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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

Bible Background

The Study Guide is your main source of Bible study material. This section helps you more fully understand and interpret the Scripture text.



Teaching Outline

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

Teacher Options

The next three sections provide a beginning, middle, and end for the session, with focus paragraphs in between.

Focus Paragraphs

are printed in italics at the top of the page because they are the most important part of the Teaching Guide.

These paragraphs will help you move your class from “what the text meant” to “what the text means.”

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.

1

AN ETERNAL
PERSPECTIVE*1 Peter 1:13-25***Bible Background****Holy Faith in Spite of Suffering**

The letter of 1 Peter begins with the author's identifying himself as "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ" (1:1). Given the content of this letter, many scholars conclude that one of Peter's followers wrote it after Peter's death to share the apostle's wisdom with a later generation. For the sake of simplicity, however, we'll refer to the author as "Peter."

After a brief salutation, Peter addresses his audience and begins to praise his audience's trust in God. In 1:1-12, Peter speaks of faith, salvation, God's power, heaven, suffering, and the Holy Spirit among other equally significant topics.

Peter writes about suffering, faith, and perseverance because his audience is undergoing profound persecution. About the Christian community in the areas addressed in 1 Peter, Raymond Brown writes,

In the "backwoods" area of northern Asia Minor those who had become Christians felt themselves cut off from the surrounding society. In the eyes of their pagan neighbors they were a curious and secretive sect. Later Roman evidence includes charges of atheism, for Christians did not worship the civic gods, and charges of anti-social behavior, for

they had closed meals and meetings. (78-9).

In this context, Peter encourages believers to "discipline [themselves]" and "set all your hope on the grace that Jesus Christ will bring you when he is revealed" (v. 13 NRSV). Peter's original hearers knew the cost of their faith quite well. As more and more of them were arrested, jailed, and executed for their faith in Jesus, perhaps they had begun to wonder if the cost was too high.

Yet Peter doesn't exhort them to escape these trials or to resist their oppressors by any conventional means. He writes, "Don't be conformed to your former desires, those that shaped you when you were ignorant" (v. 14). When calling the church to prepare for action (v. 13), Peter has in mind the cultivation of hope and faith and "hol[iness] in every aspect of your lives," not overt resistance (v. 15).

Peter calls his audience to obey, not the laws of Rome or any of its powers, but the person of Jesus, in whom they are called to place all their hope (v. 13). Simply put, they are not to engage in the lifestyles of their former pre-Christian days. Nor are they merely using God to achieve "peace of mind" or "a happy feeling inside." These pursuits would just as surely put human wishes and desires at the center rather than God and God's gracious purpose (Homrighausen, 101).

The addressees are called to act faithfully. They find their confidence not in human power but rather in dependence upon God, in whom their hope lies.

A Faithful Response to God's Call

Peter strengthens his point by appealing to the God “who judges all people according to their actions without favoritism” (v. 17). Peter seems to reason that if you dare to call upon God, who judges all people without partiality, you will do so with reverence.

This call to personal and communal holiness is an unconventional means of resistance for people who are powerless. They can act faithfully from a position of dependence upon God precisely because of the fragile hope birthed in them by the gospel. They have been “ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ” (vv. 18-19 NRSV).

To impress upon his audience the preciousness of Christ's blood, Peter offers a theologically rich description of what was accomplished in Jesus' death. He calls them to pursue holiness and, hopefully, to trust in the God they cannot see. He asks his audience to trust that God calls them to this unconventional means of resistance. As he does so, he holds forth Jesus as an example of this seeming powerlessness.

In essence, Peter calls his hearers to take up the posture and methods of Jesus, who consented to suffering—even death!—without becoming subservient. “Through Christ,” Peter writes, believers “are faithful to the God who raised him from the dead and gave him glory” (v. 21).

Peter goes so far as to say that they set themselves apart “by [their] obedience to the truth” and by their practice of faith (v. 22). Peter invites believers to imitate Jesus not only in his faithfulness to God but also in his response to others' suffering. He calls them to respond to suffering and powerlessness not with anger or

Outline

FOR TEACHING

- I. An Exhortation to Holiness (1 Pet 1:13-17)
 - A. Respond to the Gospel (v. 13).
 1. Be prepared.
 2. “Place your hope completely on the grace that will be brought to you” (v. 13).
 - B. Change and do not change back (v. 14).
 - C. Be holy (vv. 15-17).
 1. Peter calls believers to holiness (v. 15).
 2. Why be holy? Because God is holy (v. 16).
 3. Why be holy? Because God judges all people (v. 17).
- II. The Precious Blood of Christ and Its Effects (1 Pet 1:18-21)
 - A. Through the blood of Christ, we are ransomed from futility (v. 18).
 - B. We are ransomed abundantly (vv. 18-20).
 1. The ransom paid was of inestimable value (vv. 18-19).
 2. The ransom was intended from the foundation (v. 20).
 3. The ransom was just recently revealed (v. 20).
 - C. Therefore, our faith and hope should rest in God (v. 21).
- III. A New Birth for Loving One Another Deeply (1 Pet 1:22-25)
 - A. Therefore, love one another (v. 22).
 - B. You are born anew through the blood of Christ (v. 23).
 - C. Everything else will fade, but not the word of God (vv. 24-25).
 1. “All human life on earth is like grass” (v. 24-25).
 2. The word is the gospel (v. 25).

bitterness but with love. Specifically, he challenges them to “love each other deeply and earnestly” (v. 22).

How can this kind of love be possible? Peter says it's not because of our own innate capacity or willpower. Rather, it is because we have been born again: "not from the type of seed that decays but from seed that doesn't. This seed is God's life-giving and enduring word" (v. 23).

Peter calls his audience to practice their faith despite their suffering. Though living out this call to holiness is purifying, it is certainly not easy. That is apparent from today's passage.

We might have hoped that Peter would offer his readers—and us—an escape from suffering. Instead, he aims to exhort them to stand fast in the face of it (Hunter, 82). He invites them to engage in such radical, faithful powerlessness, not because it will get them what they want, but because it is centered on Jesus.

Everything in the world will wither and fade, including their powerful oppressors and even the Roman Empire. And yet "*the Lord's word endures forever*" (v. 25). Peter thus calls upon believers to trust God to the utmost. This is their offering to the One who cannot and will not wither with time. Thus they resist becoming conformed to their oppressors' conventional expressions of power.

This is a difficult yet purifying call to holiness. It is, however, imperishable. More than that, it is the gospel.

A Way to Begin

In order to understand Peter's message, it is important to establish the context in which 1 Peter was written. This letter springs from a context of persecution, oppression, and martyrdom. Living faithfully for Christ is never easy, but in this era of history, it could be genuinely dangerous. Begin the lesson by challenging participants to imagine the sense of powerlessness Peter's original audience must have felt.

○ **Hyacinth of Caesarea**

Prior to class, research the story of Hyacinth of Caesarea. Hyacinth was an early second-century Christian who worked as a servant to the Roman Emperor Trajan. Though only twelve years old in AD 108, he refused to sacrifice to the Roman gods. For this disobedience, he was scourged repeatedly and then imprisoned. In prison, he was intentionally only offered meat that had been blessed and offered to the gods. Hyacinth died of starvation and is counted among the Christian martyrs.

Relate this story and invite participants to reflect on Trajan's actions and Hyacinth's responses. What do their respective actions reveal about them? Knowing that this is only one story among countless others, how does it portray the approximate time period in which 1 Peter was written?

○ **Labels of Powerlessness**

Write the following words down the left side of the board: atheist, antisocial, incontinent, cannibalistic, and treasonous.

These were common labels applied to Christians in the early church. Have participants suggest reasons these labels might have been used. (For example, they were called "atheists" because they denied the Roman gods, "antisocial" because they met in closed and sometimes secret meetings, etc.) Ask the following questions.

Questions

- What does the use of such labels say about Christians? What does it say about the people who use these labels?
- What groups today are subject to being tagged with similarly inaccurate or offensive labels?
- What do such labels accomplish?
- What do such labels reveal about who has power and who does not?

B A Way to Explore Scripture

Today's passage helps us to understand the roles of powerlessness and faith in the first century as well as in a more contemporary context. Challenge participants to grapple with some of the harder and more uncomfortable parts of Peter's exhortation. **How can powerless people live faithfully in an antagonistic world?**

○ From Persecution to Holiness

Read 1 Peter 1:13-25. Ask the following questions. Be prepared to supply further information from the Bible Background and the *Learner's Study Guide* to provide historical context as needed.

Questions

- What does it mean to be "holy" (v. 16)?
- What does Peter expect his audience to do that will make them holy?
- What hope and comfort comes from thinking of God as the one who "judges all people according to their actions without favoritism"?
- What might the original audience have thought of when they heard mention of "the empty lifestyle you inherited from your ancestors" (v. 18)?
- What does Peter seem to be calling the persecuted church to do?
- Read verses 22-23. How do the commands in these verses explain how one's "faith and hope should rest in God" (v. 21)?
- Read verses 24-25. How does this quotation from the Psalms lead to a healthier attitude with respect to suffering or persecution?

○ Withering and Blossoming



Read 1 Peter 1:13-25. Provide a brief summary of the passage using the Bible Background and the

Learner's Study Guide.

Distribute copies of the resource page "Withering and Blossoming" and have participants complete the exercise individually. Or you may choose to reproduce the illustration on the board and do this as a group project. If so, invite participants to share their responses and write them next to the appropriate tree.

Discuss how Christians decide the things that truly matter on which we should be spending our time, effort, and financial resources.

How can the promise of verses 24-25 change the way we think and live?

○ Feeling Worthless

Read 1 Peter 1:13-25. Draw attention to "the precious blood of Christ" (v. 19) and the "new birth" from seed that doesn't decay (v. 23). In the face of powerlessness or waning influence, it can be tempting to believe that our personal value is diminished.

Lead participants in imagining how Peter's original audience might have felt under Roman persecution. What promises are implicit in Peter's words? (Write these on the board.) How can we achieve or maintain a hopeful attitude despite suffering?

C A Way to End

Peter calls believers to lead hopeful and faithful lives despite persecution. How are we to faithfully apply these hard teachings to our lives in the twenty-first century?

○ **My Own Experience**

Distribute paper and pens or pencils to each participant. Invite them to reflect on their lives and write a list of things over which they are genuinely powerless. Encourage them to think both practically and abstractly.

In light of this list, ask participants what it would look like to “place your hope completely on the grace that will be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed” (v. 13). Allow time for as many as are willing to share.

Dismiss with prayer, asking the Spirit to give us both hope when we feel powerless and the ability to love one another more fully.

○ **An Encouraging Letter**

Have participants collaborate to write a letter together. At the top of the board, write, “Dear church in 1 Peter.” At the bottom, sign the name of your class or congregation.

In the body of your letter, write words of encouragement to fledgling Christians undergoing great persecution. Ask participants what they might want or need to hear if they were in this situation.

When the letter is written, invite participants to imagine what believers five hundred years in the future might write to the participants.

Dismiss with prayer, asking the Spirit to encourage us to trust God even when we are tempted to despair.

Resources

Raymond E. Brown, *The Churches the Apostles Left Behind* (New York: Paulist, 1984).

Elmer G. Homrighausen and Archibald M. Hunter, “1 Peter,” *The Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. 12, ed. George Arthur Buttrick et al. (New York: Abingdon, 1957).

2

SUFFERING AND
SUBMISSION*1 Peter 2:11-24***Bible Background****A Strange Command**

Peter begins today's passage with an appeal that may feel out of place for twenty-first-century readers. He addresses his audience as "immigrants and strangers in the world" (2:11). This language isn't meant to imply that Peter's first-century audience was composed of literal immigrants struggling to fit into a new country. Rather, it acknowledges that they belong to the kingdom of God more than to any worldly nationality. Through their inclusion in "God's people" (v. 10), they attain "a citizenship considered superior to any other communal ties" (Nash, 70).

Peter admonishes these citizens of another kingdom to "avoid worldly desires that wage war against your lives" (v. 11). This command may be a subtle reference to certain actions Peter wants to forbid. It seems more likely, however, that Peter intends a more general warning against the values of the world. This reading would pair Peter's instruction with his assumption that his hearers are out of place in this world view (v. 11).

In that sense, living as "immigrants and strangers" isn't merely the condition of his audience. It is also the solution to the temptations of the world. They are to "distance themselves from the kinds of loyalties to the world that would indicate

they were being governed by the flesh and not God's spirit" (Nash, 70).

Peter's coming admonition to a lifestyle of submission and righteous suffering has great evangelistic power. In fact, the early church seems to have excluded other ways of sharing their faith because their lifestyle won converts so effectively. Justo González explains that early evangelism didn't take place in church services but in kitchens, shops, and marketplaces. The witness of anonymous Christians led others to faith, and the most dramatic way to witness was suffering unto death. For this reason, the word "martyr," which simply meant "witness," took on the meaning that it has today (González, 99).

Peter's admonition to submit to the powers of the world seems more reasonable—if only a little—given the power of suffering for sharing one's faith. In 1 Peter 2:13, the author doesn't hesitate to command submission to "every human institution." He even goes so far as to name specifically the Roman emperor and governors, who in the case of Nero and, later, Domitian had already begun semi-organized persecutions. In fact, church tradition holds that Peter himself died in the late 60s during Nero's persecutions (Gonzalez, 31–6).

In the face of such suffering and death, it seems strange to command Christians to submit to the powers that are bringing it about. Clearly, Peter's

overarching goal is not to provide physical safety for believers. Rather, Peter's command strives to glorify God because when the unconverted "have observed your honorable deeds," they will join too (v. 12).

Peter emphasizes this goal by giving a rationale for submission in verse 13: "For the sake of the Lord." It's not the goodness, justice, or status of the empire that earns the Christian's submission. On the contrary, it is "because it's God's will that by doing good you will silence the ignorant talk of foolish people" (v. 15).

Radical, Christlike Submission

Peter encourages believers to submit to earthly powers, specifically to the Roman powers that actively oppress them. By doing so, he invites them to engage in radical acts like those that Jesus taught on the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus told his disciples to turn the other cheek, give more than was required, go the extra mile, and not refuse those who would borrow from them (Matt 5:38-42). Those who follow Christ are expected to live out this same lifestyle.

In their submission to the powers of the world, Peter doesn't suggest that believers become loyal to the world or trust in the power of the emperor. Rather, they practice radical submission as "God's slaves, and yet also as free people" (v. 16).

Peter even goes so far as to address directly those household slaves who are numbered among the people of God. He instructs them to "submit by accepting the authority of your masters with all respect...not only to good and kind masters but also to those who are harsh" (v. 18). But remember verse 16: all of God's people are slaves—and yet free. Peter invites all of his readers to imagine their submission to worldly powers not as the passive acceptance of a corrupt social order but rather as a radical subversion of it. They aren't submitting because their earthly masters deserve it but because it ultimately brings glory to God and imitates the life and death of Jesus. "The

Outline

FOR TEACHING

- I. A Reassuring Admonition (1 Pet 2:11-12)
 - A. A surprising conditional: Since this world is not yours, you should avoid the world's desires that oppose you (v. 11).
 - B. A promised reversal: Live honorably because although they defame you, they will glorify God because of you when God judges (v. 12).

- II. The Power of Submission (1 Pet 2:13-18)
 - A. Believers must submit for the sake of the Lord (vv. 13-14).
 - B. Secular rulers have a purpose (v. 14).
 - C. Submit because it will silence your accusers (v. 15).
 - D. Submission involves the humbling of the will for God's sake (v. 16).
 - E. Submission is required of all believers, both the free and the enslaved (vv. 17-18).

- III. The Power of Suffering (1 Pet 2:19-24)
 - A. Faithful endurance has a powerful influence on the world (vv. 19-20).
 1. The power of endurance is displayed through unjust suffering.
 2. There is no power in suffering that is deserved.
 3. Peter restates his earlier point: righteous suffering is commendable before God.
 - B. Faithful endurance imitates the example of Jesus (vv. 21-24).
 1. Christ suffered on your behalf and left you an example.
 2. Christ's suffering was unjust, but he submitted anyway.
 3. Christ's suffering heals our wounds and leads us to righteousness.

model of the slave voluntarily submitting even to a cruel master," Nash explains, "was an appropriate example for all Christians" (71).

Furthermore, Peter insists that the innocence of the suffering one only strengthens the argument. Those who suffer unjustly, who are punished without cause, even by their oppressors' rationale, give the greatest testament to God's glory (vv. 19-20).

If this sounds like the story of Jesus' sinless sacrifice on the cross, that is no accident. Peter thus grounds his call to submission and endurance under unjust suffering not only in his own authority but in the authority and example of Jesus. He reminds believers that Jesus "left you an example so that you might follow in his footsteps" (v. 21).

Peter emphasizes that even Jesus submitted to the cross and endured suffering despite his innocence. For Jesus this was no act of passivity or acquiescence but an act of trust in "the one who judges justly" (v. 23).

Jesus' example only further cements the meaning of Peter's call to submission and suffering. According to Yoder, this call doesn't mean "playing along at every price, not slavish obedience, not bowing before the throne and the altar" (180). From a Christian perspective, submission isn't the attitude of the loyal citizen. Rather, it is founded in Christian ethics, in the person of Christ, and in the lifestyle that he led. It is founded in the theme of loving sacrifice so that even the enemy might be healed by Jesus' wounds (v. 24).

A Way to Begin

How are twenty-first-century believers to make sense of the culture-specific instructions we find in 1 Peter 2? Begin the session by unpacking some of the cultural details that help us discern what Peter intended with his commandments to submit to those of higher social rank.

○ Paterfamilias

Research the Roman concept of the *paterfamilias*, or "father of the family." This man held all of the legal and cultural power within a Roman family. All of Roman society was built upon clear-cut chains of command from a superior down to those under him. This cultural preference for strict hierarchy should inform our reading of 1 Peter 2.

Explain the concept of *paterfamilias*. Ask participants to brainstorm settings in our culture where such hierarchical relationships prevail (for example, in the military, in large corporations, etc.).

Challenge participants to imagine what it would mean for first-century Christians to go against such structures of command.

○ When the Weak Win

Have participants brainstorm biblical characters and stories where the "winner" would have been considered weak or inferior in their own cultural terms. (Examples might include Esther, Naaman's slave girl, or even the "Good Samaritan.")

Write participants' responses on the board. Invite them to share a little bit of the story.

You might also consider looking for times when powerful characters are the "losers" of the story.

Discuss the factors that make these unexpected reversals so powerful for the reader.

B A Way to Explore Scripture

Peter's addressees have proverbial targets on their backs. Defamed and mistreated in a world that misunderstands and distrusts them, how are they to respond? Peter calls believers to live honorably. In part, this involves submitting to oppressive human institutions. This is a hard word, to be sure, but Peter reminds his readers of the nonviolent example of Christ himself.

○ **Called to this Kind of Endurance**

Read 1 Peter 2:11-24. Use information from the Bible Background and the *Learner's Study Guide* to set the text in historical context. Discuss what the original audience of 1 Peter might have been experiencing when they first heard these words. Ask the following questions.

Questions

- Does “honor the emperor” mean obey the emperor’s commands? If so, how much do we obey? If not, then what does it mean?
- Does verse 18 condone slavery? If not, why not? If so, how so?
- How does Jesus teach us to submit and suffer?
- What is the goal of submitting to the powerful or suffering unjustly?
- Is this a command we can refuse as disciples of Jesus? Explain.

○ **Submitting to the Emperor**



Distribute copies of the resource page “Submitting to the Emperor.” Have participants work in groups of three or four to answer the questions provided. Bring the class back together and let each group share its insights.

Read 1 Peter 2:18-24. Ask the following questions.

Questions

- Why would Peter specifically call on household slaves to submit? Does that imply they have a choice in the matter? Explain.
- How might these slaves submit “as free people” (v. 16)?
- How does the example of Jesus in verses 21-24 make these commands easier to bear? How does it make them more difficult?

○ **A Legacy of Nonviolence**

Explore the connections between nonviolent resistance and 1 Peter’s command to submit to every authority. Consider discussing such examples as Martin Luther King Jr., Clarence Jordan, or the White Rose in World War II Germany.

Questions

- How did these people respond to those who mistreated them?
- How is their commitment to nonviolence a form of submission? In what ways is it not?
- What witness does nonviolent resistance give to the world about God?

C A Way to End

*We can intellectually grasp Peter’s call to submission and unjust suffering, but that doesn’t make it any easier to apply in our own modern lives! **Challenge participants to appreciate the revolutionary power that submission entails. Far from being a passive response to “real” power, it has the power to transform not only us but also the systems of domination that pervade our world.***

○ **The Final Word**

Share the following quotation from Martin Luther King Jr.:

I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word in reality. This is why right, temporarily defeated, is stronger than evil triumphant.

You might write these words on the board or on a poster board before class to show participants at this point.

Invite class members to share their own beliefs about how to respond to “evil triumphant.” Write these alongside the previous quotation.

Close with prayer asking the Spirit to give us courage to follow wherever Jesus goes—even when it’s to the cross.

○ **The Old Rugged Cross**

Provide hymnals for each participant.

Sing together the first verse and chorus of “The Old Rugged Cross.”

Discuss Jesus’ example in not resisting those who accused, tortured, and killed him. Ask the following questions.

Questions

- Was Jesus “giving up” or being “weak” by submitting to the cross? Explain.
- What “emblem of suffering and shame” might we be called to take up as followers of Jesus?

Sing the chorus of “The Old Rugged Cross” one more time. Close with prayer for strength in the face of mistreatment and peace in following Jesus.

Resources

Justo L. González, *The Early Church to the Dawn of the Reformation*, vol. 1 *The Story of Christianity* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1984).

Scott Nash, *The Church as a Pilgrim People: Hebrews–Revelation*, *All the Bible* (Macon GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2001).

John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1994).

3

RETURN BLESSING
FOR EVIL*1 Peter 3:8-17***Bible Background****Stepping Beyond Submission and Non-retaliation**

In 1 Peter, the biblical writer addresses Christians who feel they have no power to change their circumstances. He challenges them to submit to human institutions yet resist oppression by the way they lead their lives. By doing this, he says, believers display God's glory.

In today's lesson, Peter exhorts his audience even further. He calls them to an even deeper exercise of humility and Christlike virtue through blessing those who do them evil.

Peter calls on believers to follow Jesus in the way they conduct themselves toward others. They should be united, sympathetic, loving, compassionate, and "modest in your opinion of yourselves" (1 Pet 3:8). Peter directs them toward a gentle and humble practice of faith as members of the household of God, who turn from evil and do good (Nash, 72).

From this ethical foundation built upon earlier calls to submission and suffering, Peter offers a strong command: "Don't pay back evil for evil or insult for insult" (v. 9).

We might hear this as a commandment against retaliation. In other words, he is insisting that followers of Jesus not respond in kind to oppression, harm, malice, or hate. Living like this holds

open the possibility that people will hate, insult, and commit evil against Jesus' followers. Nevertheless, their commitment to the way of Christ takes away their right to retaliate.

Furthermore, Peter adds that, more than simply not retaliating, we should return mistreatment with blessing. In fact, we are called to this course of action "so that you might inherit a blessing" (v. 9). Believers are called to offer grace in response to evil because we have received God's grace and have been called to lead lives that are "holy in every aspect" (1:15).

In verses 10-12, Peter paraphrases Psalm 34:12-16. The different wordings can be attributed in part to the process of translating from Hebrew to Greek as well as using different Hebrew or Greek manuscripts. These words provide another set of ethical prescriptions in support of Peter's already challenging commands.

Following Psalm 34, 1 Peter 3:10 gives a clear command to temper our speech with humility and gentleness. In the words of James, we are called to "tame the tongue" (Jas 3:8). The following verse commands us to "shun evil and do good" and to "seek peace and chase after it" (v. 11). Finally, 1 Peter 3:12 speaks not only of God's attention being given to the righteous but also of God's resistance to those who do evil.

Defending Hope

Following Peter's quotation of Psalm 34, he asks a rhetorical question: "Who will harm you if you are zealous for good?" (v. 13). At first blush, we might assume the answer is nobody. But is that really true? In the experience of first- and second-century believers, there were plenty of people who were willing to harm them for doing good. We need only consider the incarceration, abuse, hatred, and martyrdom the early church endured even as Peter was writing. In light of that history, this seems like a strange question indeed!

The assumed answer that nobody will harm you if you are zealous for good only makes sense if the suffering inflicted upon humble and non-retaliating Christians doesn't count as harm at all. Perhaps Peter's point is that these things serve the greater purposes of the kingdom of God and thus can't be construed as genuine harm. Or perhaps his point is that these things fade by comparison to God's grace and the love to which Christians are called. Barring some such interpretation, it seems that the answer to Peter's question is a whole bunch of people will harm you if you are zealous for good.

Peter tells us not only to refuse retaliation but also to bless our enemies. When we heed this commandment, suffering can be transformed into blessing. In verse 14, Peter sums this up in the form of a beatitude: "But happy are you, even if you suffer because of righteousness!" This promise echoes Jesus' sentiments found in Matthew 5:10-12, where he pronounces a blessing on people who are harassed because they are righteous, who are insulted and defamed because of Christ (see also Luke 6:22-23).

In verse 15, Peter calls on believers to be prepared to defend their hope when others ask about it. The hope to which he refers is the hope Christians place in Christ, which is evident to others by the way they lead their lives. As counterintuitive as it seems, when we follow Jesus in

Outline

FOR TEACHING

- I. Called to a Life of Compassion, Modesty, and Non-retaliation (1 Pet 3:8-12)
 - A. Peter prescribes a series of practical steps to a godly life: unity, sympathy, love, compassion, and modesty (v. 8).
 - B. Rather than retaliate, Christians must love their enemies (v. 9).
 - C. Peter quotes from Psalm 34 to provide further ethical instruction (v. 10-12).
 1. Control the tongue (v. 10).
 2. Do good and seek peace (v. 11).
 3. The Lord sees the righteous and answers their prayers (v. 12).
- II. Called to Bear a Cross (1 Pet 3:13-17)
 - A. Peter asks a rhetorical question: "Who will harm you if you are zealous for good?" (v. 13).
 - B. Happy are those who suffer for doing what is right (v. 14).
 - C. Don't be afraid. Rather, regard Christ as holy in your hearts (vv. 14-15).
 - D. Be ready to defend your hope when people ask you to speak of it (v. 15-16).
 - E. Humility and a good conscience will put to shame those who slander you (v. 16).
 - F. It is better to suffer for doing good than for doing evil (v. 17).

a way that leads to suffering and refuse to retaliate against mistreatment, there is hope. There is hope because, even as victims, Christians are never powerless. Though evildoers mistreat us, God's grace strengthens us to live above our circumstances. And that is the sort of thing that captures the attention of others. Therefore, Peter says, a believer must be ready to explain why they are willing to live with hope in such a dangerous world.

The word translated "defend" is *apologia* in Greek. Far from being an "apology" in the modern sense, this word describes a

legal defense before a judge or simply a defense of one's position in a public debate. Our word "apologetics," meaning a reasoned defense of the faith, comes from it. Peter calls upon believers to offer their defense "with respectful humility, maintaining a good conscience" (v. 16). This is done so that those who slander them will be put to shame. Nash writes, "This defense should be given with gentleness and reverence, not abrasively or arrogantly. The manner of witnessing to the gospel is here considered an important part of the witness itself. Belief is not to be isolated from behavior" (73).

Finally, Peter insists, "It is better to suffer for doing good...than for doing evil" (v. 17). Once more, we hear a blessing on those who suffer unjustly. At the same time, the writer acknowledges that not all suffering is of equal character or value. John Howard Yoder writes, "Already the early Christians had to be warned against claiming merit for any and all suffering; only if their suffering be innocent, and a result of the evil will of their adversaries, may it be understood as meaningful before God" (129).

A Way to Begin

In our passage, Peter teaches that the appropriate response to mistreatment is to bless those who mistreat us. In order to fully grasp the radical nature of this teaching, it's necessary to have a grasp of Christian understandings of evil and of love as a response to evil. Invite participants to reflect on this radical teaching and how it would make a difference in their own responses to evil.

○ **Paul Miki and Companions**

Research the story of Paul Miki and companions. Miki was a sixteenth-century Japanese man. He was Roman Catholic and, in fact, a Jesuit seminarian. He was martyred in February 1597 in Nagasaki. Miki and twenty-five fellow Christians were crucified after being forced to march hundreds of miles. He is well known for preaching from the cross and forgiving his executioners. It is said he even wept with joy while embracing his cross.

Relate details from this story to the class. Invite participants to name ways in which the martyrs of history appeared to be powerless.

Next, ask participants to list ways in which the martyrs appeared to be powerful. Discuss why those who have died for their faith acted as they did.

○ **An Ethical To-do List**

List the commands found in 1 Peter 3:8 (be of one mind, be sympathetic, etc.) down the left side of the board with space between each entry. Ask the following questions and write participants' responses on the board.

Questions

- How could we cultivate these ethical qualities within ourselves?
- How could we foster these qualities as a congregation?

If there is time, consider picking one or two commandments as the "most important." Invite participants to plan specific ways to cultivate those virtues together or separately.

B A Way to Explore Scripture

There are several places in our passage that might attract the attention of your class, so you may want to be flexible in how you explore the Scripture together. But you should make sure to return to some of the harder parts of the passage.

Be careful that exploring another verse is not a means of avoiding the hard word of blessing those who mistreat us.

○ **Blessing Those Who Hurt Us**

Read 1 Peter 3:8-17. Ask the following questions.

Questions

- Peter tells his audience to “give blessing in return [for evil]...so that you might inherit a blessing” (v. 9). To what blessing is Peter referring?
- What blessings are mentioned in verses 10-12?
- What does it mean to bless others instead of repaying evil for evil (v. 9)? When have you observed people doing this?
- How might the command to seek and chase after peace (v. 11) relate to the command to bless those who mistreat us (v. 9)?
- How are humility and careful speech essential to what Peter is driving at?
- How does a “good conscience” (v. 16) bring shame upon people who slander you?

○ **Bless your Enemies**

Read 1 Peter 3:8-17. On the board, create three columns headed “Enemies,” “Bless them by...,” and “...and?”. Invite participants to compose, without naming names, a list of enemies. These can be personal “enemies” such as someone who mistreated us in the past, cut us off in traffic, etc., or enemies on a grander and more abstract scale. Write these in the first column.

Ask participants to consider specific ways Christians could bless these enemies. Write their responses in the second column.

Discuss what might happen if we responded in these ways. Write participants’ reflections in the third column. Ask the following questions.

Questions

- What in these verses describes what it looks like to respond with blessing when we are mistreated?
- For us to respond in this way, what needs to change in us?
- How can we encourage each other to respond in this way?

○ **Happy Are You**



Distribute copies of the resource page “Happy Are You.” Have participants fill out the chart either individually or in groups of three or four. When everyone has had time to complete the exercise, invite them to share their insights with the class as a whole.

C A Way to End

Why does Peter call on believers to bless people in return for their evil and their insults?

*Because love is the Christian response to those who hate, ignore, mistreat, or manipulate us. Furthermore, by responding in this way, Christians can realize the power they actually have, even when being mistreated. **Help participants to see the ethic of love as the foundation of Peter's call to non-retaliation.***

○ **Who Will Harm You?**

Use a magic marker to draw a big circle on a piece of poster board. Write "...so that you might inherit a blessing" in big letters inside the circle.

Ask participants to describe how they might benefit from loving their enemies and blessing those who mistreat them. Write their responses inside the circle.

Next, ask them to list possible negative consequences of being "zealous for good." Use a marker with a color similar to the poster board to record these responses outside the circle. (The point is that one has to look closely to read these.)

Discuss how Christians can adjust their perspective so that the blessings of following Jesus' example are most apparent.

Close with prayer for greater appreciation of the blessings of love, which make the costs of discipleship fade in the light of God's grace.

○ **Speak of Your Hope**

Distribute paper and pens or pencils to each participant. Read 1 Peter 3:15-16 out loud, beginning with "Whenever anyone asks..."

Ask participants to reflect on what their "hope" is with respect to God, whom they "regard...as holy in [their] hearts" (v. 15).

Invite participants to complete the sentence "My hope is..." by writing their response on their paper.

On the other side of the paper, have them write why they believe this and how they might gently and respectfully explain this hope to someone who does not share it. They may write as many responses as they would like.

Close with prayer for God's help in speaking about our hope. Ask for words to say, silences to keep, and the wisdom to know when each is best.

Resources

Scott Nash, *The Church as a Pilgrim People: Hebrews-Revelation*, All the Bible (Macon GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2001).

John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1994).

4

HONOR
GOD

1 Peter 4:-11

Bible Background**The Death, Resurrection, and Authority of Jesus**

First Peter 4 begins with “therefore.” This word invites us to look back to see the reasoning that precedes and supports the conclusion unfolding in our passage.

First Peter 3:18-22 is concerned with Jesus’ death and resurrection, the depths of God’s work to even “the spirits in prison,” the work of salvation, and the supremacy of Jesus over all things. In 1 Peter 4:1, the writer builds on all of this, especially the connections between Jesus’ suffering (3:18) and his supreme authority (3:22).

The series of statements in 1 Peter 4:1-2 ground the writer’s argument that believers must live by God’s will, not human will—neither their own nor another’s. Jesus’ suffering and authority (ch. 3) are reason enough to surrender oneself to this new way of living and thinking.

The first step in this argument is to link Christ’s suffering “as a human” to his audience’s changing “way of thinking” (1 Pet 4:1). More precisely, Peter invites them to “arm [them]selves with [t]his way of thinking” (v. 1). If this language seems combative, that is probably on purpose. For Peter, believers battle against the same worldly powers that were responsible for Christ’s own suffering. This

military metaphor looks ahead to 1 Peter 5:8 and the battle against Satan. David Bartlett asserts that the metaphor “means doing fierce battle against the forces of human desire—the realm of the flesh—and bearing the suffering that comes with that battle” (300).

The second step involves a statement that can be perplexing if we forget the theme of the Jesus’ authority: “Whoever suffers is finished with sin” (v. 1). Does this mean those who suffer no longer sin? That interpretation seems to focus on the wrong aspect of sin. Given the context, it is more likely that Peter is concerned with sin as an unjust “authority” or “power” rather than individual actions (3:22). Therefore, suffering—dying to self—reveals that one now lives under the supreme authority of Jesus. Even though believers still live in a world that remains under the false authority of sin and death, that world no longer commands their highest allegiance.

Finally, Peter links this freedom from the power of sin with a different life, word, and deed. Followers of Jesus no longer live “in ways determined by human desires but in ways determined by God’s will” (v. 2).

The contrast between how Peter’s audience formerly lived and how they live now is accentuated in verse 3. The catalog of vices contrasts the human will (“what unbelievers desire”) with God’s will (Bartlett, 300–1). Living under Jesus’

authority means abandoning the human will in favor of a higher standard. Also, faithfulness to God's will involves abandoning the practices of their former pagan lives, on which Peter says they "have wasted enough time" (v. 3).

Verses 4-6 expand upon verses 1-3. They emphasize the change in a believer's identity that takes place in the "salvation [that] comes through the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (3:21). Peter states that those with whom believers wasted their time in worldly desires will now slander them because they don't understand the believers' restraint (4:4).

And yet Jesus remains in authority over all things—even their slanderers and oppressors. These people, Peter says, "will have to reckon with the one who is ready to judge the living and the dead" (4:5). No one escapes the supreme authority that Jesus has won through his death and resurrection, not even those who have already died.

The reference to "the dead" in verse 5 leads to the curious comment in verse 6 that "the good news was also preached to the dead." This odd phrase expands upon Peter's point in the previous verse. Some suggest that this verse alludes to Jesus' preaching to the dead between his death and resurrection. Others, however, say that it is a more general word to encourage Christians who are uncertain about the state of loved ones who have died. But in spite of this verse's theological and metaphysical implications, its main concern is to elaborate the point of verse 5: Jesus' authority presides over everything and everybody. None will escape his ultimate authority.

The End of Everything

Verse 7 says, "The end of everything has come." What should be a momentous revelation is stated so flatly that it might almost be overlooked. Given the apocalyptic expectations of Peter and his audience, it seems to be a foregone conclusion that everything is ending, or at

Outline

FOR TEACHING

I. Changing the Way We Think (1 Pet 4:1-6)

- A. Peter's argument can be expressed in a series of conditional statements (v. 1-2).
 1. *If* Christ suffered, *then* you should live and think accordingly (v. 1).
 2. *If* you suffer, *then* it must be because you are "finished with sin" (v. 1).
 3. *If* you are "finished with sin," *then* you will live according to God's will, not human will (v. 2).
- B. Jesus' way of thinking changes people (v. 3-4).
 1. Peter reminds his audience of how they lived before (v. 3).
 2. Now that they live differently, the world treats them differently (v. 4).
- C. Judgment and the gospel are seen in parallel (v. 5-6).
 1. Everyone will be judged (v. 5).
 2. Jesus' authority in judgment is supreme (v. 6).

II. Honoring God with Our Lives (1 Pet 4:7-11)

- A. "The end of everything has come. Therefore..." (v. 7).
 1. "Be self-controlled and clearheaded so you can pray" (v. 7).
 2. Love each other sincerely because love makes forgiveness possible (v. 8).
 3. Practice hospitality (v. 9).
 4. Serve each other with whatever you've been given (v. 10).
- B. Whatever you do, you do to honor God through Jesus Christ (v. 11).
- C. "To him be honor and power forever and always" (v. 11).

least changing, as the powers of the world give way to the dominion of Jesus.

Jesus has fundamentally changed the way the world works. In light of this radical transformation, Peter brings us to

another “therefore.” In verses 7-11, he offers a list of ways believers should respond to “the end.”

The following commandments should be observed as a response to the end of everything and Jesus’ reign over all things. Since he is Lord and Judge, believers must take these new ways of living to heart with the end of verse 11 in mind: “Do this so that in everything God may be honored through Jesus Christ.” Each of these things—being self-controlled and clearheaded, praying, showing sincere love, etc.—is bounded by the announcement of the end in verse 7 and the exhortation to honor God in verse 11.

Peter instructs believers to “be self-controlled and clearheaded so you can pray,” to “show sincere love to each other,” to practice hospitality, to serve according to their gifts, and to speak “as those who speak God’s word” (vv. 7-11). These actions are not a means but a goal. That is to say, they are not things one can do in order to gain a benefit. Rather, they follow logically as a result of being “finished with sin” (v. 1). They happen when we live under the authority of Jesus, who rules over all things—including us and our lives.

Perhaps this authority is what makes it possible for love to bring about “the forgiveness of many sins” (v. 8). As Kierkegaard wrote, “sin discovers a multitude of sins, but love covers the multitude of sins” (78–9). Throughout 1 Peter, the writer has remained convinced that the great work of God’s love in this world is undoing sin and reconciling all people—even our enemies—to the God who loves us very much.

A Way to Begin

Taking up Jesus’ way of thinking is challenging for an audience nearly two thousand years removed from the first disciples. Yet we still believe that it’s possible if we will “live by the Spirit according to divine standards” (v. 6). Guide participants to consider what it means to honor God in every aspect of life.

○ All Good Gifts

Ask participants to name some of the things that they’ve been gifted with. They might think of meaningful literal gifts as well as talents, education, or other less tangible things. Write their answers on the board. Be prepared to share a few of your own, both to get the discussion going and to provide examples of the sorts of gifts you’re looking for. Ask the following question.

Question

- How can these gifts be used to honor God?

Depending on the responses participants have given, some answers will be apparent while others may be more challenging. Discuss whether it is possible to receive a good gift that can’t be used to honor God.

○ Good Trees and Good Fruit

Before class, arrange to display an image of a fruit tree: a blown-up picture from the Internet, a sketch on a piece of poster board, etc.

As the class begins, ask participants to name some of the ways they might identify what sort of tree this is (for example, the type of fruit on its branches, the characteristics of its bark, consulting a person with expertise, etc.). Write these on the board—or on one side of the image itself, if possible.

Next, discuss ways one might recognize a Christian as a Christian. Record these answers as well.

Invite participants to consider how the way we live reflects upon the God whom we claim to follow.

B A Way to Explore Scripture

What does it mean to take up Jesus' way of thinking? How does this way of thinking make a difference to the way we live as Christians? Guide participants to wrestle with these questions as they explore the text.

○ Jesus' Way of Thinking



Read 1 Peter 4:1-6. Using information from the Bible Background and the Outline for Teaching, summarize the message of these verses. Discuss the “way of thinking” (v. 1) that these verses outline. How is Jesus’ way of thinking different from what comes naturally to us?

Read 1 Peter 4:7-11. Divide the class into groups of three or four. Distribute copies of the resource page “Jesus’ Way of Thinking.” Have participants complete the provided table privately, then discuss what they have written within their groups.

Bring the class back together and allow each group to share its insights.

○ God's Will versus Human Will

Read 1 Peter 4:1-11. Divide the board into two columns labeled “God’s Will” and “Human Will.” Use information from the Bible Background to explain briefly the contrast Peter draws between “ways determined by God’s will” (v. 2) and “doing what unbelievers desire” (v. 3).

Draw attention to verses 3 and 7-11. These verses provide two examples of a common rhetorical device from the ancient world known as lists of virtues and vices.

Have participants list the vices described in verse 3. Write these on the board underneath the heading “Human Will.” Next, have participants list the virtues in verses 7-11. Write these on the board beneath “God’s Will.”

Discuss the role of our thinking (thoughts, attitudes, prejudices, etc.) in producing the behaviors listed in these verses.

Discuss how one can discern what is God’s will and what is the product of merely human desires.

○ Exploring the Depths

Read 1 Peter 4:1-11. Ask the following questions.

Questions

- What does Peter mean by “whoever suffers is finished with sin” (v. 1)?
- Does verse 2 make this statement clearer or more confusing? Explain.
- Verse 4 might have offered comfort to the original readers of 1 Peter. What comfort does it offer to us today? What risks are there in assuming that the two situations—then and now—are comparable?
- Read verse 8. What does Peter mean by saying that “love brings about the forgiveness of many sins”? Does love cancel another’s sins, pave the way for forgiveness, or something else?
- Does true love overlook offenses? Why or why not?

C A Way to End

It's one thing to understand Peter's words and quite another to truly take up Jesus' "way of thinking" (v. 1). As you draw this lesson and this unit to a close, participants have another opportunity to respond to Jesus' call to follow him.

Guide participants to reflect on the meaning of this passage and how it challenges them to live differently.

○ **Soon and Very Soon**

Remind participants of the statement that "the end of everything has come" (v. 7). Discuss how this affirmation might undergird the various specific commandments found in this passage.

Distribute the lyrics to the song "Soon and Very Soon" by Andraé Crouch (found in several hymnals and certainly on the Internet). Sing this song together. Then invite participants to add new verses based on their study of 1 Peter. For example, "No more suffering there," "No injustice there," "No one lonely there," etc.

Discuss how both the original lyrics and the others you've added reflect Jesus' "way of thinking" (v. 1).

Close with prayer for God to help us all to think, act, and love like Jesus.

○ **What Next?**

Distribute paper and pens or pencils to each participant. Have them respond in writing to the following questions. (Either write them on the board or read each one with a pause for participants to write.)

Questions

- What have I "wasted enough time" doing?
- How can I live to honor God—even though the world thinks it is strange?
- How can my sincere love of another bring about the forgiveness of sin?
- What are three things I can change in order to honor God?
- How can I do these things in a way that honors God?

If any participants are willing to share what they wrote, allow some time to do so.

Close with prayer that we might be molded into whatever form gives God the most honor and glory.

Resources

David L. Bartlett, "1 Peter," *The New Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 12, ed. Leander E. Keck et al. (Nashville TN: Abingdon, 1998).

Søren Kierkegaard, "Love Covers a Multitude of Sins," *Edifying Discourses: A Selection*, ed. Paul Holmer, trans. D. and L. Swenson (London: Collins, Fontana, 1958).