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1 Peter: Keep Hope Alive

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WHAT'S IN YOUR TEACHING GUIDE

This Teaching Guide has three purposes:

- to give the teacher tools for focusing on the content of the session in the Study Guide.
- to give the teacher additional Bible background information.
- to give the teacher variety and choice in preparation.

The Teaching Guide includes two major components: Teacher Helps and Teacher Options.

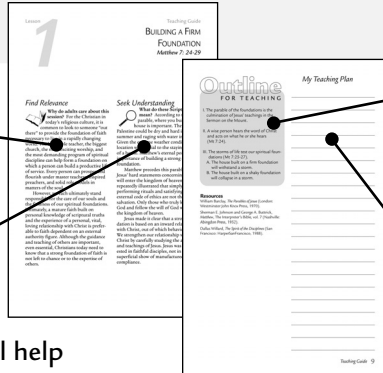
Teacher Helps

Find Relevance

helps you zero in on why each session is important for the adults you teach.

Seek Understanding

presents helpful Bible Background informations and insights that will help you better understand the Scripture.



Teaching Outline

provides you with an outline of the main themes in the Study Guide.

My Teaching Plan is a convenient place for you to make notes for teaching the session.

Teacher Options

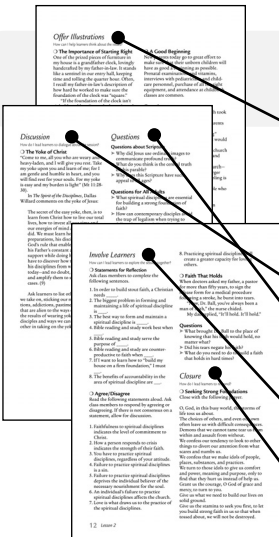
Offer Illustrations presents material that will help you paint a picture of the session. This section often presents items from church history, current events, or interesting anecdotes that help introduce the session.

Discussion provides teaching activities that will help learners discuss the Scripture text.

Questions presents multiple collections of questions for various kinds of adults.

Involve Learners helps learners become actively involved with the Scripture text for a particular session.

Closure gives you a means for wrapping up the session.



You Can Choose!

There is more material in each session than you can use, so choose the options from each section to tailor the session to the needs of your group.

Prepare Before the Session

Read the session for today in the Study Guide. Then read the options in this Teaching Guide, placing checkmarks beside the activities you plan to include. After you have decided which options to use, gather the appropriate materials.

LOVE ONE ANOTHER DEEPLY

1 Peter 1

Find Relevance



Why do adults care about this session? 1 Peter is a short, often neglected New Testament letter all about remembering and living in light of memory. Peter writes words of encouragement to those in his day who had begun to hear about the suffering of Christians in Rome. His words of encouragement were framed by his memory of the suffering of Jesus and also the suffering and death of many first generation Christians. Peter also wrote to encourage his readers to remember that living as Christians means loving one another in very practical ways.

Every generation needs some built-in time to remember the suffering of our ancestors in the hopes that future generations will be kinder. Christians especially need to pause and remember that the call to follow Jesus includes the demand to “take up the cross.” As we read and study 1 Peter for five weeks, let us remember the Christians who have gone before us and their strong words of hope and love.

Seek Understanding



What do these Scriptures mean? The letters of the New Testament are difficult for modern readers because they lack a clear story. In the same way that the

letters (or E-mail) we write and receive rest upon the assumption that both writer and readers are already familiar with the culture and circumstances of the letters’ contents, New Testament letters have a context that needs to be given some attention. In this respect, 1 Peter is no different from other New Testament letters. Understanding this letter requires some attention to its context.

The rise of Christianity came under the shadow of Rome. Do not forget that Jesus was executed by the power of Rome. Paul was also arrested, imprisoned, and martyred under the heel of a Roman boot. From the days of Jesus and Paul until the early fourth century, the Christian faith was regarded with suspicion and, often, violently resisted and repelled. Peter probably wrote his letter to Asia Minor (see the opening paragraph) because of the recent death of Paul in Rome. Nonetheless, the theme of this first chapter is not fear but hope. The suffering of Jesus, Peter writes, should transform all fear into confidence. Suffering will come, to be sure, but identifying with the suffering of Jesus will serve only to strengthen the bonds of love that define the community.

Offer Illustrations

How can I help learners think about the issues?

○ Life Together

Dietrich Bonhoeffer is the best known Christian martyr of the twentieth century. At the time of his death in a Nazi prison camp on April 12, 1945, he was only thirty-nine years old. Although only the last two years of his life were spent in prison, the last eleven years of his life were faithfully lived out under the shadows of crisis. In 1934, Bonhoeffer joined like-minded German Christians of the Confessing Church in forming seminary communities that refused to comply with the anti-Semitic policies of the government.

Within the seminary community where Bonhoeffer taught and lived, a smaller community of souls came together. They called themselves *Bruderhof*, German for “brother’s community.” Even after the seminary was shut down by the Nazis, the *Bruderhof* continued. Out of the experience of the *Bruderhof* came *Life Together*, a small book with a large message for Christians in every place and age. Written under the clouds of threats from the government, *Life Together* is a joyous testimony to the power for living that comes from authentic hope and genuine love for one another.

In reference to Bonhoeffer and *Life Together*, Geoffrey Kelly notes, “In an ironical way we are indebted to the Gestapo for this remarkable book” (Kelly in Bonhoeffer, 3). Imagine this! A classic writing on the vitality of Christian discipleship growing out of the crisis of Nazi Germany! The story of Bonhoeffer’s life in general and the writing of *Life Together* in particular are strong reminders of the power of God’s grace. In the face of suffering and living constantly under threat of death (and Bonhoeffer *did* die), Christians can experience joy, hope, and love.

○ Prison Letters

Peter and Paul were contemporaries during the era when Christianity was born. Although both were important to the spread of the gospel, the story of Paul is better known. Four of the letters in the New Testament that bear Paul’s name were written while Paul was in prison awaiting an opportunity to plead his case (he claimed false arrest in Jerusalem) before the Emperor. These Prison Letters—Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians, and Philemon—discuss how a follower of Jesus should respond to hardship and threat. Although the Prison Letters are clearly composed under the clouds of suffering and persecution, never do they give in to fear and anxiety. On the contrary, Philippians especially sounds the strong notes of joy, hope, and love. Of all the letters from Paul, Philippians is the most hopeful and joyous. The well-known line “Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say rejoice” (Phil 4:4) captures the tone and content of this letter that was *written from prison*.

The life of Paul illustrates the way genuine discipleship is driven by joy, hope, and love, even in the face of suffering and persecution. Through the letters of Paul and the account of his life written by Luke in the Book of Acts, contemporary Christians can glimpse a life lived with eager expectation for the power of grace. The joys of discipleship are directly related to the hope that followers of Jesus have, and the shared joy and hope is also the reason behind the deep, practiced love that identifies Christians in every generation.

Discussion

How do I lead learners to dialogue about the session?

First Peter 1 uses some common words in ways that are not so common for today's readers. Lead a discussion on the way we use the words "hope" and "love" with the intention of exposing the deeper New Testament meaning of the words.

Ask those who feel comfortable doing so to use either "hope" or "love" in a sentence. Write the sentences on the board. Encourage class members to expand on the meaning of the sentences in a way that places an emphasis upon the practical results of true hoping and loving. Be prepared to note that mere wishing ("wish" is a commonly used synonym for "hope") does not lead to action, but genuine hope instills confidence (a biblical synonym for hope) and action. Also be prepared to lead the class beyond an understanding of love as sentiment. Genuine love involves action, specifically caring for the needs of others. Ask the class to give examples from their lives in which they have received active love (such as someone taking care of the children or aging parents so the class member could have some free time, or having someone volunteering to help with a difficult project).

Questions

Questions about Scripture

- How does the opening line of 1 Peter, which calls the recipients "exiles," set the tone for the whole letter (and this week's lesson)?
- What does the realization that Jesus suffered say to Christians who face hard times?
- What is the foundation for all Christian hope (1:3)?

Questions for All Adults

- What are some examples of difficulties Christians face in the modern world?
- How does the community of faith, the church, help Christians endure difficulties?
- What are some possible ways that the church increases difficulties for people living in our day?

Questions for Mature Adults

- What can you do to help teach younger adults and families in the church about the security found in a loving community of faith?
- Do you have peers and friends who have been neglected by the community of faith because of absence due to illness? How can you help identify these friends for others in the church?
- How can you live with an attitude of rejoicing in the midst of the difficulties that come with aging?

Questions for Younger Adults

- What makes you aware of the need for joy, hope, and love?
- What lessons have you learned by watching your older friends and family exercise their faith in difficult circumstances?
- How can you put love into action in your community?

Questions for Adults with Children

- How can you teach your children that love is more than words and affection?
- What efforts can you make to instill the positives of Christian living in your family and among your children?
- How can you celebrate the joys of discipleship with your family?

Involve Learners

How can I lead learners to explore the session together?

○ More Than Words

Place several large pieces of butcher paper on the walls of your meeting room. Refer to the “Discussion” suggestions for this session in which class members were asked to write sentences using the words “hope” and “love.” If you did not use the sentences then, you can introduce them now. Ask class members to form several small groups. Ask the groups to shift attention away from sentences that use the words descriptively and to collectively write some sentences that use the words in the context of encouragements. In the New Testament, and especially in 1 Peter, hope and love have visible and measurable effects in the life of the community. Ask the small groups to choose one sentence to write on the butcher paper. Share others as time permits. Leave the papers on the walls for the remaining weeks of study in 1 Peter to remind your class members of the community of love and hope for which we strive. If groups have a difficult time getting started, share the following examples of encouraging sentences.

A hopeful community involves others in demonstrating our confidence that God is at work among us.

Hope in a community gives it an attitude of celebration in all that it does.

Love makes a community eager to get involved in the lives of people in need.

A community guided by love is always attuned to rescuing the lonely and troubled in its midst.

Lead a discussion about the effects of hope and love in the community, encouraging members to give concrete examples.

○ Love In Action

Distribute note cards or slips of paper and ask each member of the class to write the name of someone they know who seems to need hope and love this week. Ask class members to fold the cards or papers and put them in their purses or billfolds as a reminder to act hopefully and lovingly toward the named person during the week.

Closure

How do I lead learners to respond?

The writer of 1 Peter is confident because of the great grace God has shown in Jesus Christ. Remind class members of the “living hope” that is ours in Christ and close with the words of the hymn “Because I Have Been Given Much” (in *The Baptist Hymnal*, 1975 and 1990 editions).

2

CONDUCT YOURSELVES HONORABLY

1 Peter 2

Find Relevance



Why do adults care about this session? Recent public discussion about political campaigns and political candidates in the United States has raised the “character issue.” Stung by scandal after scandal, both Republicans and Democrats have vowed to put more emphasis upon the character of candidates and parties. As the argument unfolds, there is increasing talk about character as the primary issue in the selection of leaders for our country. But what is “character?” So far in the public debates no one has offered a clear definition of the term. Like so many other “issues,” the “character issue” appears to be another way to attack opponents.

In the early Christian community there was a profound awareness of the importance of character. Unlike the contemporary political context, in early church, character was a definable issue. Peter clearly spells out the need for character when he demands that his readers conduct themselves with honor (2:12) and that they follow the example of Christ (2:21).

In any generation there is no greater issue for Christians than that of character. In every generation the confessions of Christians invite scrutiny of their character. The haunting words of one critic

should echo in the heart of every follower of Jesus: “I admired Christianity until I met a Christian.”

Seek Understanding



What do these Scriptures mean? Understanding the context of the early church is necessary, especially when reading and studying 1 Peter. Peter writes to communities who already existed on the margins of society. The first Christians were much more likely to come from the classes of slaves, the poor, and women than from established social circles. Because Peter’s audience was marginal, the readers also knew that the slightest deviation from what was acceptable in society would make it more difficult to proclaim their faith as followers of Jesus. When possible, draw attention to the social status of those who first received and read Peter’s letter. Focusing attention on the setting of the letter will be an important step toward understanding its content.

Offer Illustrations

How can I help learners think about the issues?

○ You Are My Best People

Guillermo Catalán is a Baptist pastor and teacher in Santiago, Chile. Like the rest of Latin America, Chile is not a friendly place for Christians who live out their faith in evangelical communities (in Latin America the term “evangelical” identifies a wide range of non-Catholic followers of Jesus). Catalán tells a story he heard from one of his fellow Baptists:

“A member of [a] Sunday school class noticed that a group of evangelical workmen in a certain factory began to get together at lunch break to pray. Each day the group increased in size. The activity reached the ears of the owner of the shop. He said that in his business he would not accept proselytism. He said he would fire them all, but before doing so he wished to talk with them and inform them personally of his decision. The evangelical laborers gathered, fearful because they were going to lose their jobs. When the owner of the business came to the meeting, he looked at the men for a long time, but he could not speak. He was mute for a while. When he recovered his voice he said, “I am standing before the best people of my business, my very best workers. You are my best people. I was mistaken. Excuse me.” (Catalán, 108–109)

This short story illustrates the power of the gospel when it is lived out in the larger world. The character of the workers became an undeniable witness to the owner of a factory.

○ The Whole World Watches

In the middle 1980s, scandals involving two prominent Christian ministers made life difficult for all Christians in the United States, even those not associated with the ministries of Jim Bakker and Jimmy Swaggert. When reports of Bakker’s affair with his secretary and his misuse of gifts to the PTL Club were published, all Christians had to deal with the public opinion and impression that Christians were not what they claimed to be. Bakker went to prison for fraud, but all Christians were imprisoned by the negative publicity of one person’s dishonor. Soon after Bakker’s problems, Jimmy Swaggert was linked to some New Orleans prostitutes; he also lost face and position in our society. As in the case of Jim Bakker, following the dishonorable conduct of Swaggert, all Christians found themselves under the suspicions of the larger world who could not look beyond the mistakes of a high profile confessing Christian.

It is true that actions speak louder than words and that the actions of a few reflect upon the whole church. Christians should learn from the good examples of the Chilean workers and the bad examples of Jim Bakker and Jimmy Swaggert. Our larger world is watching the church in general, and its members in particular. How do you think these stories might influence unchurched people’s perceptions of the church?

Discussion

How do I lead learners to dialogue about the session?

Use one or both of the previous illustrations to discuss the old saying, “Actions speak louder than words.” Tie in the illustrations with Peter’s demand that his readers conduct themselves honorably. Discuss the positive effect of honorable conduct as opposed to the negative impact of dishonorable conduct. As quickly as possible, turn the discussion toward the way our lives are a means of evangelism.

Ask members of the class to share stories from their own lives in which examples of Christian conduct have had an impact upon their desire to conduct themselves honorably. Ask members to think and talk about their responsibility to be “living stones” (2:5) that make up the public image of the church in our world.

Questions

Questions about Scripture

- What is the relationship of the church to the larger world?
- How does Peter use the story of Israel to illustrate the demands upon the church?
- What characteristics of Christ should guide members of the church in their daily conduct?

Questions for All Adults

- After reading and studying 1 Peter 2, what do you think Peter would say about Christians who “demand their rights” in society?
- What are the unique demands for living the Christian life in a world that puts more emphasis upon success and getting ahead rather than character?
- How would Peter encourage contemporary Christians in the workplace?

Questions for Mature Adults

- In your lifetime, have positive or negative examples of Christian conduct had the more lasting effect on evangelism in your community?
- What does it mean to be called a “living stone” of the church?

Questions for Younger Adults

- Is the church a place for you to stand out or a place for you to fit in?
- Peter offers the example of the suffering of Jesus as a model for Christian living. How is suffering for the right reason a relevant model for the contemporary church?
- What is the difference between respect for authority (2:13) and the fear of God (2:17)?

Questions for Adults with Children

- How are you teaching your children about the character of Christ?
- What aspect of Christian character are you most eager for your children to learn?
- In a society that places great emphasis on getting ahead, how do you help your children understand the importance of Christian character?

Involve Learners

How can I lead learners to explore the session together?

Through the study and discussion, some class members may have begun to think about the way words and actions come together in a Christian's life. Encourage discussion by asking the class to form two small groups. Ask each group to appoint a recorder. Give each group five minutes to compile a list of words that are characteristic of the Christian life. Tell the groups that the purpose of the exercise is to come up with as many as possible.

At the end of the five minutes, ask the recorder from each group to trade lists of words. With each group now in possession of the other group's list, ask the groups to suggest specific actions that would communicate the same thing as the confessions. Assure the group that there are no right or wrong answers, but encourage them to find ways that our ways of talking about faith can be implemented in Christian living—ways that our words may be put into action.

In five minutes, ask the groups to share their suggestions with the whole class. Then ask, "How can we as a class be living witnesses to our faith?" Allow several minutes for responses. Then ask, "How can we as a church be living witnesses to our faith?" Class members may answer both questions with examples of what the class or church is already doing as a living witness (examples: Parent's Day Out programs, participation in Habitat for Humanity, food and clothes closets, etc.). Affirm those examples and encourage participation.

Closure

How do I lead learners to respond?

Bring your meeting time to a close with the reminder that in the larger world around us, the church is usually seen as one entity. Recall the lesson's use of singular, corporate terms for the church ("a race," "a people," "a nation"). To symbolize the oneness of the church and its witness, ask members to stand and join hands for a final prayer. Lead the group in a prayer for courage to be the church.

3

DO NOT FEAR WHAT THEY FEAR

1 Peter 3

Find Relevance



Why do adults care about this session? First Peter 3 strains our ability to find points of contact between scripture and our world. Peter wrote to a community of faith that was made up mostly of slaves and women. First-century slaves were under the thumb of their masters and first century wives lived at the whims of their husbands. In our late twentieth century world of North America, it is easy for some of us to overlook relevance in a chapter of the New Testament designed to give hope to slaves and women who had to live with the daily threat of being abused or killed because of their faith. The Christian church has not only become accepted in our culture, but in many places is a place of power rather than powerlessness.

Many Christians outside of North America and Europe, however, are not afforded a sense of security, much less comforts and luxuries enjoyed by first world Christians. Across Africa, Asia, and in places in Latin America, Christians confess and practice their faith under the fear of persecution and death (Wall, 14–19). The church is larger than its expression in North America. Studying 1 Peter provides an opportunity to broaden our horizons and become familiar with Christian brothers and sisters who live under genuine threats.

Seeking Understanding



What do these Scriptures mean? Understanding 1 Peter 3 requires an appreciation of the historical setting of the whole letter which was written to Christians under Roman rule, many of whom were slaves and women. As you prepare to teach, focus on those verses that illuminate the setting. Verses 15-17 provide a clear description of the harsh conditions under which Peter's audience had to live: "Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence. Keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who abuse you for your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if suffering should be God's will, than to suffer for doing evil." Note that Peter says "when you are maligned" and not "if you are maligned." Early believers expected harsh treatment.

Offer Illustration

How can I help learners think about the issues?

○ Oscar Romero

On March 24, 1980, Archbishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador was assassinated by government soldiers in San Salvador, the capital city of that small country in Central America. He was shot while standing at the altar celebrating the mass.

Romero had become the champion of the poor and oppressed in his nation. Because of his outspokenness on issues of justice and peace, themes he discovered in the Scriptures, Romero was considered an enemy of the ruling party. When Romero died, no one was surprised. The archbishop had received warnings and threats. Only weeks before Romero was shot, the radio tower that beamed his Sunday sermons was knocked out by a well-placed bomb.

While threats and tensions mounted, Romero continued to preach the gospel and mingle with the poor and oppressed, offering them hope and encouragement in difficult days. Two weeks before his death, Romero gave an interview to a Guatemalan reporter. In part he said, “I have often been threatened with death. Nevertheless, as a Christian, I do not believe in death without resurrection.” Romero did not fear what others feared. He did not fear death because he knew he had already been buried with Christ in baptism and raised to walk in newness of life (see Rom 6:4). The life, death, and witness of Oscar Romero is a sober reminder of the demand of the gospel, even in the twentieth century (Brockman, 205–223).

○ The Courage of Peter and John

The opening chapters of the Book of Acts tell the amazing story of the courage of Peter and John. Months after Jesus’ crucifixion at the hands of Rome, Peter and John were arrested and threatened because of their bold proclamation of the gospel. When threatened, Peter and John did not flinch. Instead, they claimed all the more that the gospel had set them free and given them courage. Clearly Peter and John did not fear what others feared.

The story of Peter and John is a clear account of courage and faith in the face of suffering and persecution. Because of their confidence in the gospel and their identification with Christ, Peter and John are enduring symbols of what it means to live the Christian life under duress.

Linking Peter from the Book of Acts with Peter, the author of 1 Peter, reinforces confidence in his words of encouragement. Peter, the persecuted in Jerusalem, has credibility with his friends in Asia Minor. Peter, the persecuted, also has credibility with Christians today who struggle with the threats of persecution because they attempt to live the gospel.

Discussion

How do I lead learners to dialogue about the session?

Most North American Christians are not likely to have experienced genuine threats because of their commitments to Christ. To create interest in the application of this text, treat the lesson in its historical setting, and then move to examples and illustrations of how Christians in every generation have faced opposition, oppression, and suffering. Using the lesson materials and the illustrations provided above, pose the question “Why are Christians in some times and places more likely to experience threats and harshness than others?” The discussion will probably turn toward issues such as religious freedoms under some governments and the role of Christians and Christian ideas in shaping a society. Though North American Christians have the freedom of religious expression, we are excused from thinking about the genuine suffering of other Christians in different times and places. Ask how the suffering of Christians in different times and places has an impact today. Lead your group in expressions of gratitude for security and sympathy for those not so blessed.

Questions

Questions about Scripture

- How is Christian conduct different from good moral non-Christian conduct?
- How can Christian conduct be a means of evangelism?
- Why does the example of the Christ change the meaning of fear?

Questions for All Adults

- What are the fears in your life that make today’s lesson relevant?
- Why is the church an important place for followers of Jesus in today’s world?
- How can Christians and the church help correct the negative impressions of Christianity prevalent in our society?

Questions for Mature Adults

- What experiences of overcoming fear have you had that could be valuable for others in your church and community?
- Where do you turn to find encouragement as you face difficult days?
- How does your life exemplify the confidence you place in Christ?

Questions for Younger Adults

- Although you are probably not faced with the fear of physical suffering because of your faith, what are your fears?
- How does your identity with the church and other Christians help you overcome the difficulties of getting started and established?
- How can you cultivate Christian conduct?

Questions for Adults with Children

- How do you teach your children the realities of a sometimes hostile world without making them fearful of life?
- How are you cultivating a positive understanding of the church as a loving community for your children?
- How can you make time for yourself and your need for community in the midst of the pressures of being a good parent?

Involve Learners

How can I lead learners to explore the session together?

Cut out the symbols of hope and fear found on page 28. Provide members of the class with some stiff paper and several pairs of scissors. As you distribute the paper and scissors, say, “Our fears and hopes often take shape as symbols rather than words.” Give the example of the cross as a symbol of hope and hold up the examples from page 28. Ask group members to create and cut out their own symbols of either hope or fear. (Some individuals might want to do both.)

After class members have had time to make their cutouts, ask volunteers to hold up their symbols for all to see. Ask other members of the class how they interpret the symbols; then have the persons who made the cutouts explain what the symbols mean to them. Members may hear different interpretations of the same shape, underscoring the unique nature of our hopes and fears.

Be alert to related symbols and make the connections between them. Be especially alert for symbols that could balance one another (a symbol of hope that specifically relates to a symbol of fear). When related symbols or balanced symbols are introduced, give the class time to explore the hopes and fears they share.

Closure

How do I lead learners to respond?

Bring the session to an end by reading 1 Peter 3:8: “Finally, all of you have unity of spirit, sympathy, love for one another, a tender heart, and a humble mind.” Remind the class that they have the opportunity to soften each other’s fears as together you pursue the Christian life.

Close with a prayer, remembering the confessions of hopes and fears that emerged in the discussion, and also acknowledging the continuing presence of grace in the lives of Christians.

LIVE BY THE
WILL OF GOD*1 Peter 4**Find Relevance*

Why do adults care about this session? If you visit any bookstore these days and ask for the self-help section, you probably will be directed to one of the largest sections in the whole store. The books will offer advice and instructions in everything from acrobatics to Zen Buddhism. Many of the books will have predictable titles such as “How to (fill in the blank)” or “Thirty Days to a New You through (fill in the blank).” Whether you buy a book or not, the trip to the self-help section will remind you that our culture is a seeking culture. Our culture is seeking things of value and, more importantly, seeking ways to find value in life.

Christian bookstores also have large how-to sections. There are books on Christian dieting, Christian investing, Christian living, and on and on. The underlying theme in many of the Christian how-to books is finding the will of God. The contemporary logic is that if someone finds the will of God for her or his life, then life will change for the better. It’s good logic. Christian bookstores have ample supplies of books claiming to explain how to live according to the will of God. For good reasons, we are eager to learn more about God’s will for our lives. Living by the will of God is the focus of 1 Peter 4.

Seek Understanding

What do these Scriptures mean? Tapping the relevance and interest of a lesson on living by the will of God is not difficult. Focusing the topic in light of Scripture may be more challenging. Popular notions about living by the will of God can be mechanical. Some lay out a series of “steps” to ensure living by the will of God while others speak of God’s will in ways that put high emphasis upon the “feeling” of security found in God’s will.

Peter takes a decidedly low-key and practical approach to living by the will of God. Peter does not develop a “step program” for living by God’s will. Neither does he get lost in the midst of feelings. In a series of short imperatives, Peter shows the will of God to be about living in a community of respect that is a symbol of grace to others. “Be serious and discipline yourselves” (4:7); “maintain constant love for one another” (4:8); “be hospitable to one another without complaining” (4:9); “serve one another” (4:10); and finally, “continue to do good” (4:19). Living by the will of God for Peter is another way of saying that Christians live in a community of faith with integrity and hope. Note that integrity and hope have been constant themes throughout our study of 1 Peter.

Offer Illustration

How can I help learners think about the issues?

○ When Will the Messiah Come?

Elie Wiesel tells the story of a rabbi in the Middle Ages who endured years of persecution by the local government. Because of the persistent harassment, the rabbi's house servant had grown suspicious of every visitor, especially those who arrived after dark. On a dark winter night, minutes after midnight, a rough knock on the door startled the rabbi and his servant. Over protests the rabbi opened the door and saw a young soldier. "Have you any food?" he asked. Knowing the importance of welcoming strangers, the rabbi sent the servant to warm up some soup and get some bread. "Are you not well fed in the army?" the rabbi asked. "Oh, yes," the soldier replied, "but I am Jewish. When I saw the lamp in the window I knew this must be the house of a rabbi. Rabbis always study God's word late into the night. I knew I could find kosher food here."

About that time the servant appeared with a steaming bowl of soup and some bread. The soldier ate. Between spoonfuls of soup the young man asked, "So tell me, rabbi, when will the Messiah come?" Peering into the dark cold night the rabbi was silent. Then he said, "The Messiah comes when we are reminded who we are." (Wiesel, 139–40)

Questions

- What did the Rabbi mean "when we are reminded who we are?"
- When do you feel that you are living according to God's will?
- Everyday living can easily overtake our Christian focus. What does it take to remind you of who you are?

○ The Weeping Prophet

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says, "Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Mt 5:11-12). Of all the prophets, none fits the picture of the unjustly abused prophet like Jeremiah. Known as "the weeping prophet" for all the tears he shed through his harsh treatment, Jeremiah was ridiculed, imprisoned, and threatened, all because he was faithful in interpreting the presence of God in the midst of difficult days in Jerusalem. What makes the Jeremiah story even more painful is that he was abused by other people who claimed to be authentic interpreters of God's presence and God's will. History proved that Jeremiah was the authentic voice in his day and that his opponents were false prophets. Jeremiah endured the injustice because of his confidence in God's presence and God's promises. Jeremiah is, therefore, a good model for the followers of Jesus who face hardships and injustice.

Questions

- Do you know (or know of) people who have endured injustice because of their confidence in God? Share their stories.
- For Jeremiah and people like him, does it matter that history proves them righteous?
- When facing hardships or injustice, how do God's promises help you?

Discussion

How do I lead learners to dialogue about the session?

○ A Tale of Two Churches

Discussing what it means to “live by the will of God” may encourage class members to think only about the big moments in their lives. When we hear people use the phrase “the will of God,” it is usually in the context of either making a big decision (“I’m trying to discern God’s will as I consider taking another job.”) or in the context of coming to terms with an unpleasant event (“I guess it was not God’s will for Aunt Jane to recover.”)

Acknowledge that God’s will is important in the big moments of life, but set the stage for another aspect of God’s will by suggesting that the little moments of life are also open to being shaped by God’s will. Using the story from Elie Wiesel, ask members of the class to reflect upon times they have been reminded who they are. Some may want to talk about the blessing they experienced when they helped a neighbor in need or visited a lonely shut-in. As a help to guide the discussion, remind the class of the practical nature of Peter’s description of living by the will of God (see “Seek Understanding” on page 18).

Questions

Questions about Scripture

- What is the relationship between good stewardship and living by the will of God (4:10)?
- Does every instance of suffering point to the integrity of the one who suffers? Why or why not?
- How does the will of God shape the everyday lives of Christians?

Questions for All Adults

- When are you most aware of a need for God’s will?
- Does the will of God have a place in your daily thinking and living? How?
- How does an awareness of God’s will change the way you treat routine tasks?

Questions for Mature Adults

- Peter claims that living by the will of God means that life changes. How has your life changed?
- If living by the will of God means loving and serving one another, how should we respond to the opportunity of being served?
- What examples in your life and the life of your church could be included in Peter’s warning about “the fiery ordeal” (4:12)?

Questions for Younger Adults

- How can you recognize God’s will in the “smaller” moments of life?
- What is the relationship between living by God’s will and participating in the community of faith?
- How might living with integrity require you to risk success?

Questions for Adults with Children

- How can you involve your whole family in living by the will of God, as described in 1 Peter 4?
- What unique demands for caring for and serving one another exist in a family setting?
- How can children be taught that suffering for the good is better than succeeding because of the bad?

Involve Learners

How can I lead learners to explore the session together?

The topic of God's will may be difficult to apply in the low-keyed way Peter describes it in his letter. The tendency among many, if not most, class members will be to think of God's will in relation to life's big moments. The drama of major decisions or the trauma of significant setbacks or losses lend themselves to reflection on God's will for our lives. The goal of this lesson, however, is to cultivate an awareness of the will of God in the midst of the little moments of life.

If you followed the suggestions for discussion above, the class will have already been introduced to the difference between the big and little moments. If you chose a different focus in the discussion, introduce the idea of big and little moments to your group. On the board, write "Experiencing God's Will" at the top center; below it and to the left write "in the big moments"; below and to the right write "in the little moments." Ask members of the class to think about both big and little moments in their lives when they have experienced God.

Then, as a group, fill in the columns on the board. If the lists are uneven, specifically solicit items that will go under the shorter list. Each time an item is mentioned, allow time for others in the class to comment on it from their own perspective.

When six or eight items are in each column, ask class members if they can identify relationships between the experience of God's will in the big and little moments of life. For example, the big moment of changing jobs or careers will be related to the little moment of cultivating the discipline necessary to live and work in a manner that follows the example of Christ. The big moment of

adjusting to the death of a parent or friend will be related to the little moments of being a care giver during an illness. As connections are made between the big and little moments in life where God's will is experienced, draw lines between the items in each list. Ask individuals to make the same kinds of connections on their own pages. Affirm all participants for their involvement. Conclude by underscoring the truth that God's will is important both in the big and little moments of life.

Closure

As class time comes to an end, return to the idea of self-help and how-to books that opened the class. Note that buying and reading books is not the same as putting their ideas into practice. The same is true with living by the will of God. Reading about it and talking about it is no substitute for doing it.

Read the following paraphrase of Romans 12:1-2: "I plead with you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your lives as a sacrifice, holy and appropriate to God; that is what God made you for. Do not get locked into ideas that you hear, but always be ready to be surprised by new thoughts that can change the way you live. God's will is about changing your life and becoming more aware of what is good, appropriate, and mature for God's children."

Close with a prayer confessing the desire to live by God's will.

5

BE EXAMPLES TO THE FLOCK

1 Peter 5

Find Relevance



Why do adults care about this session? We don't have the choice whether or not role models exist; they surround us.

Every generation has its role models, too. Senior adults look to the likes of Bob Hope, John Glenn, or Billy Graham. Middle adults have , Hank Aaron, or . Younger adults have Tiger Woods, Harry Connick, Jr., and Brad Pitt. The youth of our land strive to emulate LeBron James, Michelle Kwan, Shawn Johnson, or Ashton Kutcher. Role models are all around us. The question is which ones will have the most impact on our lives now and later?

We used to call them heroes; today, they are role models. Whatever term we use, we are talking about examples. Examples come in at least two flavors: good and bad. Honesty demands that we note the increase in the number of bad examples in our day. Haughty and brash radio hosts have large followings. Sports figures with persistent run-ins with the law still command attention and admiration. Entertainers and even politicians with confessed, if not flaunted, indiscretions are still in great demand.

Against such a backdrop the last chapter of 1 Peter is immensely relevant. The theme of this chapter is, "Be examples to the flock." "The flock," of course, is the

church. Today the church is in real need of good examples.

Seek Understanding



What do these Scriptures

mean? The concluding chapter of any New Testament letter is a mix of final thoughts on the issues raised in the body of the letter, and personal words of gratitude and encouragement. In the case of 1 Peter 5 the personal words (5:12-14) underscore the crisis setting from which the letter was written. Significant is the veiled reference to Rome through the image of "Babylon" (5:13). For the reader with a Jewish background, "Babylon" would conjure up images of the Exile. During the New Testament era writers would call Rome "Babylon" as a code for the oppression of Christians experienced under the Roman Empire.

Peter's final thoughts are found in verses 1-11. The two main themes of the letter, the importance of mutual love in the church and encouragement to follow the example of the suffering Christ, are addressed to the leaders of the church. Peter addresses the "elders" with strong words: "Be examples to the flock" (5:3). He also encourages the younger leaders and the whole congregation to recognize their responsibility to lead exemplary lives.

Offer Illustrations

How can I help learners think about the issues?

○ Mr. Dave

In a memorable episode of *The Andy Griffith Show*, a transient lands in Mayberry and makes a big impression on Opie. “Mr. Dave,” played by actor Buddy Ebsen, touts the life of leisure possible only among hobos. By word and deed Mr. Dave sets an example for Opie that leads the lad to quit cleaning up his room and insist on “discussing” the appropriateness of certain chores. Opie even gets caught playing hooky from school so he can go fishing with Mr. Dave. Near the end of the show Sheriff Taylor and Mr. Dave have a face to face conversation about Mr. Dave’s influence. “My boy Opie thinks that about everything you do is perfect,” the sheriff says. “Who’s to say,” Mr. Dave asks, “that your way is better than my way? Why not let the little fella decide for himself?” Andy was ready. “That’s not the way it works,” he says. “Show a youngun something bright and shiny and they will take it every time. Only when it’s too late will they know about the hook that is inside. No, that’s not the way it works.”

Mr. Dave decides he will leave Mayberry. “I’ll just go,” he says, “and your problem will be over.” “That’s where you’re wrong,” Andy replies. “My problem has just begun. I’ve got a lot of correctin’ to do.”

Questions

- How can we correct the affect of negative role models in our children’s lives?
- What behaviors are we modeling for those who are watching?

○ Followers, Not Leaders

In July of 1997, nearly 100 Baptist theologians and educators from around the world gathered in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada to pursue the topic “Educating Leaders for the 21st Century Church.” The meeting was sponsored by the Baptist World Alliance and its work group on theological education and evangelism. The conference was divided into sessions; each session had a specific focus. The first session was to explore the issue, “Theological Foundations for Leadership.” The first speaker was a distinguished Chinese teacher and pastor, Dr. Chow Lien Hwa, who has worked in Taiwan for over forty years. Dr. Chow rocked the conference with his remarks:

“The term leadership may be theological, but it is not biblical. Throughout the Bible we seldom find the word ‘lead’ or ‘leader,’ instead we read the word ‘follow’ or ‘follower.’ Jesus called people to follow him. All disciples are followers of Christ. Jesus never asked his followers to lead the people, he wanted his disciples to serve the people. Even [Jesus] came to serve and not to be served.” (Chow Lien Hwa, “Theological Basis for Leadership,” presented at the meeting sponsored by the Baptist World Alliance, 1 July 1997)

Discussion

How do I lead learners to dialogue about the session?

The issue of 1 Peter 5 is the need for examples in the church. Although Peter singles out a group called “the elders” (5:1) he gives advice and encouragement to everyone in the church (5:5). Pose the question, “Who is responsible for setting examples in the church?” Initial responses may focus on church staff and laypeople in positions of leadership, such as deacons and Bible study teachers. Use the illustration of Dr. Chow (above) to examine the way we think about leaders in the church.

Encourage discussion around the fact that every member of the church has a responsibility to set an example for others. Help focus the discussion by describing someone in your church (other than church staff) who has been an example for you. Urge class members to begin seeing themselves as the people who should “be examples to the flock” (5:3).

Questions

Questions about Scripture

- According to 1 Peter 5, what motives for church leadership are possible?
- Are there different expectations in the church for “elders” and “youngers” and the rest?
- What is the significance of Peter calling the church in Rome “your sister church in Babylon?”

Questions for All Adults

- What temperament is required of a church leader?
- To whom do you look for examples in the church?
- What are some competing examples in our world that make it more difficult to set examples in the church?

Questions for Mature Adults

- What suggestions do you have for keeping the joy in service to your church?
- In what ways is your life an example for others?
- How do you see your commitment to the church as more than an obligation?

Questions for Younger Adults

- What do you look for in a role model in the church? Outside the church?
- Should age or length of experience be a factor in identifying church leaders?
- How do you deal with the anxiety or cares of your life?

Questions for Adults with Children

- What efforts can you make to put you and your children in the presence of good examples (good role models)?
- Are there effective ways to keep you and your children from the presence of bad examples?
- How has (or how can) your family become an example for others in your church?

Involve Learners

How can I lead learners to explore the session together?

Bring to class some entries from a recent “classified” section in your local newspaper. Hold up two or three announcements for jobs and comment on the precise way prospective employers detail the characteristics needed for employment. Ask people to comment on the effectiveness of such ads.

Ask the class to form four small groups. Make two copies of page 29. Give each group a card. Two groups should get the portion of the page titled “Wanted: Examples to Follow” and two groups “Wanted: Role Model.” Assign each group the responsibility of writing an advertisement for their title.

After an appropriate time, call the class together and have the groups read their advertisements. Give all members of each group an opportunity to explain how they arrived at the wording of the ad, and why they think the characteristics in their ad are important.

Closure

Remind members of the class that one of the connecting threads throughout the five-week study of 1 Peter has been the importance of following the example of the suffering Christ. If you used the illustration of Dr. Chow, repeat his words or use them now: “Jesus called people to follow him. All disciples are followers of Christ. Jesus never asked his followers to lead the people, he wanted his disciples to serve the people.”

Conclude the class by singing or saying the words to either “Be Thou My Vision” (In The Baptist Hymnal, 1991 edition) or “Footsteps of Jesus” as the closing prayer.

Footsteps of Jesus

Sweetly, Lord, have we heard Thee calling,
“Come, follow Me!”
And we see where Thy footprints falling,
Lead us to Thee.
Footprints of Jesus that make the pathway
glow;
We will follow the steps of Jesus where'er
they go.

Tho' they lead o'er the cold, dark
mountains, Seeking His sheep,
Or along by Siloam's fountains, Helping
the weak.

Footprints of Jesus that make the pathway
glow;
We will follow the steps of Jesus where'er
they go.

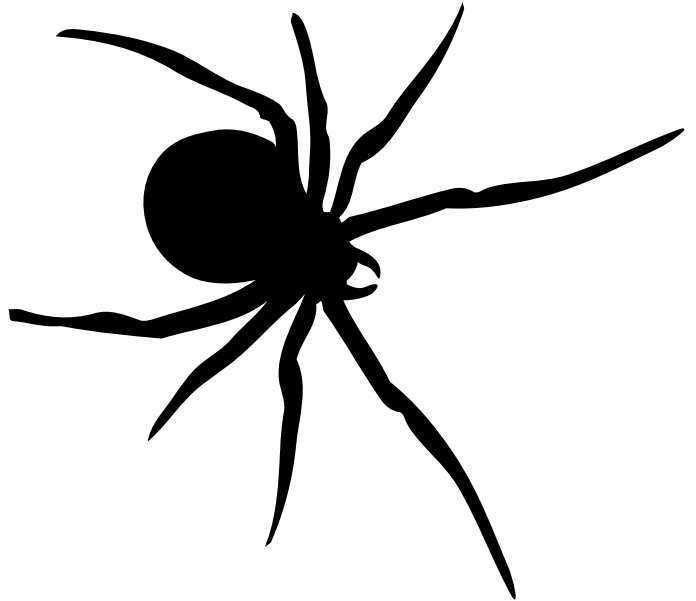
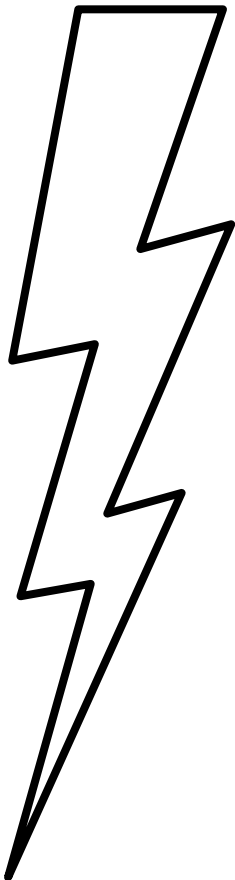
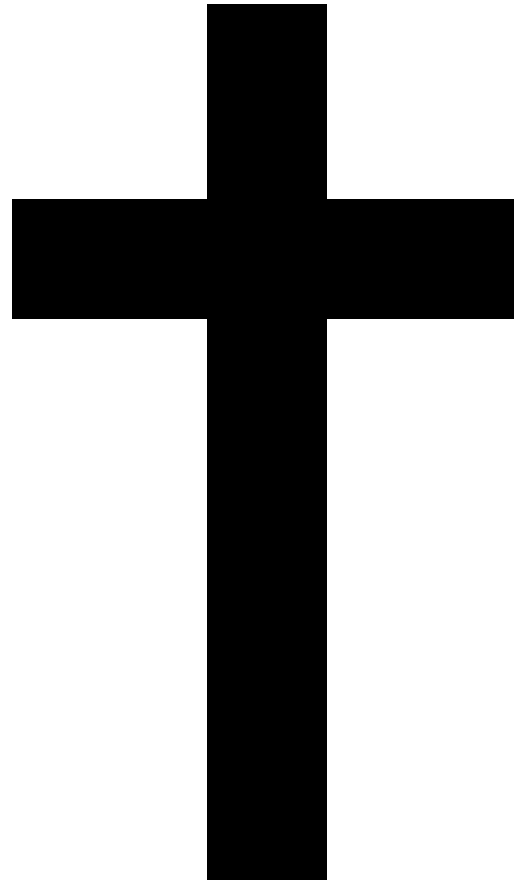
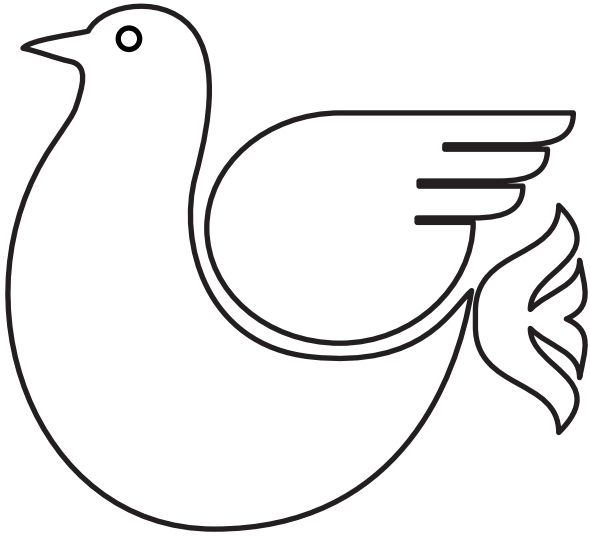
If they lead thro' the temple holy,
Preaching the Word,
Or in homes of the poor and lowly,
Serving the Lord.

Footprints of Jesus that make the pathway
glow;
We will follow the steps of Jesus where'er
they go.

Then at last, when on high He sees us,
Our journey done,
We will rest where the steps of Jesus
End at His throne.

Footprints of Jesus that make the pathway
glow;
We will follow the steps of Jesus where'er
they go.

Words by Mary B. C. Slade, 1826–1882.



Ask the class to form four small groups. Give each group a portion of this page for this session. Two groups should get the portion of the page titled "Wanted: Examples to Follow" and two groups "Wanted: Role Model." Assign each group the responsibility of writing an advertisement for their title.



WANTED: EXAMPLES TO FOLLOW



WANTED: ROLE MODEL