthodox Christians also teach that all the baptized share in a common priesthood, while also holding that some are ordained to a special ministerial priesthood. Everyone agrees that every believer is called to worship God, pray for others, and offer their life to Him.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Not a People**

Peter's words about once not being a people echo the prophet Hosea. God told Hosea to give his children names meaning not loved and not my people, as a picture of Israel's unfaithfulness. But God promised that one day He would call them loved and my people again (Hosea 1:6–10; 2:23). Peter says

that promise came true in a new way for Gentiles who were far from God and were welcomed into His family.

Then Peter gives some practical instructions. Dear friends, since you're foreigners and exiles in this world, stay away from the desires that fight against your soul. Live so well in front of your non-Christian neighbors that, even if they accuse you of wrongdoing, they'll see the good things you do and give glory to God when He comes.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Live So They Notice**

Peter's readers were being slandered. People said that Christians were antisocial, disloyal, and immoral. Peter's strategy is simple: prove them wrong by how you live. Be the kindest person on your team, the most honest student in your class, the most helpful kid in your neighborhood. People might still mock your faith. But it's hard to argue with a life that's genuinely good.

Then Peter tells his readers to submit to every human authority, for the Lord's sake, whether the emperor or the governors he sends to punish wrongdoers and reward people who do right. God wants you to silence foolish people's ignorant accusations by doing good. Live as free people, but don't use freedom as an excuse to do wrong. Live as servants of God. Respect everyone. Love your fellow believers. Have reverence for God. Give the emperor honor.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Honor the Emperor?**

Remember who the emperor probably was when Peter wrote this: Nero, a cruel ruler who would later execute Christians, possibly including Peter himself. Peter still tells believers to respect authority and do good. That's remarkable. But it has limits. When the religious authorities ordered Peter to stop preaching about Jesus, he refused, saying that we must obey God rather than human beings (Acts 5:29). Christians respect governments, pay taxes, and obey laws, but when a law requires disobeying God, God comes first.

Notice also the order: honor the emperor, but fear God. Only God gets our worship.

Next Peter speaks to household slaves. Submit to your masters with respect, he says, not only to the kind and gentle ones, but also to the harsh ones. It's a good thing if you endure pain from unfair treatment because you're aware of God. If you're punished for doing wrong, there's no credit in putting up with it. But if you do right, get hurt for it, and keep going, God sees and approves.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Slavery in the Roman World**

Slavery was everywhere in the Roman Empire. Perhaps one in five people in Italy were enslaved, and in cities the number may have been higher. People became slaves through war, debt, kidnapping, or being born to enslaved mothers. Household slaves might be teachers, doctors, cooks, or managers, and some were eventually freed. But slaves were legally property. They could be beaten, sexually abused, separated from their families, and even killed, with little or no protection under the law. It was a cruel system, and we shouldn't minimize that. Roman slavery wasn't based on race in the way slavery in the Americas later was, but it was still a brutal denial of human dignity.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Why Didn't Peter Condemn Slavery?**

Peter was writing to a tiny, powerless minority who had no ability to change Roman law. He speaks to slaves directly, as members of the church and as people who make moral choices, which was unusual; Roman writers usually spoke only to masters about their slaves. Peter doesn't say slavery is good. He tells slaves how to follow Jesus in the situation they were already in. Over time, Christians came to see that the gospel itself, which says that all people are made in God's image and equal in Christ (Galatians 3:28), is incompatible with slavery. Christians were leaders in the movements to abolish slavery, although tragically, other Christians used verses like these to defend it. Today, Christians across all traditions agree that slavery is evil.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Never an Excuse for Abuse**

This passage does not mean that you should stay in a situation where you're being abused. Peter is talking to people who had no legal way out. If anyone is hurting you, at home, at school, in a relationship, online, or anywhere else, that is wrong, and it's not your fault. Telling someone isn't disobedient or unloving. God cares about justice and about your safety. Tell a trusted adult, a teacher, a school counselor, or a pastor. If you're in danger, call emergency services.

Peter explains why suffering for doing good matters. This is what you were called to, because Jesus suffered on your behalf and left you a model, so you could follow in His footprints. Then he describes Jesus' suffering using words from Isaiah 53. Jesus never sinned, and never lied. When people insulted Him, He didn't insult them back. When He suffered, He didn't threaten revenge. He trusted Himself to God, who judges fairly. He took our sins on Himself, carrying them to the cross in His own body, so that we could be finished with sin and live for what's right. Peter quotes Isaiah's words, "by his wounds you have been healed." You were like sheep wandering away, but now you've come back to the Shepherd who watches over your souls.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Following His Footsteps**

The word Peter uses for example describes a pattern a child would trace when learning to write the alphabet. Jesus is the pattern we trace. When someone insults you, posts something mean about you, or treats you unfairly, your instinct might be to hit back. Jesus didn't. That doesn't mean He was weak or silent about injustice. He spoke truth boldly. But He didn't take revenge. He trusted God to make things right. You can do the same, while still standing up for what's right and getting help when you need it.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Back to the Shepherd**

Peter knew what it meant to wander away from Jesus. He had denied Him three times. And he knew what it meant to come back. On the beach, Jesus didn't shame him. He restored him and told him to take care of His sheep. If you've wandered, the Shepherd is still looking for you. You can come back.

KEY VERSE

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

1 Peter 2:9 (NIV)

REAL TALK

1. Which title in 2:9 means the most to you? Why?
2. How can your life make people curious about Jesus, or at least prove false ideas about Christians wrong?
3. When is it right to obey authority, and when is it right to say no?
4. How would you respond, with Jesus as your example, the next time someone insults you?

TRY THIS *Write 1 Peter 2:9 on a card and put it where you'll see it every morning, like your mirror or your phone's lock screen. Each day this week, read it out loud and do one thing that shows someone the light of God.*

CHAPTER 3

Ready with an Answer

1 Peter 3

Peter now turns to wives and husbands. He tells wives to accept their husbands' leadership, in the same spirit he described for citizens and household workers. His goal is that if a husband doesn't believe God's message, his wife's way of life might win him over, even without a word, when he sees how pure and respectful she is.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **A Christian Wife with a Pagan Husband**
> To understand this passage, picture the situation. In the Roman world, a wife was expected to follow her husband's religion. A Greek writer named Plutarch, who lived around the same time as Peter, said that a wife should worship only her husband's gods and shut the door on strange religions. So a woman who became a Christian on her own, without her husband, was doing something bold and countercultural. She might face anger, suspicion, or worse. Peter is speaking to women in that difficult position. Notice that he doesn't tell them to give up their faith to keep the peace. He tells them to keep following Jesus, and to let their lives speak.

Peter says a woman's beauty shouldn't come mainly from outward things like fancy hairstyles, gold jewelry, or expensive clothes. It should come from who she is inside, the lasting beauty of a gentle and calm spirit, which God treasures. That's how the godly women of the past made themselves beautiful, women whose hope rested in God. Peter mentions Sarah, who respected Abraham and called him

master. You are her daughters, he tells the women, if you do good and don't let fear control you.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Inner Beauty**

Peter isn't banning hairstyles or jewelry. He's saying they're not where real beauty comes from. That message matters for everyone, guys included, especially in a world of filters, edited photos, and constant comparison. You can spend hours trying to look a certain way and still feel like you're not enough. Peter points to a kind of beauty that doesn't fade with age, doesn't depend on your body type or your clothes, and is precious to God: a heart at peace. A gentle spirit isn't a weak one. Jesus described Himself as gentle (Matthew 11:29), and He was the strongest person who ever lived.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Don't Give Way to Fear**

Peter's instruction about not being afraid is important. A wife whose husband opposed her faith had plenty to fear. Peter tells her not to let fear rule her. She belongs to God. This isn't a call to submit to threats or intimidation. Peter is encouraging these women to stand firm in courage and hope.

Husbands, Peter says, in the same way, be understanding in the way you share life with your wives. Treat them with honor, as the more vulnerable partner, and as people who share with you equally in God's gift of new life. If you don't, your prayers will be blocked.

BACKGROUND CHECK **What About the Husbands?**

Peter's words to husbands were radical in his day. Roman law gave husbands enormous power over their wives. Peter tells husbands to honor their wives, to understand them, and to treat them as equal heirs of God's grace. He even warns that if husbands treat their wives badly, it will damage their relationship with God. The phrase weaker partner probably refers to physical strength, or to how vulnerable women were in that society, not to intelligence, value, or spiritual strength. In God's eyes, husbands and wives are equally His children.

BACKGROUND CHECK **How Christians Read These Verses**

Christians apply this passage in different ways today. Some, often called complementarians, believe God gives husbands a loving, servant leadership role in marriage and wives a role of supporting that leadership, while seeing both as fully equal in worth. Others, often called egalitarians, believe Peter was giving wise advice for a specific cultural setting, and that the deeper principle is mutual submission and partnership, as in Ephesians 5:21. Both groups agree that marriage should reflect Christ's self-giving love, and that husbands and wives are equal before God.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Submission Never Means Abuse**

Whatever view a church holds, no passage in the Bible requires anyone to accept abuse. Submission doesn't mean obeying someone who tells you to sin, and it never means staying silent about violence, threats, or control. If you see abuse at home, or if a boyfriend or girlfriend is controlling, threatening, or hurting you, that is not love, and it's not what God wants. Talk to a trusted adult, a school counselor, or a pastor. If you're in danger, call emergency services. Getting help honors God.

Then Peter speaks to everyone. Be united in your thinking. Feel for each other. Love like family. Be kind and humble. When someone does you wrong, don't hit back with wrong, and don't trade insult for insult. Instead, answer with a blessing. This is your calling, and God will bless you for it. Peter quotes Psalm 34: if you want to love life and enjoy good days, watch what you say, steer clear of lies, turn away from evil, and do good. Look for peace and go after it, because God watches over people who do right and listens when they pray, but He opposes those who do evil.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Blessing Instead of Insults**

Social media makes revenge easy. Someone posts something hurtful, and you can fire back in seconds, with an audience watching. Peter says there's a better way: bless them instead. That doesn't mean pretending it doesn't hurt

or that what they did is okay. It means refusing to play the same game. You might pray for them, say something kind, or simply walk away. And if it's bullying or harassment, block and report it, and tell an adult. Blessing doesn't mean letting yourself be a target.

Who will hurt you if you're passionate about doing good? Peter asks. But even if you do suffer for doing right, you're blessed. Don't be afraid of what they threaten. Don't let them shake you.

Then comes one of the most important verses in the letter. In your hearts, set Jesus apart as Lord. "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have." But do it gently and respectfully, with a clean conscience, so that people who slander your good behavior will be embarrassed. It's better to suffer for doing good, if that's God's will, than for doing evil.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Always Be Ready**

1 Peter 3:15 is one of the best verses in the Bible for teens. You probably know people who don't believe in God, or who think Christianity is outdated, harmful, or just dumb. Sooner or later, someone will ask you why you believe. Peter says: be ready. That doesn't mean you need to have every answer or win every argument. It means you've thought about why you believe, and you can explain it in your own words. Here are a few ways to get ready. Think about your own story: how did you come to faith, and what difference has Jesus made in your life? Learn the basic reasons Christians believe Jesus rose from the dead. Write down the questions your friends ask, and look for answers with a parent, pastor, or youth leader. And it's always okay to say, I don't know, but I'll find out.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Gentleness and Respect**

The second half of 3:15 is just as important as the first. How you share your faith matters as much as what you say. You can win an argument and lose a friend. Some Christians come across as angry, arrogant, or judgmental, and it

pushes people away from Jesus. Peter says to be gentle and respectful. Listen more than you talk. Ask questions. Take other people's views seriously. Don't mock or insult anyone. Remember that the goal isn't to prove you're right. It's to point people to Jesus.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Set Apart Christ as Lord**

Notice where Peter's instruction starts: in your heart. Before you can explain your faith to anyone else, Jesus has to be Lord of your own life. Your words will carry more weight if your friends see that you actually live what you believe. That's why Peter talks about a clear conscience. If your life contradicts your words, people won't listen.

Then Peter explains why suffering for doing right is worth it. Christ also suffered, once for all, for sins, the innocent for the guilty, to bring you to God. His body was put to death, but He was made alive by the Spirit. The NIV footnote offers another reading: made alive in the spirit. Then comes one of the hardest passages in the Bible. Peter says that Jesus "went and made proclamation to the imprisoned spirits," who had disobeyed long ago, when God patiently waited while Noah built the ark. Only eight people were saved through the water.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Spirits in Prison**

Martin Luther said this might be the most difficult passage in the New Testament. Who were the spirits in prison, and what did Jesus tell them? There are three main views. First, some, following Augustine, think the preexistent Christ preached through Noah, by the Spirit, to the people of Noah's day, who rejected the message and are now imprisoned, awaiting judgment. Second, many think that between His death and resurrection, Jesus went to the realm of the dead. Some in this view believe He announced His victory, others that He brought the righteous dead to heaven, sometimes called the harrowing of hell, and some that He offered the gospel to the dead. This is connected to the phrase in the Apostles' Creed that Jesus descended

to the dead, or to hell. Third, many modern scholars think the spirits are fallen angels connected to the strange story in Genesis 6:1–4, which some Jewish writings, like the book of 1 Enoch, describe as being imprisoned for their rebellion in Noah's time. In this view, after His resurrection, Jesus proclaimed His victory over them. Christians who love Jesus and trust the Bible hold each of these views. Whatever the details, Peter's point is clear: Jesus has won, and every power is under His authority.

BACKGROUND CHECK **He Descended to the Dead**

The Apostles' Creed, an ancient summary of Christian belief, says that Jesus was crucified, died, and was buried, and that He descended to the dead, or in older translations, into hell. Christians understand this line differently. Some see it as Jesus entering the realm of the dead, as described in 1 Peter 3:19 and 4:6. Others see it as a way of saying that He truly died, or that He experienced the full weight of separation from God on the cross. Some churches leave the line out. But all agree that Jesus truly died and truly rose again.

Peter says that the water of Noah's flood is a picture of baptism. "This water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also," he writes. It's not about washing dirt off your body, but about a promise made to God from a clean conscience. The NIV footnote offers another possible reading: an appeal to God for a clear conscience. And it saves you through Jesus' resurrection. Jesus has gone up to heaven and sits at God's right hand, and every angel, authority, and power is under His rule.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Baptism Saves You?**

This verse has been understood in different ways. Catholic, Orthodox, and many Lutheran and Anglican Christians believe that baptism is a means God uses to give new life, forgiveness, and the Holy Spirit, and they often baptize babies as well as adults. Many Reformed Christians see baptism as a sign and seal of God's covenant promises, also given to children of believers. Baptists, Pentecostals, and many other Protestants see baptism as a public declaration

of faith that follows salvation, so they baptize people old enough to believe for themselves. Notice what Peter himself emphasizes: baptism doesn't work like a magic bath. It's connected to a clear conscience before God and to Jesus' resurrection. All traditions agree that baptism is commanded by Jesus (Matthew 28:19), that it's connected to faith, and that salvation comes through Jesus. If you haven't been baptized, talk to your pastor about it.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Noah and Baptism**

Why does Peter connect Noah with baptism? In the flood, water brought judgment on a corrupt world, but the ark carried Noah's family safely through it to a new beginning. In baptism, water pictures death to the old life and the start of a new one. Paul uses a similar picture: in baptism, we're buried with Christ and raised to new life (Romans 6:3–4). Jesus is the ark who carries us through judgment into new life.

KEY VERSE

But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.

1 Peter 3:15–16 (NIV)

REAL TALK

1. What do you think real beauty is? Where does our culture say it comes from?
2. If a friend asked you today why you believe in Jesus, what would you say?
3. Have you ever seen someone share their faith in a way that pushed people away? What would gentleness and respect look like instead?
4. Which view of the spirits in prison seems most convincing to you? Why?

TRY THIS *Write a one-page answer to the question, Why do you believe in Jesus? Include your own story and one or two reasons. Then share it with a parent, youth leader, or Christian friend and ask for feedback. Pray for one friend who might ask you someday.*

CHAPTER 4

Different on Purpose

1 Peter 4

Since Jesus suffered in His body, Peter says, arm yourselves with the same mindset, because whoever has suffered in the body has finished with sin. From then on, they no longer spend the rest of their lives chasing human desires, but doing what God wants.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Arm Yourself**
>
> Peter uses military language here. Get armed. Get ready for battle. The weapon is an attitude, the same attitude Jesus had: a willingness to suffer rather than give in to sin. What does it mean that someone who has suffered is finished with sin? Interpreters aren't sure. It may mean that when you're willing to suffer for Jesus, sin loses its grip on you, or that believers who share in Christ's death have broken with sin's power. Either way, Peter is saying that following Jesus will cost you something, and it's worth it.

You've already spent enough time doing what pagans like to do, Peter says: wild living, lust, getting drunk, partying, and worshiping idols. Now your old friends think it's strange that you don't join them in their reckless lifestyle, so they insult you. But they'll have to answer to God, who is ready to judge everyone, living and dead.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Why Aren't You Coming?**
>
> Peter describes something many teens know well: the pressure to go along with the crowd. If you're the one who doesn't drink at the party, doesn't watch what everyone else is watching, doesn't join in the group chat when it

turns cruel, or doesn't hook up, people might think you're strange. They might laugh at you, leave you out, or call you judgmental. Peter's readers faced the same thing. Their friends were shocked when they stopped joining in. It's hard to be different. But Peter says you're not missing out. You're living for something better. And having even one friend who shares your values makes it much easier. Look for that friend.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Pagan Parties**

In Peter's world, much of social life revolved around the gods. Trade guilds held banquets in temples, with sacrifices, heavy drinking, and sometimes sexual immorality. Family celebrations and city festivals honored the gods. For a new Christian, saying no could mean losing business, friends, and status. It wasn't just about avoiding a party. It was about changing your whole social life.

Peter adds a difficult sentence. The good news was preached even to people who have since died, so that although they were judged by human standards in the body, they might live in the spirit, the way God does.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Preached to the Dead**

Like 3:19, this verse is hard to interpret. Many think it refers to believers who heard the gospel while they were alive and have since died. The world condemned them, and they died like everyone else, but they live with God. Others connect it with 3:19 and think it means Jesus proclaimed the gospel to people who had already died. Most interpreters don't think it teaches that people get a second chance after death, but Christians discuss this. Peter's main point is clear: God will judge everyone fairly, and those who belong to Him will live.

Everything is about to reach its end, Peter says. So keep your head clear and stay alert, so you can pray. Most of all, keep loving each other deeply, since love throws a covering over a huge number of sins.

BACKGROUND CHECK **The End Is Near?**

Peter wrote nearly two thousand years ago that the end was near. Was he wrong? Christians believe that with Jesus' death and resurrection, the last chapter of history began. We're living in the last days, however long they last. Peter himself later explained that God isn't slow, but patient, giving people time to turn to Him (2 Peter 3:8–9). The point isn't to set dates. It's to live ready.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Love Covers Sins**

What does it mean that love covers sins? It doesn't mean love hides abuse or ignores serious wrongdoing. It means that love doesn't keep score. It forgives small offenses, gives people the benefit of the doubt, and doesn't broadcast other people's failures. Proverbs says something similar: hatred stirs up fights, but love covers wrongs (Proverbs 10:12). In a world where people screenshot every mistake and cancel people for one bad moment, that kind of love stands out.

Be hospitable to each other, without complaining. Each of you has received a gift from God. Use it to serve others, as good managers of the many forms of God's grace. If you speak, speak as though you're delivering God's words. If you serve, serve with the strength God gives you. That way, God will get the praise through Jesus in everything. Glory and power belong to Him forever. Amen.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Your Gift**

Peter says every believer has a gift from God. Maybe you're good at encouraging people, organizing things, teaching, making music, fixing things, listening, or welcoming new people. Paul lists other gifts in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12. Your gift isn't for showing off. It's for serving others. Ask yourself: what do I love doing that helps people? What do others say I'm good at? Then use it, at church, at school, at home, and in your community. God gave it to you for a reason.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Hospitality**

In the ancient world, traveling Christians depended on believers opening their homes. Hospitality literally means love of strangers. Peter adds: without grumbling, because hospitality can be inconvenient. For you, hospitality might look like inviting the new kid to sit with you, having friends over, or making sure no one's left out of the group.

Dear friends, Peter says, don't be shocked by the fiery trial you're going through, as if something weird were happening to you. Instead, be glad that you're sharing in Christ's sufferings, so you'll be filled with joy on the day His glory is unveiled. If people insult you because of Christ, you're blessed, because God's glorious Spirit rests on you.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Don't Be Surprised**

Many people think that following Jesus should make life easier. Peter says the opposite: expect opposition. Jesus told His disciples that the world would hate them because it hated Him first (John 15:18–20). Around the world today, millions of Christians face discrimination, imprisonment, or violence for their faith. In some countries, simply owning a Bible or attending church can be dangerous. Take a moment to pray for persecuted believers. And if you face mocking or exclusion because of your faith, remember that you're not alone, and it's not strange. You're in good company.

But make sure you're not suffering for being a murderer, a thief, a criminal, or even a busybody. If you suffer for being a Christian, don't be ashamed. Praise God that you carry that name.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Not All Suffering Is Persecution**

Peter makes an important distinction. If you're mocked because you follow Jesus, that's honorable. But if people dislike you because you're rude, self-righteous, nosy, or judgmental, that's not persecution. That's the result of bad behavior. Some Christians confuse the two. Peter even includes meddlers on his list, people who stick their noses into other people's business. Before

you claim you're being persecuted, ask yourself honestly whether you're being treated badly for Jesus, or for acting like a jerk.

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Name Christian**

The word Christian appears only three times in the New Testament: here, in Acts 11:26, where believers in Antioch were first given the name, and in Acts 26:28, when King Agrippa used it, maybe sarcastically. It probably started as a nickname from outsiders, meaning Christ's people, and possibly as an insult. Peter says to wear it proudly.

Judgment begins with God's own household, Peter says. And if it starts with us, what will happen to people who reject God's good news? He quotes Proverbs 11:31, which says that if it's hard for good people to be saved, things will be much worse for the ungodly and sinners. So when God allows you to suffer, place yourself in the hands of the Creator who keeps His promises, and keep doing good.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Faithful Creator**

Peter ends this chapter by calling God our faithful Creator. It's the only time that title appears in the New Testament. When everything around you is falling apart, remember who made you, and that He is faithful. He won't drop you. He knows how you're made, and He'll take care of what He made.

KEY VERSE

Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms.

1 Peter 4:10 (NIV)

REAL TALK

1. When have you felt pressure to go along with the crowd? How did you handle it?
2. What does it mean to you that love covers a multitude of sins? Is there someone you need to stop keeping score with?
3. What gifts has God given you? How could you use one to serve someone this week?
4. What's the difference between being persecuted for Jesus and being disliked for bad behavior?

TRY THIS *Ask two people who know you well what they think your gifts are. Then pick one gift and use it to serve someone this week, at home, at church, or at school. Also, look up a ministry that serves persecuted Christians and pray for one country by name each day.*

CHAPTER 5

The Shepherd and the Lion

1 Peter 5

Peter now speaks to the leaders of the churches, the elders. He appeals to them as one elder to another, as someone who saw Christ suffer, and who will also share in the glory that's coming.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **A Fellow Elder**
>
> Peter could have reminded the elders that he was one of the Twelve, that Jesus had personally chosen him, and that he had seen the risen Lord. Instead, he calls himself a fellow elder, one of them. That's real humility. Catholic tradition sees Peter as the first bishop of Rome and the first pope, with a special role among the apostles. Protestant and Orthodox Christians honor Peter as a leading apostle but understand his role differently. Here, though, Peter simply stands alongside other leaders as a fellow servant.

Take care of God's flock that's in your charge, he tells them. Watch over them, not because you're forced to, but willingly, the way God wants. Don't do it to get money, but because you're eager to serve. Don't boss around the people in your care, but be an example for them. Then, when the Chief Shepherd appears, you'll receive a crown of glory that never fades.

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Feed My Sheep**
>
> Peter is passing on the job Jesus gave him on the beach after the resurrection: take care of My sheep (John 21:15–17). A shepherd's job is to feed, guide, protect, and look for lost sheep. Good leaders aren't bosses. They're servants.

Jesus is the Chief Shepherd. Every pastor, youth leader, and parent is an under-shepherd, accountable to Him. And unlike the wreaths of leaves given to winning athletes in the ancient world, which wilted in a few days, the crown Jesus gives never fades.

BACKGROUND CHECK **When Leaders Fail**

Peter warns leaders not to abuse their power, use their position for money, or dominate the people in their care. Sadly, some church leaders have done exactly that, including some who have abused children and teens. If a leader at church, or anywhere else, makes you uncomfortable, asks you to keep secrets, touches you inappropriately, or uses their position to control you, it's not your fault, and you should tell a trusted adult right away. If they don't listen, tell another one. Good leaders welcome accountability. Jesus is fiercely protective of His sheep.

In the same way, Peter says, younger people, accept the authority of your elders. And all of you, put on humility like clothing in your dealings with each other. Peter quotes Proverbs 3:34, as James also did: God opposes the proud but is generous to the humble. So humble yourselves under God's powerful hand, and He will lift you up at the right time.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Respecting Older People**

Peter tells younger people to respect and listen to the older leaders in the church. That can be hard for teens who are figuring out their own beliefs and sometimes think adults just don't get it. And sometimes they don't. But older believers often have wisdom that comes from experience. Respect doesn't mean you can never disagree, ask questions, or think for yourself. It also doesn't mean obeying anyone who asks you to do something wrong or harmful. It means being humble enough to learn. And remember, Peter says all of you, older people too, should be humble toward each other.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Clothed in Humility**

The word Peter uses for clothe yourselves describes tying on an apron, the kind a servant wore to work. Maybe Peter was thinking of the night Jesus tied a towel around His waist and washed the disciples' feet, including Peter's (John 13:4–5). Peter had refused at first. Now he tells everyone to put on the servant's towel. Humility isn't thinking you're worthless. It's thinking about yourself less and about others more.

Then comes one of the most comforting verses in the Bible. Throw all your worries onto God, Peter says, because He cares about you.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Cast Your Anxiety**

The word Peter uses for cast means to throw something onto something else, like throwing a blanket over a donkey before loading it. Think of the things that make you anxious: grades, college, friendships, family problems, your future, your body, your phone, the news. Peter says: throw them on God. All of them. Not because your worries are silly, but because He cares about you. You can tell Him exactly what's bothering you, as often as you need to. Try naming your worries out loud or writing them down, and then giving them to God one by one. Jesus said something similar: don't worry about tomorrow, because your Father knows what you need (Matthew 6:25–34).

BACKGROUND CHECK **Anxiety Is Real**

Bringing your worries to God is powerful. But anxiety can also be a medical condition, and many teens struggle with it. If your worry is constant, keeps you from sleeping or eating, causes panic attacks, or makes it hard to function, it's not a sign that you lack faith. Talk to a parent, a school counselor, or a doctor. Counseling and, when needed, medication can be some of the ways God helps. Prayer and professional help go together. And if you ever have thoughts of hurting yourself, tell a trusted adult immediately or contact a crisis line in your country. You matter to God and to the people around you.

Then Peter gives a warning. Stay alert and clear-headed. "Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour." Resist him, standing strong in your faith, because you know that believers all over the world are going through the same kinds of suffering.

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Roaring Lion**

In Peter's world, lions were terrifying predators, and some Christians would later be killed by lions in Roman arenas. Lions often target animals that are young, sick, or separated from the herd. The devil works the same way. He looks for people who are isolated, discouraged, worn out, or careless. That's why Peter connects this warning to staying alert and to the worldwide family of believers. You're safer with the flock. Peter knew this from experience. Jesus had warned him that Satan wanted to sift him like wheat, and Peter fell that night (Luke 22:31–34). But Jesus prayed for him, and he came back.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Not Paranoia**

Peter isn't telling you to be afraid of the devil or to see demons behind every bad thing. Christians hold different views about how the devil works, but they agree that evil is real, and that Jesus has already defeated it. The devil may roar, but Jesus is the Lion of the tribe of Judah (Revelation 5:5). Resisting the devil usually looks ordinary: praying, reading Scripture, staying connected to other believers, saying no to temptation, and telling the truth. You don't fight alone. Peter reminds you that believers around the world are standing with you.

After you've suffered for a little while, Peter promises, the God who gives every kind of grace, and who invited you into His eternal glory in Christ, will personally put you back together, and make you strong, solid, and steady. Power belongs to Him forever. Amen.

BACKGROUND CHECK **He Will Restore You**

Peter knew what it was like to be restored. After his worst failure, Jesus didn't give up on him. He restored him, made him strong, and gave him a purpose.

Peter promises the same for his readers. Your suffering is real, but it's temporary. God's glory is forever. Whatever you're going through, God is not finished with you.

Peter ends the letter by saying he has written briefly, and that Silas helped him. He considers Silas a faithful brother. He wrote to encourage them and to testify that this is God's true grace, and he urges them to hold their ground in it. The NIV footnote explains that the Greek has Silvanus, another form of the name Silas. Then he sends greetings from the church in Babylon, which shares their chosen status, and from Mark, whom he calls his son. Greet each other with a kiss of love, he says. May everyone who belongs to Christ have peace.

BACKGROUND CHECK **A Kiss of Love**

In Peter's culture, family members greeted each other with a kiss on the cheek, as many cultures still do. Peter tells believers to greet each other the same way, because they're family. Slaves and free people, rich and poor, Jews and Gentiles, men and women, all greeting each other as brothers and sisters. In your culture, it might look like a handshake, a hug, or a warm hello. The point is to treat other believers like family.

KEY VERSE

Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

1 Peter 5:7 (NIV)

REAL TALK

1. What makes a good leader? Who's a leader in your life who serves well?
2. What does humility look like for a teenager?
3. What worries are you carrying right now? What would it look like to throw them onto God?
4. When are you most vulnerable to the roaring lion? What helps you stand firm?

TRY THIS *Make a worry list. Write down everything that's making you anxious. Then pray through it, one item at a time, telling God about each worry and giving it to Him. Keep the list, and in a month, look back to see how God has worked. If any worry feels too heavy to carry alone, share it with a trusted adult this week.*

THE END (AND THE BEGINNING)

Now What? The Bottom Line

You've just read 1 Peter, the letter of a man who failed Jesus badly and was forgiven completely. Peter knew what it was like to be ashamed. He also knew what it was like to be found, restored, and given a living hope.

Here's what the Bible says, as plainly as I can put it.

1 God made you, and He loves you.

God made you on purpose, and He loves you more than you can imagine. He wants you to know Him.

> *For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.* **John 3:16 (NIV)**

2 We've all turned away.

We've all gone our own way instead of God's. Peter certainly did. The Bible calls it sin, and it separates us from God.

> *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,* **Romans 3:23 (NIV)**

3 Sin has a real cost.

God is good, so He doesn't shrug off evil. The Bible says the result of sin is death, separation from God forever.

> *For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.* **Romans 6:23 (NIV)**

4 Jesus came for you.

Jesus, who never sinned, died on the cross in our place and rose again, to bring us back to God.

> *For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.* **1 Peter 3:18 (NIV)**

5 You can't earn it. You receive it.

Salvation isn't a reward for being good enough. It's a gift you receive by trusting Jesus.

> *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.* **Ephesians 2:8–9 (NIV)**

6 Turn and trust.

Turn from running your own life, and trust Jesus as your Savior and King. No failure is too big for Him to forgive. Just ask Peter.

> *If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.* **Romans 10:9 (NIV)**

So what do you do with that? You don't need perfect words. You can talk to God honestly, right now, wherever you are. If it helps, you could pray something like this:

> *God, I've been running my own life, and I've sinned against You. I can't fix that myself. Thank You that Jesus died for me and rose again. I believe You raised Him from the dead. I'm turning to You. Forgive me. I trust Jesus as my Savior, and I want to follow Him as my King.*

Give me a living hope, help me bring my worries to You, and make me ready to tell others why I believe. In Jesus' name, amen.

If You Just Said Yes

Tell someone. A parent, a youth leader, a pastor, or a Christian friend. Start there.

Read the real thing. Read 1 Peter straight through. Then read 2 Peter, the next letter in the New Testament, which Peter wrote near the end of his life.

Find your people. Get connected to a church where the Bible is taught and Jesus is honored. Ask about being baptized.

Talk to God every day. Bring Him your worries, your questions, and your thanks. He cares about you. Peter promised.

Not Sure Yet?

Not ready? That's honest, and honesty is a good place to start. Keep asking. Keep reading. Peter once had plenty of doubts too. Just don't settle for "I already know all that."

Because if Peter is right, Jesus really did rise from the dead, and He's still in the business of second chances.

And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.

1 Peter 5:10 (NIV)