

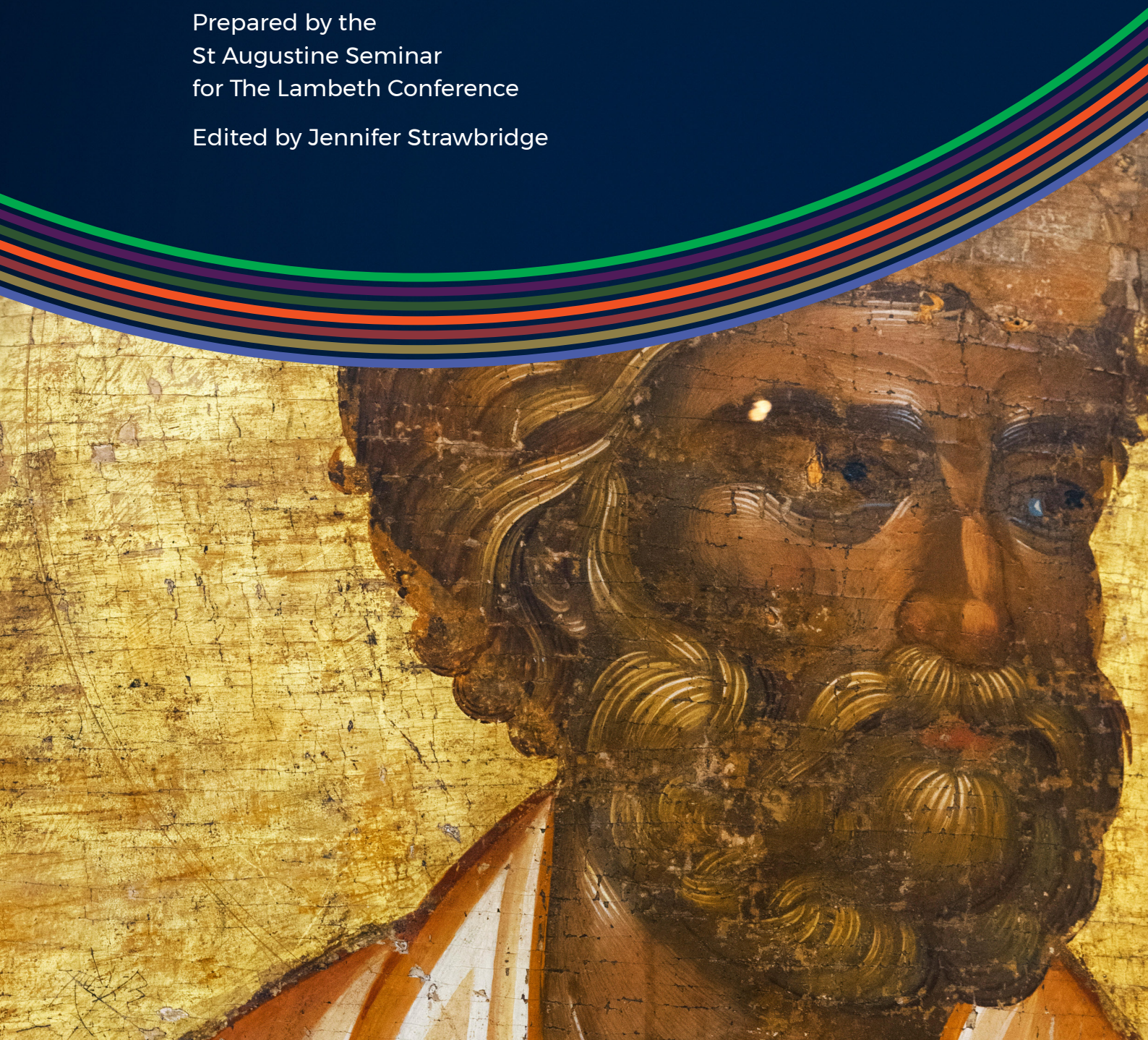
LAMBETH  
CONFERENCE  
God's Church for God's world



# BIBLE STUDIES THE FIRST LETTER OF PETER

Prepared by the  
St Augustine Seminar  
for The Lambeth Conference

Edited by Jennifer Strawbridge



# 1 Peter - and the work of the St Augustine Seminar

## About the Bible Studies

The focus of these studies is the first letter of Peter. Those who have contributed to the studies were drawn together as part of the St Augustine Seminar; funded by a generous grant from the St Augustine's Foundation, a registered charity that provides grants to support the work of theological education across the Anglican Communion.

Over the course of six days and two meetings in London, as well as countless emails and correspondence, faithful scholars from around the world gathered as a part of this Seminar to spend time with 1 Peter and to seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit in their work together.

These Bible studies draw on the voices, stories, struggles, and prayers of scholars from six continents and representing a range of Christian traditions and experiences.

These Bible studies are designed for use by the Anglican Communion, specifically for those gathered at the Lambeth Conference in 2022. But they are also offered for use by all who wish to dive deeper into the book of 1 Peter, within their own setting and in a group or in personal prayer. They have already been used within numerous communities before publication and we encourage you to make these studies your own. Each study is designed to take an hour.

The book of 1 Peter is a personal favourite of mine. There is so much in it that is pertinent for the Church, for the world, for the times we are living in and for us as we seek direction for the Anglican Communion in the years ahead.

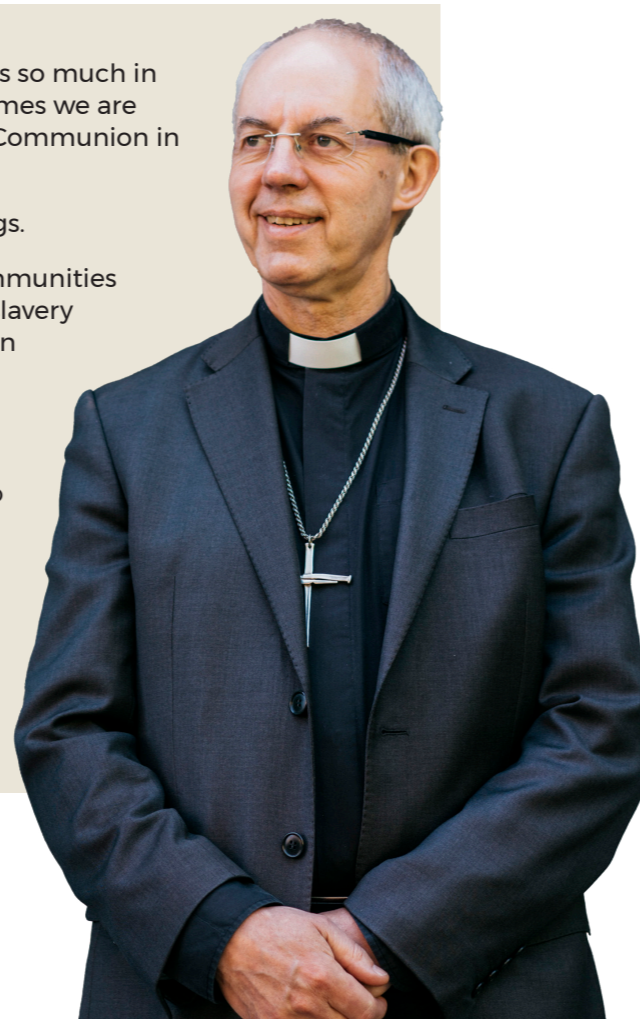
1 Peter is a book that doesn't shy away from difficult things.

It's a book that addresses the challenges that Peter's communities were facing. It speaks about belonging, alienation, exile, slavery and persecution - you can immediately hear the echoes in our world today.

It's a book that raises an utterly compelling and inspiring vision of God's kingdom. It raises our eyes beyond the immediacy of our struggles and differences. It urges us to hear a far deeper call.

Through our faith in Jesus Christ, Peter encourages us to live lives of witness, hope and holiness as God's chosen people.

**The Most Reverend Justin Welby,  
The Archbishop of Canterbury**



Participants in the St Augustine Seminar meet to discuss 1 Peter



# Contributors

## Editor

**Jennifer Strawbridge**  
Associate Professor in New Testament Studies,  
University of Oxford

## Contributors and Authors from the St Augustine Seminar

**Margaret Aymer**  
Academic Dean and First Presbyterian Church  
Shreveport, D. Thomason Professor of New  
Testament, Austin Presbyterian Seminary

**Markus Bockmuehl**  
Dean Ireland's Professor in the Exegesis of Holy  
Scripture, University of Oxford

**Ian Boxall**  
Associate Professor of New Testament, The Catholic  
University of America

**Christopher Brittain**  
Dean of Divinity and Margaret E. Fleck Chair in  
Anglican Studies, Trinity College, University of Toronto

**Chris Chivers**

**Ani Ghazaryan Drissi**  
Faculty of Theology, University of Geneva;  
Programme Executive for the World Council of  
Churches Faith and Order Commission

**Musa Dube**  
Professor of New Testament, Candler School of  
Theology, Emory University

**Jeremy Duff**  
Principal of the St Padarn's Institute, The Church  
in Wales

**Maurice Elliott**  
Director and Principal of the Church of Ireland  
Theological Institute, Dublin

**Paula Gooder**  
Canon Chancellor, St Paul's Cathedral, London

**Isabelle Hamley**  
Secretary for Theology and Theological Adviser to the  
House of Bishops, Church of England

**Christopher M. Hays**  
President of ScholarLeaders International

**Robert Heaney**  
Professor of Theology and Mission, Virginia  
Theological Seminary

**Wesley Hill**  
Associate Professor of New Testament at Western  
Theological Seminary, Holland, Michigan

**Josiah Idowu-Fearon**  
Secretary General of the Anglican Communion

**Emma Ineson**  
Bishop to the Archbishops of Canterbury and York'

**Craig Keener**  
F.M. and Ada Thompson Professor of the New  
Testament, Asbury Theological Seminary

**Kwok Pui Lan**  
Dean's Professor of Systematic Theology, Candler  
School of Theology, Emory University

**Hannah Lewis**  
Chaplain Amongst Deaf People, Diocese of Oxford

**Gloria Lita Mapangdol**  
President and Dean of St Andrew's Theological  
Seminary, Quezon City

**David Monteith**  
Dean of Leicester

**Esther Mombo**  
Associate Professor in the Faculty of Theology,  
St Paul's University, Limuru

**Cathrine Ngangira**  
Assistant Curate, Holy Cross Bearsted, Canterbury

**Ephraim Radner**  
Professor of Historical Theology, Wycliffe College

**Amy Richter**  
Biblical Studies Faculty, Queen's College, St.  
John's, Newfoundland Labrador Canada

**Samy Shehata**  
Primate of the Province of Alexandria

**Katherine Sonderegger**  
William Meade Chair in Systematic Theology,  
Virginia Theological Seminary



**Stephen Spencer**  
Director for Theological Education in the Anglican  
Communion

**Paul Swarup**  
Presbyter in Charge, Green Park Free Church,  
New Delhi

**Jennifer Strawbridge**  
Associate Professor in New Testament Studies,  
University of Oxford

**Yak-hwee Tan**  
Associate Professor in Biblical Studies, Tainan  
Theological College

**Paulo Ueti**  
Theological Advisor and Regional Facilitator for Latin  
America of the Anglican Alliance; Assistant Director  
for Theological Education in the Anglican Communion  
for Portuguese, Spanish and French speaking regions

**Caroline Welby**  
International Retreat Leader

**Gerald West**  
Professor Emeritus, University of KwaZulu-Natal

**Robyn Whitaker**  
Senior Lecturer in New Testament at Pilgrim  
Theological College, University of Divinity

# Notes for Facilitators

**Each group engaging with this study will have a facilitator. The facilitator is a co-participant and a full and equal member of the small group. Facilitation is a participatory process. It is not about teaching a specific way of understanding the text. Facilitators are guides whose main roles are: 1) to enable all to participate, and 2) to ensure the Bible study finishes with prayer in the allocated period of time.**

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- The Bible studies are collaborative in style when used within a group. This style depends on a facilitator who helps the group to work together. It is important to remember that the facilitator is one among equals, especially when some in the group might not say what the facilitator wants to hear. This does not mean that the facilitator does not have a voice, but it does mean that that person's voice is not the most important one.
- The facilitator needs to be sensitive to the reality that some members of the group may be working in their second, third, or even fourth language. It is the role of the facilitator to ensure that there is sufficient discussion, explanation, or even repetition of any written material so that no one is left out. All texts should be read aloud within the group. At the same time, the facilitator must be sensitive in not asking all members of the group to read aloud and also ensure pairing of group members with sensitivity, where necessary. It is also okay to allow for natural silences to occur and to avoid the impulse to rush in and fill any spaces with words.
- In terms of sharing reflections with the wider group, group members need to be encouraged by the facilitator to 'tell us in one or two sentences' about a particular question or topic. Sometimes, as well, it is better to offer the choice as to whether someone wishes to share; some members may not wish to share at each occasion. Moreover, as facilitator, bear in mind the difficulties of protocol (see below for awareness around hierarchy) and honour/shame, as well as the perceived demand that if one person shares, then all must share.
- The facilitator needs to help keep the Bible study to time. We have offered estimated timings to complete parts of the study, but these are only suggestions. It is unlikely that groups will get through the whole study each time. Some groups may take longer on a question, and others may be quicker. The facilitator ought to avoid pushing through too quickly and cutting conversation off mid-stream. The intention of the suggested timing is not to be fixated on time but to help discern when to stop and when to listen longer, without the worry about getting through every question. This must be balanced, however, with moving the study toward the concluding prayer when the allocated time has been reached.
- These Bible studies are intended to be participatory and encourage discussion, and they have been compiled with the understanding that each and every member of the group has wisdom. The 'answers' are not all with one person; all have a valid and valuable contribution to make to the Bible study. Facilitators will need to make this clear in each study, especially when encouraging participation. Some may expect to speak in order of importance or status and sometimes, the use of time to give a response may be abused. The facilitator needs to be aware of such dynamics and make it clear to the group that there is no set order for speaking in advance, that all are equals, and that there is no hierarchy in the group.

- While the facilitator is a co-participant, it is important for the facilitator to devote some time before each study to read through the biblical text and the study for that day by way of preparation. It may help the facilitator to consider potential responses to the questions, keeping in mind that they are reading the Bible with others whose contexts are different from their own. Such preparation will enable the facilitators to have a sense of the shape of each study and

to draw group members together in the task of encountering Scripture and praying together. Since each Bible study is driven by questions and reflection, the facilitator needs to enable participants to engage with the questions, with one another, and with Scripture. The hope is that ultimately, the facilitator will empower group members to recognise their own identity as one chosen by God and the value and importance of their own contributions to the whole.

## Specific Notes for Facilitators concerning each Study

1. Specific instructions for Facilitators are placed in **red** in each study (for example: **suggested time: 15 minutes**).
2. Specific instructions for the group are placed in **blue** in each study (for example: **discuss this question in pairs**).
3. Notes are offered at the end of each Bible study to assist with preparation and also offer extra information for those who desire to go deeper into the text and context of 1 Peter.
4. Some questions involve working with a neighbour. In these cases, the facilitator might indicate the half-way point of the time for that question so that both of the people in each pair have time to share with the other, if they wish.
5. Moreover, pairs are essential, not groups of three. Thus, the facilitator must be mindful of group numbers and be part of

one pair if the group has an even number of members (including the facilitator, who is a full group member), or refrain from working in a pair and contemplate answers for him/herself if the group has an odd number of members.

Because sharing with a neighbour is a part of most of the studies, it might be helpful to encourage people to sit in different places around the table in order to enable conversation between different pairs each day (see, however, the note above concerning sensitivities around pairing in some groups).

6. The first day of the study is particularly important for setting a tone and creating a space where all feel welcome and able to share from their own context and experience.

## Select Resources

*Facilitator's Notes: The Bible Study Series of Church Land Programme*, Church Land Programme, [http://www.churchland.org.za/?page\\_id=98](http://www.churchland.org.za/?page_id=98) (accessed 29 August 2019).

## Notes for all Participating in the Bible Studies

**The Bible studies are collaborative in their style when used within a group. This style depends on a facilitator who helps the group to work together as a member of the group. It is important to remember that the facilitator is one among equals, especially when some in the group might not say what the facilitator or another group member wants to hear. This does not mean that the facilitator does not have a voice, but it does mean that their voice is not the most important one.**

- Please ensure that all texts are read aloud within the group. Remember that some members of the group may be working in their second, third, or fourth language. The group must be sensitive in not asking all members of the group to read aloud. It is also okay to allow for natural silences to occur and to avoid the impulse to rush in and fill any spaces with words.
- The facilitator needs to help keep the Bible study to time. We have offered estimated timings to complete parts of the study, but these are only suggestions. It is unlikely that groups will get through the whole study each time. Some groups may take longer on a question, and others may be quicker. The intention of the suggested timing is not to be fixated on time but to help discern when to stop and when to listen longer, without the worry about getting through every question. This must be balanced, however, with moving the study toward the concluding prayer when the allocated time has been reached.
- These Bible studies are intended to be participatory and encourage discussion, and they have been compiled with the understanding that each and every member of the group has wisdom. The 'answers' are not all with one person; all have a valid and valuable contribution to make to the time together in Bible study. Some may expect to speak in order of importance or status, but there is no set order for speaking in each group, all are equals and there is no hierarchy in the group.
- Notes are offered at the end of each Bible study to assist with preparation. Some may wish to read them before each day. For others, the notes might offer extra information if they desire to go deeper into the text and context of 1 Peter after the study. Each study is understandable and fully sufficient without the notes. The notes are for preparation and extra reading, if desired, and are not part of the hour-long study.



# A word from the Convenor of the St Augustine Seminar – Professor Jenn Strawbridge

Scripture is fundamental to the identity of Christians in general, and Anglicans in particular. Scripture is at the heart of Christian worship, teaching, and prayer, both within a Church community and personally. The Book of Common Prayer, as well as numerous Lambeth Conference resolutions, affirm that Holy Scripture contains all things necessary to salvation. In the conversations and gatherings which led to the Bible studies that follow, we have drawn from the best of our traditions and scholarship with the hope that Scripture will 'continue to illuminate, challenge, and transform cultures, structures, and ways of thinking, especially those that predominate today' (Resolution III.1, Lambeth Conference 1998).



Five studies are offered in this book, a convenient number since 1 Peter contains five chapters. However, the chapter divisions of 1 Peter are not always helpful (and were only introduced in the 1500s). This is especially true for chapters 2 and 3 where the letter calls various sectors of the Church to 'accept the authority of' (see 1 Peter 2.13, 2.18, 3.1). 1 Peter 2 and 1 Peter 3 belong together as Peter engages what it means to acknowledge authority, to submit, to honour, and how to return good for evil as a pattern that instructs all Christians in conformity to Christ. This will be part of the focus for Day 3 of the Bible studies.

The studies are intentionally open to allow the Spirit to move and conversations not to be overly directed or restrained. The questions, images, and texts from Scripture are given to nurture all who engage with 1 Peter in their relationship with God and with one another. These studies stand alone and do not need any supplements. For those who desire further study on 1 Peter, the St Augustine Seminar has also produced complementary materials, including a commentary and a series of videos.

The method of Bible study differs slightly each day so that 1 Peter may speak within a diversity of experiences and contexts. The intention for each question is to take you deeper into the biblical text, deeper into the intersection between Scripture and your context or situation, and deeper into relationship with one another. Thus, the studies are meant to be inviting and participatory, where group members are encouraged to share their interpretations, experiences, and contexts. The questions are not meant to invite sermons about what the passage means for everyone. In this study, you are encouraged to speak from your context, resisting the temptation to interpret the text for someone else in your group. It is important to note that listening to others is just as important as speaking.

## How to get the most from your Bible Studies together

- The Bible Study material has been designed to be used as a group.
- You will have a facilitator supporting your group discussion.
- Read the Biblical text aloud as a group.
- Take your time, to allow for different languages and interpretation.
- Avoid the temptation to fill every silence with words. Allow time for reflection and contemplation.
- Try and keep to time. Estimated timings are suggested for each part of the study.
- Enable everyone to share their voice. Every member of the group has wisdom to share. The 'answers' are not all with one person.
- Everyone is equal – there is no hierarchy or order of speaking to follow.
- Notes are offered at the end of each Bible study to assist with preparation.
- Instructions to facilitators are in red.
- Instructions to participants are in blue.

These studies are about building a relationship with God, with Scripture, and with one another. How you enter into conversation with 1 Peter and your own context is up to you. For example, a central focus of 1 Peter is suffering. Some will immediately identify with the context of persecution and suffering, and others will not. Each person present may have a different understanding of what suffering means in their context. Importantly, we cannot interpret someone else's suffering for them.

Finally, we note that there are no 'right' answers to the questions that follow. These studies are not meant to be a competition in biblical knowledge. Rather, we hope that all engaged in these studies will be committed to creating a space in which what is on the heart can be spoken, where Holy Scripture can be encountered, and where that Scripture can minister to each person gathered in conversation and prayer.

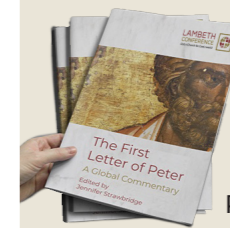
As a diverse group creating these studies, we have had profound encounters with one another as we have engaged with 1 Peter. Our hope and prayer is that through your study of 1 Peter, you are invited to deeper engagement with God's Word, to richer relationships with those who read and hear these texts with you, and to openness to what the Holy Spirit might speak through Scripture.

**J. Strawbridge**

## Get your 1 Peter Resources

### Watch

To watch films about 1 Peter, visit the Lambeth Conference web site: [www.lambethconference.org](http://www.lambethconference.org)



Get the commentary: The commentary is entitled: *The First Letter of Peter: A Global Commentary* (SCM Press, 2020).

The full Bible Commentary is available to conference delegates for free online.

Delegates should visit the online Lambeth Conference Resources Hub.

Email: [info@lambethconference](mailto:info@lambethconference) for your login details.

*All references to Scripture in English are drawn from the NRSV translation.*

# Introduction to 1 Peter

Adapted from 'The First Letter of Peter: A Global Commentary' (SCM Press, 2020)

**The First Letter of Peter presents itself as a letter written by 'Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ' (1.1). The letter describes its apostolic author in Rome (called Babylon in this letter) and writing in the company of Mark and Silvanus (5.12-13). The driving message for all readers of this letter is the transforming joy of faith in Jesus Christ and a call to witness, to hope and to holiness as God's chosen people.**

1 Peter is both embedded in the early Christian movement and deeply conversant with the Hebrew scriptures, drawing on a number of Jewish and Christian themes and texts. As such, it is understood by scholars to be an ecumenical bridge and anchor. It is called a 'catholic epistle', where catholic means 'universal' since it is addressed to more than one community. 1 Peter is also connected with more strands of the New Testament than any other New Testament

letter. Jesus' life and death in 1 Peter resonates with that in the gospels of Mark, Matthew, and Luke, and elements of this letter echo the writings of the Apostle Paul.



Map of places in Asia Minor as mentioned in 1 Peter 1  
Creative Commons License BY-SA 3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=6602420>

1 Peter is written to communities who, sanctified by the Spirit, are called to witness to the transforming joy of Christ, even as they suffer for Christ's name. The Christian communities addressed by the apostolic author are in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, all provinces of the Roman Empire in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey), and the letter's first verses hint at a prior mission to northern Asia Minor (1.1). These areas are associated with persecution of Christians both here in 1 Peter and in the correspondence in 112AD of Pliny the Younger with the Emperor Trajan. As Pliny writes to the Emperor: 'in the case of those who were denounced to me as Christians...those who confessed I interrogated a second and a third time, threatening them with punishment; those who persisted I ordered executed' (Letter 10.96).

The readership is a Christian diaspora - a group of people alienated from the society around them - whom we know to have experienced opposition specifically for their Christian faith and identity (4.12-17). They are suffering as rejected outsiders in their own communities, no longer belonging to a world in which they were once at home (4.1-5). The letter uses a number of powerful metaphors often translated as 'resident alien', 'exile', 'stranger', 'foreigner', and 'sojourner'. This is the context into which Peter speaks his strikingly resonant message of hope and holiness, beginning in the first chapter.

Hope in the midst of persecution is clearly and repeatedly developed as that which unites the readers both with the Apostle and with Jesus himself. The description of Jesus' exemplary suffering, including his silence when unjustly abused in his trial (2.23-24), links with the depiction of the death of Jesus in gospel tradition (see Mark 10.45; 14.61; Matt. 20.28) as well as several of Peter's speeches in Acts (see Acts 4.10-12; 10.42-43). Within 1 Peter, the apostolic author encourages Christian leaders as a 'fellow elder' and apostolic 'witness' of Jesus' sufferings (5.1). The letter offers encouragement for unity over division and for humility over anxiety as it instructs those suffering for their faith in how to live faithfully in the time between Jesus' death and resurrection and his return.







# DAY 1: Called into Hope and Holiness in Christ

## GATHERING FOR THE FIRST BIBLE STUDY

**5 minutes**

During this time, the Facilitator describes the method for the study and ensures the "Notes for all Participating in the Study" (see above) are agreed. The first two parts of the study today will be engaged within pairs.

### PART 1

## Hope

**15 minutes**

**Read aloud this introduction:**

1 Peter is written to a people who are a minority, scattered in the world and separated from even their own community. The letter begins by giving the Christians to whom Peter writes a number of labels or identities, including that of 'exile' and of being 'chosen', 'destined', and 'sanctified' by God and the Holy Spirit. With this dual identity in mind (exile and chosen), Peter immediately speaks of hope, which is a theme that runs throughout the letter.

**Read 1 Peter 1.3-5 aloud:**

*<sup>3</sup> Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, <sup>4</sup> and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, <sup>5</sup> who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.*

**With a partner, reflect on one or more of the following questions:**

- Q** Peter speaks about God giving us 'new birth into a living hope'. What does 'living hope' mean to you?
- Q** What does it mean to your church? Note: 'church' could mean your local church or your diocese.

**Pairs may share, if they wish, a few sentences from their reflection with the group.**

### PART 2

## Holiness

**20-25 minutes**

**Read aloud:**

Peter builds on our identity in Christ and on the call to hope with a series of commands for all Christians.

**Read 1 Peter 1.13-16 aloud. Peter says,**

*<sup>13</sup> Therefore prepare your minds for action; discipline yourselves; set all your hope on the grace that Jesus Christ will bring you when he is revealed. <sup>14</sup> Like obedient children, do not be conformed to the desires that you formerly had in ignorance. <sup>15</sup> Instead, as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct; <sup>16</sup> for it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy.'*

**With a partner, reflect on one or more of the following questions:**

- Q** Five commands appear in 1 Peter 1.13-16: prepare your minds for action; discipline yourselves; set all your hope on the grace given by Jesus Christ; do not be conformed to the desires that you formerly had; be holy in all your conduct.
- Q** Which of these commands do you most need to put into practice?
- Q** What does being holy mean for you?
- Q** Do you struggle with being made holy? If so, in what ways?
- Q** How do you experience God making you or your community holy? Note: 'community' refers to your faith community.

**Pairs may share, if they wish, a few sentences from their reflection with the group.**

### PART 3

## Mutual Love

**10-15 minutes**

**Read aloud:**

The end of 1 Peter 1 calls us to 'love one another deeply from the heart'. This is repeated again in 1 Peter 3.8 when Peter calls 'all of you' to have 'love for one another'.

**Read aloud 1 Peter 1.21-22. Peter says,**

*<sup>21</sup> Through him you have come to trust in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are set on God. <sup>22</sup> Now that you have purified your souls by your obedience to the truth so that you have genuine mutual love, love one another deeply from the heart.*

**Take a minute or two to reflect on these questions on your own, and then, if you wish, share your reflections with the larger group.**

- Q** Why is it difficult to love all believers or all people in your wider community?
- Q** What holds you back from loving 'one another deeply from the heart'?

### PRAY

## Concluding Prayer

**5 minutes**

In closing, either the facilitator leads a prayer, drawing together the discussion, or the facilitator may invite members of the group, as they wish, to pray in response to what they have heard and shared. Prayers may include:

- Hope for themselves and for their churches found in part 1;
- The demands of the Christian faith, including the call to be holy, mentioned in part 2;
- The call to love one another deeply and those who need this kind of love, shared in part 3.

## DAY 1: Notes for Further Study



### NOTES FOR PART 1:

Those who are exiles, separated from their home, are outsiders and often reviled. The language of 'exile' and 'dispersion' or diaspora draws on well-known images and experiences from the Old Testament, where Israel was scattered like sheep as resident aliens in a foreign land. Here you might also think of gospel stories like Luke 15 with Christ as a shepherd looking for scattered, lost sheep. From the beginning, Peter's community suffered from rejection and harassment by members of society because they lived as strangers in a foreign land and their Christian identity made them suspect. In the world, their identity in the name of Christ may lead to suffering, but they are chosen, destined, belong to a new people, and are protected by the power of God (1.3-5).

The beginning of 1 Peter calls Christians living in diaspora to put their faith in God and not to lose hope in the face of suspicion and hostility. As minorities in their world, they had to show how living as a Christian community was different while at the same time assuring others that their Christian way of living did not present a threat to society.

From the opening verses of 1 Peter, hope is central and Peter tells us that hope is something we are given. Hope cannot be separated from the life that Jesus offers in his death and resurrection. It is not based on wishful thinking, fantasy, hyperbole, or any propaganda promoted by the empire or those pretending to have God's authority. Neither does such hope ever reduce to mere optimism, as if it were like a secular 'hope' for good weather or the success of one's football team. It is instead secure and anchored in God.

This promise of hope and new birth in 1.3 isn't given to make us feel comfortable and affirmed. The gifts of new life patterned on the witness of Jesus is indeed both openly inclusive, welcoming *everyone* as they are and yet radically transformative, leaving no-one 'just the way I am'. Hope in Christ transforms both our fears and our desires, freeing us from our sinful and self-destructive past allegiances, as we see in the next section of the letter (1.14, 18-19).

### NOTES FOR PART 2:

In 1 Peter, holiness is presented both as a condition or state granted to believers through Christ, and as a goal or outcome to which they themselves must attain. The vocation, the call, of all is to holiness and to God. The 'given-ness' of holiness (it is a gift, just like hope) is the reality of who Christ is, and forever will be, for all who come to trust in him. This establishment of believers' holy standing before God cannot be undone. It is unchanging, unconditional, already perfect and fully guaranteed.

Christ's self-sacrifice and suffering informs the call to holiness of those who bear the name 'Christian'. This is a call to imitate God in God's self-sacrificial movement toward the other and towards us. God is holy and so we too are called to be holy (1.15-16). This holiness is not something that we can earn or control, but is an invitation and a gift. Thus, holiness isn't about performative piety. Rather it is given by God, it is a call from God, and it leads to transformation. As such, one does not have to have certain abilities to be holy: the marginalised, the weak, the disabled can all be holy.

At the same time, the sense whereby believers are expected to conform to a new standard of holiness serves as an inescapable call to transformed living. In contrast to the security and constancy of their holy status, the requirement to demonstrate holy living through walking with Christ is prone to fluctuation, to circumstances, to personal choices and to intermittent progress. The experiential nature of holiness can be connected to the themes of maintaining joy in face of hardship and suffering, and of what it means to live as 'resident aliens'. These tasks may be arduous, but ultimately their impact can be purposeful, if understood through the filter of precisely what the letter is aiming to teach: Pursue such holiness because the one who calls you is holy (1.15).

While the concept of holiness is often associated with 'separation' or distinction – God's distinction from what is unholy – this truth can give the false impression that holiness is about distance and exclusion. A more accurate view of holiness in biblical terms is the character of God's movement to embrace and transform what is far from God, a movement which, especially in the light of sin, 'costs' God something. Holiness is therefore not an abstention from the bad, but an imitation of God in God's self-sacrificial movement towards the other, which is most explicit in the person of Jesus Christ. In this way, imitating God's movement towards us should determine the action, the discipline, the behaviour (we could say, the ethics) within the Christian community and communion. God seeks a creation that reflects divine truth, beauty and goodness; holiness is how God achieves this.

Holiness, then, is supremely manifest in God coming close to the unholy, patiently submitting to what is unholy, and thereby transforming it to God's own character of self-sacrificing love. This is a central Gospel proclamation: 'But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us' (Rom. 5.8). This proclamation is then given a form within human life and relationship: 'Love your enemies' (Matt. 5.44; Luke 6.27, 35).

Holiness involves distinction and behaviour, but primarily as aspects of sacrifice, where what is true, good, and beautiful is offered up for the sake of others in love. The Church's identity of holiness, then, is one oriented to others: not only to the holy within the Church, but to the unholy, within and outside the Church. Jesus is the only one who can make the unholy holy. We might separate ourselves because we have judged another to be unholy. And yet, the call of the Christian is to live on the border of the holy just as Jesus himself loved and broke bread with those considered 'unholy' in his own time. Christ even became sin for us, dying an unholy death as a criminal on a cross, in order to draw the whole world to himself. The call to holiness is always derivative, grounded in Christ. One is holy, the Church is holy, a community is holy, only because Christ is in the midst of it.

### NOTES FOR PART 3:

Peter calls the community to mutual love and to unity in Christ, in his death and resurrection, in a way that displaces all despair, all division, all that is perishable in this world. The call to 'love one another deeply from the heart' is the focus at the end of this first chapter, and is the response that the saving act of God in Christ demands. The resurrection, therefore, is an essential part of the living hope to which Peter calls his community, enabling the Christian to stand firm against all that brings death in individual lives, in communities, in this world. The resurrection gives believers hope and courage to rise up against all that seeks to kill, enabling hope, instilling love, and grounding confidence-even in the midst of suffering-in the word of God which endures for ever (1.25).



# DAY 2: A Holy People following Christ

The first and final parts of the study today will be engaged with in pairs.

## PART 1

### Living Stones

**20 minutes**

**Read aloud the following verses from 1 Peter 2:**

*<sup>1</sup> Rid yourselves, therefore, of all malice, and all guile, insincerity, envy, and all slander...*

*<sup>11</sup> Beloved, I urge you as aliens and exiles to abstain from the desires of the flesh that wage war against the soul.*

**Read aloud:**

The terms used in verse 1—malice (evil), guile (deception), insincerity, envy, and slander—can be a little difficult to understand. While these vices are clearly present in the world today, we have to think carefully in order to identify when we feel envy or malice or when we are acting with guile, insincerity, or slander.

**Take a minute or two to reflect personally on the list of vices in 1 Peter 2. Make an effort to be honest with yourself.**

**In your own life, do you see (or have you seen) malice, guile, insincerity, envy, or slander?**

**As you are able, share with a partner a story of a specific time when you have seen this vice emerge in your own life.**

**Now expand your thinking beyond yourself.**

**In your community or nation, what are one or two 'desires of the flesh' that need to be confronted by the Church? Your response can draw on the vices listed in verse 1, or can focus on other issues or sins, such as those mentioned in 1 Peter 4 (4.2–3: licentiousness, passions, drunkenness, revels, carousing, lawless idolatry).**

**Keep in mind that there are differences within the Anglican Communion about what 'desires of the flesh' might need to be confronted by the Church.**

**As you are able, share from your own context with the larger group what you think are 'desires of the flesh' that need to be confronted in your life or your community.**

**Listen carefully to what others think are concerns in their own context.**

## PART 2

### Honourable conduct

**15 minutes**

**Read aloud:**

Although the people of God are 'aliens and exiles' in the world, owing to their primary identity as God's chosen people, believers do not simply abandon the world, nor should they encourage a hostile relationship with society. On the contrary, Peter says that believers should behave in ways that are so exemplary and honourable that they turn critics into converts (2.12) and secure the favour of the governing authorities (2.14–15).

**Read aloud 1 Peter 2.12:**

*<sup>12</sup> Conduct yourselves honourably among the Gentiles, so that, though they malign you as evildoers, they may see your honourable deeds and glorify God when he comes to judge.*

**Take a minute or two to reflect on these questions on your own, and then, if you wish, share your ideas with the larger group.**

**We might easily read past this verse, but the sort of behaviour it calls forth would have to be striking in order to have the desired effect. Think about your own church today.**

**What sort of honourable conduct in your context would be so compelling and powerful that it would cause unbelievers to glorify God?**

**What sort of conduct in your context would be so compelling that it would lead to praise of the Church by non-Christian leaders?**

## PART 3

### Suffering for doing what is right

**20 minutes**

**Read aloud from 1 Peter 2.20–21:**

*<sup>20</sup> But if you endure when you do right and suffer for it, you have God's approval. <sup>21</sup> For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps.*

**Take a few minutes to think about situations of injustice in your life, country, or community. Write down 2–3 things that come to mind or draw an image to capture each situation of unjust abuse.**

**Share your images or list with a partner. Discuss with your partner whether in one of the situations, you (or your church) have been complicit in suffering or not acted in places where a difference could have been made. What might you change?**

**Pairs may share with the group, if they wish, one of the situations they discussed.**

**As a group, reflect on what it might mean to repent for past failings and how when one part of the Communion is suffering, they might be supported by others.**

## PRAY

### Concluding Prayer

**5 minutes**

In closing, either the facilitator leads a prayer, drawing together the discussion, or the facilitator may invite members of the group, as they wish, to pray in response to what they have heard and shared. Prayers may include:

- The sins which the Church needs to confront, mentioned in part 1;
- The opportunities to win over sceptics and opponents with honourable conduct, mentioned in part 2;
- The situations of injustice shared in part 3.

## DAY 2: Notes for Further Study



### NOTES FOR PART 1:

In this opening section, Peter exhorts his listeners to 'lay aside' or rid themselves of vices that are harmful to the community. Similar 'vice-catalogues' can be found in some of Paul's letters (1 Cor. 5; Gal. 5; Eph. 5; Col. 3). The vices stated in Peter's list are attitudes and behaviours that could destroy the community: malice, deceit, insincerity, envy and slander. Therefore, the community is encouraged to behave righteously toward one another.

Because believers are a holy people and priests of God, Peter explains that they should be recognisably distinct from the rest of society. Although they are God's people and citizens of the kingdom of heaven, they are also "aliens and exiles" (2.11) in this fallen world. Accordingly, Peter repeatedly instructs his communities to reject the sinful desires and practices so typical of the Gentiles (2.1, 11) and warns against the 'desires of the flesh'. The meaning of that phrase, 'desires of the flesh', is somewhat open to interpretation in this context but encompasses any number of sinful inclinations and would certainly include the specific vices mentioned verse 1: malice, guile, insincerity, envy, and slander.

### NOTES FOR PART 2:

The 'honourable deeds' to which the believers are called include abstinence from the 'desires of the flesh'; put differently, they should not revert to the immoral behaviours of their former lives but should live up to the noblest aspirations of Roman morality. While this reference to Roman morality may seem surprising to 21st-century Christian readers, we often think of ancient Romans and Greeks as being wicked or licentious, it bears remembering that there were also moral Romans living in the communities to which Peter writes, some of whom suspected that the Christians were immoral. The righteous conduct of Peter's listeners, therefore, was to counter the suspicions of their pagan neighbours and to bear witness to God. Thus, the practice of a good way of life, shaped both inwardly and outwardly by doing good, would have an impact on those who misrepresent Peter's community and call them evildoers.

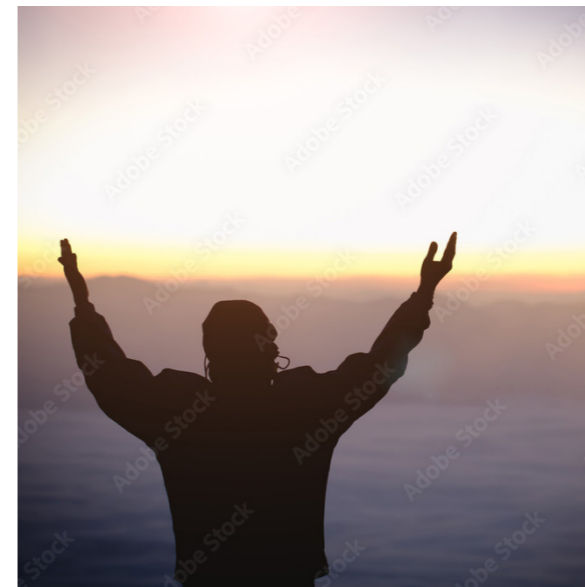
### NOTES FOR PART 3:

After encouraging believers to win over their opponents through honourable conduct, the letter acknowledges that, when people's relationships are marked by significant differences of social status (as in situations of slavery), the powerful sometimes abuse those under their authority. In such situations, the letter exhorts Christians to endure that suffering without abandoning their integrity, imitating the example of Jesus (who did not contend with or lash out at the Sanhedrin and Roman authorities when they unjustly condemned him).

Christians in the 21st century often have a great deal more capacity to alter situations of injustice than was the case for first-century Christians, and so it bears emphasizing that silent endurance should not be the only response of the Church when she suffers for righteousness' sake. That said, we ought not go to the other extreme and ignore the example Jesus gave us, when he refused to retaliate

against those who abused him. Peter is quite clear that, even in his unanswered suffering for doing what was right (2.20), Jesus' lifestyle is to be imitated by believers (2.21, 23).

We need to be attentive to the dynamics of power within this letter and within our world. The people of 1 Peter occupy a lowly position in society and are, most likely people with little power, including slaves, women, and people under the authority of a powerful government. This letter has been read (and preached) as teaching such people simply to accept their lot in life and to submit to authority; but it is possible to read this chapter in a much more subversive (and therefore constructive) light. If we assume that, like slaves, 'aliens and exiles' are not in a position to change their social situation, we can ask how they might cope with and live in such circumstances.



They may not be able to make a material change to their situation, but do they have an option relating to how they see themselves and their humanity? Have they internalised their situation, such that they perceive themselves as lesser humans? Or, with the encouragement of 1 Peter, might they be able to claim their dignity as children of God, despite being powerless in other ways? 2.16 exhorts them to 'live as free people' - perhaps not externally free but liberated in the way they see themselves.

To such people – then as well as now – the promises of 1 Peter 2 are of no small significance. A people told that once they were 'not a people' – they were ignored, marginalised, demeaned, shamed – are told that they are 'now God's people' (2.10). A people labelled as shameful, exiled, and on the margins of their society are in fact 'God's own people' (2.9). They are holy as God is holy, they are 'a chosen race and a royal priesthood' (2.9), they are 'chosen and precious in God's sight' (2.4).

Although they are lost and confused, Christ the cornerstone will give them direction (2.6). Their identity as 'stranger', 'exile', and 'odd one out' has been transformed. Previously this identity as a stranger was a mark of shame, but now it is a sign that they are God's own people. Those who are slaves are, in fact, free-free to choose to obey, internally sure of their dignity; resilient and resistant-because they know that the one who walks by their side through the suffering is Christ himself (2.21).





# DAY 3: Resistance and Resilience in Christ

## PART 1

### Empire

🕒 15 minutes

Study the pictures over the page. Each picture was found as the result of an internet search for 'empire'. Take a moment to reflect on your own, and then, if you wish, share your ideas with the larger group.

🗨️ What connects these pictures as definitions of 'empire' in our past and in our world today?

📖 Read the following verse from 1 Peter 2:17 aloud:

*<sup>17</sup> Honour everyone. Love the family of believers. Fear God. Honour the emperor.*

Take a minute or two and then share your reflections on this question with your neighbour.

🗨️ How do these commands from Peter speak to you and your situation?

🗨️ Are any of these commands harder to follow than others?

## PART 2

### Authority

🕒 25 minutes

📖 Read aloud:

1 Peter connects submission to human institutions (such as empire and the emperor), both with the submission of slaves to masters and the submission of wives to husbands, with a focus on unbelieving husbands.

📖 Read aloud, Peter writes:

*2.13: For the Lord's sake accept the authority of every human institution...*

*2.18: Slaves, accept the authority of your masters with all deference...*

*3.1: Wives, in the same way, accept the authority of your husbands...*

*3.8-9: Finally, all of you, have unity of spirit, sympathy, love for one another, a tender heart, and a humble mind. Do not repay evil for evil or abuse for abuse; but, on the contrary, repay with a blessing.*

📖 Read aloud:

Those who are subject to authority, and those who-like the recipients of Peter's letter-are aliens and exiles, had little power in the ancient world and could easily be persecuted for their beliefs.

Now think for a few minutes about a situation where you feel powerless or persecuted because of your faith. What image does this situation bring to mind?

With a partner, reflect on one or more of the following questions:

🗨️ What would it mean to resist that situation and what it would mean to endure that situation?

🗨️ How do you know when you should bear up under insult and evil and when you should defend yourself?

🗨️ Is it possible for you to give a blessing instead of returning evil or insult to those who are harsh, punishing, or silencing towards you? Why or why not?

Pairs may share with the group, if they wish, one of the situations they discussed.

## PART 3

### Hope

🕒 15 minutes

📖 Read aloud:

Peter follows the section addressing certain sectors of his communities (slaves, wives, those subject to human institutions) with a section that addresses everyone. As a part of this address to all, 1 Peter tells his communities in 3:15-16: *<sup>15</sup> Always be ready to make your defence to anyone who demands from you an account of the hope that is in you; <sup>16</sup> yet do it with gentleness and reverence.*

Together, discuss the following questions as a group:

🗨️ What does it mean to live in a way that makes other people ask you about the source of your hope?

🗨️ What would you say to someone who asked you to give an account of your hope?

## PRAY

### Concluding Prayer

🕒 5 minutes

In closing, either the facilitator leads a prayer, drawing together the discussion, or the facilitator may invite members of the group, as they wish, to pray in response to what they have heard and shared. Prayers may be:

- For all who live under systems of oppression, political, economic, or social
- For the lordless powers of our world, for the ways our lives submit to them, and for ways that we might turn to Jesus as the one and only Lord and judge
- For all who live under the authority of harsh, unjust, or silencing powers;
- For courage to give an account of hope, for yourself and for your church.

## DAY 3: Notes for Further Study



Persepolis near Shiraz, Iran



Roman Colosseum, Italy



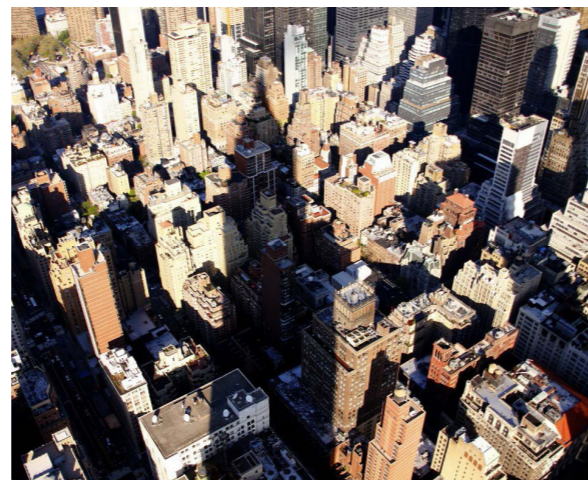
Himeji Castle, Japan



1913 Postcard of HMS New Zealand, U.K.



The Sphinx, Egypt



New York City, USA

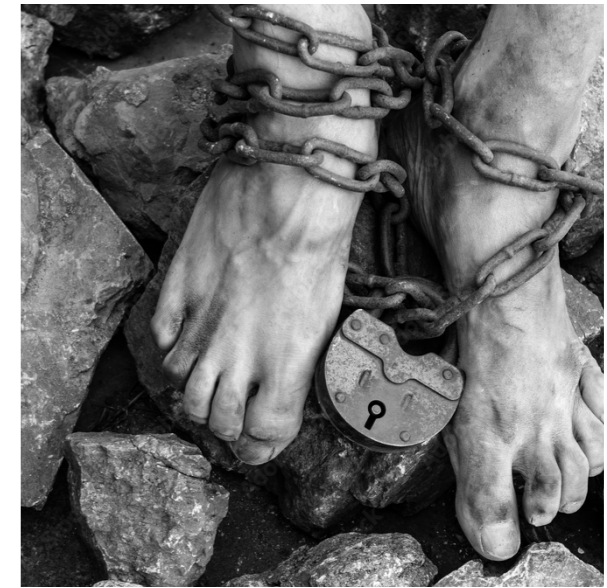
(Note for Publisher: Images are Creative Commons License.)

As mentioned in the introduction to the Bible studies, the chapter divisions of 1 Peter are not very helpful. 1 Peter 2:13-25 cannot be separated from the start of 1 Peter 3 because the call to various sectors of the Church to 'accept the authority of' (2:13, 18; 3:1) belong together. We are to think, in all these cases, about what it means to acknowledge authority, to submit, to honour, and how to return good for evil as a pattern that instructs all Christians in their conformity to Christ, who suffered sometimes without a word and yet remained victorious in his submission.

### NOTES FOR PART 1:

At the time 1 Peter was written, societies were greatly concerned with the establishment and maintenance of 'order' in all areas of life, both private and public. At the top of the Roman social order were the emperor and other political leaders, such as the senators and governors. Peter commands his listeners to 'accept the authority' of them. At best, governing authorities could be agents of God's justice and serve the healthy order of society, so Christians are urged to submit to their governors, not as a matter of compulsion or fatalism, but 'for the Lord's sake' (2:13). Peter's community would have understood that human authorities did not have ultimate claims upon them (especially when those authorities became agents of injustice). A Christian's allegiance ultimately is to Jesus Christ.

This section of 1 Peter 2 climaxes with some short key reminders to Peter's listeners, making the priorities and distinctions of his communities clear. While everyone is to be honoured, including the emperor, it is only God that they are to *fear* (2:17) and the community of believers that they are to *love*. Thus 'honour' as an outward virtue is appropriate for all, including the emperor (which in itself could be seen as a subversive flattening of Roman hierarchy, placing the emperor on the same level as 'everyone'); 'love' as an inner virtue is required for the community of believers; and 'fear' (or awe) is the appropriate stance toward God.



1 Peter then turns to two dominant systems of human institutions: slavery (2:18-25) and patriarchy (3:1-7). Slavery and patriarchy are the two most prevalent and enduring systems of the ancient world; they are so widespread that they are all but invisible. Remarkably, this letter makes them visible.

### NOTES FOR PART 2:

These exhortations then for Christians to honour the emperor while fearing God and for Christian slaves not to respond in sin when treated unjustly, hold before us the vulnerability of most Christians in the first century. They lived on the margins. It confirms for us what Peter means when he calls his community 'aliens and exiles'. Such realities serve both to encourage Christians today who find themselves in situations of persecution and marginalisation and to remind Christians living in a dominant Christian society not to grow too comfortable or be lulled into complacency. An awareness of how easily one could become vulnerable to systems of power within the ancient world, helps us stay vigilant toward such systems in our world today.



## DAY 3: Notes for Further Study

### NOTES FOR PART 2 CONTINUED:

On a related note, we must grapple theologically with a text from Scripture that uses the same kind of theological argument for slaves and for women/wives. In the ancient world slaves and women occupied a similar social status. Neither slaves nor women had power, a status which fits well into the wider community of 1 Peter. Aliens and exiles did not have any power either. There are parts of our contemporary world where little has changed. There are also parts of our world in which the system of slavery has been rejected by the Church, but not the system of patriarchy. And there are parts of our world in which both systems have been rejected. Such divergent contexts will come at 1 Peter quite differently when it comes to a contemporary appropriation of this Scripture.

When we look at Peter's sections addressed to slaves (2.18-25) and wives (3.1-6), we should consider what setting Peter was addressing. He was not addressing a setting of voluntary employees who could simply resign from work if they were being mistreated. He was not addressing women who might readily find different husbands who did not expect unilateral submission.

Unless they earned enough money on the side to buy their freedom, slaves did not have much say concerning their slave status. Slaveholders often did eventually free slaves (though sometimes to preclude having to support them in their old age). A minority of slaves in the Roman empire achieved status and even wealth. But the legal authority to emancipate slaves lay solely with the slaveholders. Peter thus provides advice not to resist, but for how to bear up under a difficult situation that his addressees could not control.

In the case of wives, Peter is addressing the norm in his day, not the question of direct physical abuse that he addressed with slaves (2.20). Unlike slaves, wives were not usually objects of beating in the regions that Peter addresses (1.1). Also unlike slaves, wives had options safely to remove themselves from such situations, if they arose; no laws compelled them to stay. In other words, Peter does not advise against escaping such abuse for those with the freedom to do it.

Is it ethical to flee abuse? Scripture provides numerous examples. David fled from Saul, and Jesus' family fled to Egypt to escape Herod. Even in cases of persecution for the name of Christ, Jesus allows fleeing (Matt. 10.23), and his disciples normally did so when possible (Acts 14.6). Let us be careful to use these passages to encourage one another's faith in the face of difficult situations, not to make difficult situations harder!



### NOTES FOR PART 3:

'Submission' to the systems of the dominant order, whether to emperors, governors, slave-masters, or husbands, should not be understood as having an intrinsic value. Submission to these powerful systems is strategic, a by-product of the ultimate submission which is to God, for by 'sanctifying Christ as Lord' in their hearts, God's people will have opportunities to give 'an account of the hope' that resides in them (3.15).

This crucial call summons the community of 1 Peter to frame the earlier calls to 'accept the authority of' in relationship to, perhaps even in tension with, the ultimate Lordship of Christ. Thus 3.8-17 requires hard interpretive work from the reader of this letter. How are we to understand the relationship between 'the Lord' and the many other claims to lordship of that time, including the lordship of 'human institutions' (2.13), 'masters' (2.18), and 'husbands' (3.1)? And how is sanctifying Christ as Lord in our heart an act both of resilience and of resistance in a world of lordless powers?

Often 3.15-16 is twisted by putting the weight on the final words to excuse our timidity, as if Peter was saying 'you must ensure your evangelism is done more gently'. The weight in the sentence falls on 'ready', 'always' and 'to anyone'. Yes, there is the wisdom that evangelism should be done gently and respectfully: this is sensible given the people's weak and oppressed position in society; it also follows from the commands to be humble, and pursue peace. Nevertheless, the people's calling is to be a blessing to others, to sanctify Jesus, not to be frightened into silence, and indeed the aim of their manner of life is that others might be won over to glorify God.

Underlying this wisdom from Peter is an easily overlooked logic for evangelism which we find elsewhere in the New Testament. Peter's readers are urged to live in a distinctive manner, and then to be ready to answer the questions about their faith which emerge: the manner of life provokes the questions, but the questions then need to be answered. Too often we fail at one or other of these challenges: either we don't have distinctive and attractive enough conduct to provoke any questions, or we do have it but, when asked, are unwilling to point people to Jesus as its source.

Neither actions nor words alone are sufficient. But nor is it as simple as saying we need both. Peter's vision appears to be that the distinctive manner of life (action) needs to come first and generate genuine interest and questions, then the gentle explanation of a living hope in Jesus can be given.

Thus, the underlying logic of 2.11 through to 3.17 starts to emerge; Peter advocates a manner of life which will make it hard for the Christian's neighbours to accuse them, and which may indeed bring those neighbours to faith. This pattern of life is determined not by abstract ideas of 'rights', but by wisdom in how to live as a minority in danger of persecution, a minority which believes that even the persecutors can be saved by Jesus.



# DAY 4: Suffering in Christ

## Read aloud

Suffering is mentioned more times in 1 Peter than in any other New Testament text. Remember Peter's context in your reflections: his communities are small groups of Christians who are minorities in their culture, living in an empire that is hostile to them, that is fearful of their beliefs, and that views them with suspicion. Suffering here is not because a person is evil. Suffering is for the name of Christ.

### PART 1

## Suffering

 10 minutes

Write down 2-3 things that come to mind or draw an image to capture the word 'suffering'.

**Q** When you hear the word 'suffering' what image comes to your mind?

**Q** What emotion(s) does it stir in you?

Share your images or list with your neighbour.

### PART 2

## Suffering and Community

 20 minutes

Now think about your community – either your faith community or wider social context. With the same partner, reflect on the following question:

**Q** What are your community's beliefs about suffering?

**Q** For example, are you told to accept suffering because it is the will of God? Is there an assumption that being a 'good' Christian will protect you from suffering? Are there other beliefs about suffering in your community?

If you are able, share your reflections with the wider group.

**Q** How do understandings of suffering differ across your contexts and communities?

### PART 3

## Suffering and Joy

 10 minutes

 Read aloud Peter 4.12-16:

*<sup>12</sup> Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that is taking place among you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. <sup>13</sup> But rejoice in so far as you are sharing Christ's sufferings, so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed. <sup>14</sup> If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory, which is the Spirit of God, is resting on you. <sup>15</sup> But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, a criminal, or even as a mischief-maker. <sup>16</sup> Yet if any of you suffers as a Christian, do not consider it a disgrace, but glorify God because you bear this name.*


Discuss with a partner one or both of the following questions:

**Q** What do you hear Peter saying about suffering that might be similar or different to your own view or that of your faith community?

**Q** Within your context, what does it mean to rejoice in the face of suffering?

### PART 4

## Suffering and Hospitality

 15 minutes

 Read aloud 1 Peter 8-10:

*<sup>8</sup> Above all, maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins.*

*<sup>9</sup> Be hospitable to one another without complaining. <sup>10</sup> Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received.*

 Read aloud:

1 Peter advises constant love, hospitality without grumbling, and using your gifts for the common good in order to create faithful communities that are resilient in the face of suffering. All of Peter's advice directs us towards the 'other' or the 'stranger', especially when we realise that hospitality means 'love of the stranger'.

With the whole group discuss these questions:

**Q** What does constant love and hospitality in the face of suffering look like in your context?

**Q** How are you called to give and receive hospitality in your community and wider society, especially with those who are on the margins?

### PRAY

## Concluding Prayer

 5 minutes

In closing, either the facilitator leads a prayer, drawing together the discussion, or the facilitator may invite members of the group, as they wish, to pray in response to what they have heard and shared. Prayers may be:

- For those who are suffering, in your own life, your community, in our world;
- For those who are strangers in your community;
- For ways to offer hospitality-to love the stranger-without grumbling.



## DAY 4: Notes for Further Study



### NOTES FOR PARTS 1 AND 2:

The recipients of this letter are suffering. Christ's suffering and exaltation are the example for all who suffer (2.18-25) and Christians are called to follow Christ and to know Christ's joy in the midst of suffering (3.18-22). Now, in chapter 4, Peter gets into the heart of what he means by suffering, unpacking what suffering means for his community.

1 Peter 4 begins with a foundational premise: 'Christ suffered in the flesh'. From the very first sentence of this chapter, suffering is front and centre, but with an important caveat. Peter is not writing about any suffering; he is writing about the suffering of Jesus Christ. Just as 'Christ suffered in the flesh' so Peter's community is to suffer 'also with the same intention'.

Peter is not glorifying suffering but speaks only of suffering for Christ's glory. That 'Christ suffered in the flesh' refers especially to Christ's death, a connection made clear from Peter's description of Jesus in the previous chapter (see 3.18). However, and significantly, Peter isn't calling his community to death and martyrdom. 'Christ's sufferings' certainly include his passion and death on the cross, but they may well be broader. Throughout his ministry, Jesus experienced hostility,

rejection by his closest associates, economic vulnerability, as well as physical pain. Christ's sufferings, therefore, embrace more than the suffering of those who are facing penalty of death. Christ's sufferings include all who are mocked, rejected, vulnerable and in pain because of their faith. Peter encourages his community in their suffering, directly addressing and acknowledging that their suffering is real and offering them a perspective to find encouragement, even joy, in the midst of their trials. And that perspective is simple: Christ also suffered.

Peter is clear that suffering is not something that his community endures passively, but since Christ suffered, they are to 'arm' themselves with this same 'way of thinking' (4.1). The language of 'arming' may well draw on a military image, like Paul's images of putting on spiritual armour (see Eph. 6.11-16). However, despite the military metaphor, this attitude is fundamentally non-violent and does not depart from the stance found throughout this letter. Like Christ, God's people should refuse to return abuse with abuse (2.23). They arm themselves not with physical weapons, but with the insight that they are sharing in the sufferings of Christ (4.13). Suffering should not surprise Christ's followers who know the story of Christ's suffering and the stories of the sufferings endured by God's people Israel. That the community suffers should not come as a shock, 'as though something strange were happening to you' (4.12). Suffering, rather than material blessings, is the default position of those whom God loves.

Addressing Christians with little power, Peter locates their unjust sufferings in the context of the Christian hope. Christ's glory is still to be revealed (4.13), and the glory of that end is a beacon toward which his community is called to orient their lives. Suffering will ultimately be overcome. Nevertheless, this hope and future orientation in the 'then' doesn't exempt Christians from acting and doing good 'now'. Here we remember the repeated call to do good when Peter addressed community members suffering in various ways in 2.18-3.7.

We have to remember Peter's context as a letter written to small groups of Christians who are minorities in their culture (where people worship many gods), living in an empire that is hostile to them, that is fearful of their beliefs, and that views them with suspicion. Suffering here is not because a person is evil. Suffering is for the name of Christ. Within this context, Peter describes suffering in a few ways, beginning with what it is and what it is not. He is not speaking about suffering because a person is evil. 1 Peter is not speaking about persecution by the state (such as being thrown to lions) but about social marginalisation, mockery, slander, and the pressure to conform to the standards of the day. This is important to keep in mind so that we do not look at the 'suffering' portrayed in 1 Peter as that which comes through illness or physical abuse, for example. This suffering is very clearly the result of following Christ. Christian hope is closely patterned on the experience of Jesus himself: his suffering and death (1.19; 2.21), but equally his resurrection (1.21) and exaltation (3.21).

### NOTES FOR PART 3:

One of the central points of this chapter is that not all suffering is equal—only suffering on behalf of Christ can be counted as sharing in Christ's suffering. Only a suffering that comes from living for Christ (or the name of Christ) can be included as sharing in Christ's suffering. Christians should never view this kind of suffering as a disgrace because it gives glory to God.

And even though Peter is writing about something that is very real and painful for his community, he nevertheless frames it with hope, reminding his hearers that suffering does not have the final word.

The chapter is relevant not only for Peter's time and context, but for many Christians around the world today. While some Christians have the privilege of following Christ without the threat of suffering associated with his name, in many parts of the world, being Christian results in great suffering, including the threat of death, imprisonment and limitations on identity. And so, this profoundly relevant text reminds us that as Christians who are part of one holy nation (2.9), we are to be mindful of and share in one another's sufferings.



### NOTES FOR PART 4:

Amongst various things Christians can do to support their suffering sisters and brothers, the exhortation to be hospitable (4.9) particularly stands out. We often think of hospitality as something we offer friends, family members, or others in our faith communities. That is, things like sharing a meal or offering accommodation to people we already know. Yet the Greek word for 'hospitality' has at its root the word for 'love' and the word for 'stranger' (literally: 'love of stranger'). Showing love to strangers is hard at the best of times but it is especially hard in a context of hostility and persecution when fear is high. Suffering often makes us turn in on ourselves or become self-focused in an effort to survive. Peter calls us to look outward and support those suffering through love, prayers, and hospitality. This question asks you to think about what your community might do, here and now, to offer hospitality and support to your fellow Christians who face suffering and persecution for their faith.

In showing hospitality, strangers welcome strangers, foreigners show love to foreigners, recognizing their common kinship in Christ. In a world that is often fearful of strangers, 1 Peter speaks of strangers whom God has made friends. The call to love and hospitality in this section on suffering is about drawing people together. This text calls all, especially those who might be suffering less, to move toward those who are suffering and to support them with genuine love and hospitality.



# DAY 5: Authority in Christ

## PART 1

### Shepherd

**15 minutes**

**Read aloud:** As you hear the first lines of 1 Peter 5, hold these four images of a shepherd on the next page before you.

*<sup>1</sup> Now as an elder myself and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as one who shares in the glory to be revealed, I exhort the elders among you <sup>2</sup> to tend the flock of God that is in your charge, exercising the oversight, not under compulsion but willingly, as God would have you do it-not for sordid gain but eagerly. <sup>3</sup> Do not lord it over those in your charge, but be examples to the flock. <sup>4</sup> And when the chief shepherd appears, you will win the crown of glory that never fades away.*

**Discuss the following as a group:**

- Q** What is your understanding of a shepherd?
- Q** How should a shepherd lead, according to 1 Peter?
- Read aloud:** In these images, the shepherd leads from behind the flock, in front of the flock, carries the most vulnerable in the flock, and also takes time to sit down and rest. Sometimes the shepherd might set the direction, and sometimes the shepherd lets the sheep determine the path.
- Q** How might your leadership change through these images of shepherding?
- Q** What does it mean to imitate Jesus as the 'chief shepherd'?

## PART 2

### Humility

**15 minutes**

**Read aloud 1 Peter 5.5b-7:** *<sup>5</sup> And all of you must clothe yourselves with humility in your dealings with one another, for 'God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.'<sup>6</sup> Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time. <sup>7</sup> Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you.*

**Discuss with a partner one or more of the following questions:**

- Q** What does it mean to clothe yourself with humility?
- Q** How are humility and the 'casting of your anxiety' on God connected?
- Q** How do you practice humility in your life and ministry?

## PART 3

### Roaring Lions

**25 minutes**

**Read aloud:** 1 Peter tells us that the shepherd's role includes discipline, solidarity with 'all in the world', and resisting the roaring lions in the pasture. He writes:

*<sup>8</sup> Discipline yourselves, keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour. <sup>9</sup> Resist him, steadfast in your faith, for you know that your brothers and sisters in all the world are undergoing the same kinds of suffering.*

**With the whole group discuss these questions:**

- Q** Who or what are the roaring lions in your context? Who or what is threatening your flock?
- Q** In your context, how do you resist these lions?
- Q** In your context, how do you keep steadfast in your faith?
- Q** How might you support other brothers and sisters in the world who are suffering?
- Q** What kind of support do you need in your leadership?

## PRAY

### Concluding Prayer

**5 minutes**

**In closing, either the facilitator leads a prayer, drawing together the discussion, or the facilitator may invite members of the group, as they wish, to pray in response to what they have heard and shared. Prayers may be:**

- for those in your group and their ministry as shepherds;
- for humility and the ability to cast your anxieties on God;
- for the situations discussed that threaten to kill and scatter the flock;
- for ways to remain in solidarity with one another in ministry and in suffering for Christ.

## DAY 5: Authority in Christ



Shepherd in India



Shepherd in Vietnam



Shepherd in Spain



Shepherd in China

## DAY 5: Notes for Further Study



### NOTES FOR PARTS 1:

We have to remember that this letter was written before the solidifying of ministry into a three-fold order of bishop, presbyter, and deacon. And unlike other New Testament writings, Peter does not use the term 'bishop' (episkopos) here. Instead, 1 Peter prefers the term 'elder' which does not necessarily point to formal church leadership. Rather, the term elder, which is a neutral term and can be translated as both female and male elders, designates people who are older within the congregation, and possibly people who are older in the faith.

Peter exhorts the elders to shepherd the flock within their charge. This metaphor is grounded in the earth and in tending the creatures of the earth. The verb 'to shepherd' echoes the command to Peter at the end of John's Gospel to shepherd and nurture the flock of Jesus (21.16). Moreover, it calls to mind Jesus's own teaching about the nature of the 'good shepherd' in John 10.1-18: the shepherd who lays down his life for the flock, whose sheep know his voice, who knows his sheep by name, and who leads his sheep out to pasture. Moreover, the shepherd is also the one who searches for the lost sheep (Ezekiel 34; Luke 15); the shepherd is both pastor and evangelist. This is a call to a demotion rather than a promotion within the ancient world.

As a letter written to 'aliens and exiles', it is fitting that shepherds in the Roman world were considered as outcasts; they were outsiders to the upper classes, as dirty, smelly people. A call to shepherd the flock of God thus must be a call to be with and among the people, to be involved with the most vulnerable of the community, a call away from status to service. For the author, the male and female elders must reflect this shepherding ethos. The elders, women and men, are reminded by Peter that they too remain members of the flock, that they too are shepherded by 'the chief shepherd'. The 'elders' are not the chief shepherd. No one called to be shepherd in this world is the chief shepherd. That role is only for God in Christ. Thus, the elders stand in a liminal space: they are both sheep and shepherd, both needing guidance and called to guide.

Moreover, in a reflection from a scholar who has served as a shepherd in her community, the shepherd leads from behind, allowing the flock to go where they want to go, giving them freedom and creativity. This shepherd is not in full control and does not know what kind of fruit or grass the sheep will prefer on any given day. The shepherd is responsible for keeping the flock together and protecting them so they can flourish in the pasture. The shepherd is not the commander of an army; s/he is not a general whose troops are to follow unquestioningly in step. The metaphor of shepherding for leadership contradicts a more domineering model such as one from the Roman imperial order.

Peter follows this call to 'tend the flock' with three ways that such shepherding should happen, focusing both on what this leadership should not entail and what it ought to look like. The shepherding is not to be done by compulsion, nor for gain, nor by lording it over those in their charge; rather, shepherding the flock is to be undertaken willingly, eagerly, and by setting an example for the flock. Compulsion and greed contradict the proper nature of an elder shepherd.

A true shepherd exhibits a free willingness to be a leader, neither suffering under duress nor seeking personal gain. Within the context of the persecuted church, such a leader would enter into leadership of the faith community knowing and accepting the risks, and not looking for personal glorification.

While implied in the metaphor of the shepherd - especially when literal shepherds so often lead from the back - the apostolic author explicitly forbids 'lording it over' the community. At the root of the Greek verb used here is the word 'lord'. The writer of 1 Peter seems to be reminding the elder leaders that they are not the lords of the community, for the community only has one Lord. Rather, they are to set an example. Implicit in Peter's exhortation is that the elders are to be examples of Jesus for the community (not a surprise in the context of this letter).

### NOTES FOR PART 2:

In Chapter 5, Peter turns to the theme of humility as a characteristic of the entire community, including elders and younger members, and one which changes the face of power. An important distinction needs to be made about the word 'humility'. This should not be interpreted as biblical justification of the humiliation of some (younger) members of the community by others. Perhaps, drawing from the Latin word 'humility', another way to put this is that the community is called to be grounded, each thinking of her or himself soberly and not more importantly than s/he is. Moreover, Peter underscores his call to humility by reminding the community of the scriptures' counsel that 'God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble' (see Prov. 3.34; and also James 4.6).

5.6-7 are one sentence in Greek. To begin, one notices a distinction between 5.6 and the second part of 5.5. The earlier verse called for humility, or modesty, toward one another. It is worth noting here that within the context of persecution and suffering, humility or modesty is a strategy of survival rather than a method of attaining piety. However, 5.6 shifts the discourse from relationships between community members to the call of the whole community to take its correct posture before God. Here the elders stand in exactly the same

relationship to God as the younger members of the faith. Before God, all are humbled; no one is exalted, except by God's own actions. Moreover, God's uplifting of the humble reflects God's nature; it is not a prize meted out to the most humble within the community. Humility is not a competition. Here, reading 5.5 and 5.6 together, Peter's exhortation to humility echoes the teaching of Jesus in the gospels: 'all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted' (Matt. 23.12).

Peter then immediately connects humility with the casting off of anxiety. While the NRSV translation reads 'cast all your anxiety on him', a more accurate translation is 'casting all your anxieties on him'. Casting one's anxieties on God is part of the act of humbling oneself before God. People who give their anxieties to God reflect their posture toward God.





To live humbly under 'the mighty hand of God' is to entrust oneself, one's suffering, and one's cares to God. Here, too, we find Peter grounded in the tradition of Scripture and of Jesus, where, in the Psalms, God's people are told to 'Cast your burden on the Lord, and he will sustain you' (55.22), and Jesus tells his followers not to 'worry about your life' (Matt. 6.25-34). This is a reminder to elders and to the entire flock of who is in charge, a reminder of the Christ who promised rest to those who were burdened (Matt. 11.27-28). Peter doesn't say that those who follow Christ will never have anxiety or worry.

Suffering is assumed for those who follow Christ in Peter's communities. But Peter does assure his readers that they can trust in God and God's promises—they can cast this anxiety onto him and humble themselves under his hand—because God's love and care endure.

### NOTES FOR PART 3:

Peter reminds all Christians of their proper posture toward their 'adversary, the devil' which is a posture of watchful, sober-minded resistance. The word translated as 'keep alert' should have a familiar ring, as Jesus frequently demands this of the disciples (see Matt 24.42-43; 25.13; 26.38, 40-41; Mark 13.34-35, 37; 14.34, 37-38; Luke 12.37). These actions, of course, invert the actions of the disciples in the garden of Gethsemane on the night of Jesus's arrest. Rather than following their example and falling asleep, the elders and members of this community are charged to be alert and sober-minded, ready to resist the adversary. The text does not offer an option for laziness to a shepherd-leader; part of being a good shepherd is resisting the lion.

The word 'adversary' in 5.8 derives from courts of law in the Roman world. The 'adversary' in this instance functioned as the accusing or prosecuting attorney, charging those on trial with crimes against the state or the emperor. However, one must also keep in mind the executions by wild beasts already taking place in the Roman arenas, replete with roaring lions. All of these images come into play in 1 Peter 5.8.

Each of these metaphors underscores that the adversary is not a 'person' per se, but an evil force, larger than any member of Peter's community. Peter charges all Christians to resist these diabolical forces in 1 Peter 5.9.

For contemporary Christians in the global church, those forces are numerous and should be named. At times it is easier to tell those who are suffering to keep quiet and to endure their suffering—the problematic elements of these responses we have already explored in chapters 2 and 3—but Jesus's radical call in this final chapter of 1 Peter is to confront the lions, to resist the adversary.

An important clause at the end of 5.9 reminds the community that they do not face persecution alone. Instead, they face what their siblings in the faith faced or are facing in other parts of the Roman empire. Peter, here, reminds his community of their solidarity one with another, not unlike the metaphor of the body found in 1 Corinthians 12.

Here, their unity in Christ overcomes all division and threat, even as they suffer. They do not suffer alone, nor do they resist alone. They are joined in both of these actions by their global brothers and sisters in the faith, a helpful reminder to today's Church as well.

## Supporting information

### Additional Questions for Groups

**If there is time at the end, or space for the group to re-gather at the Conference, here are further questions for reflection:**

- Q** What have you learned from studying 1 Peter as a part of your group?
- Q** What did you learn about yourself?
- Q** What did you learn about others?
- Q** What surprised you in these studies?
- Q** What will you add to your prayers as a result of these studies?

### Prayers relating to 1 Peter

O God of all grace, who has called us into your eternal glory by Jesus Christ; mercifully hear the prayers, which with hearty desires we make to you; and grant that we, being clothed with humility, and casting all our care on you, may be sober and vigilant, and continuing steadfast in the faith, may resist all the temptations of the devil, and at length obtain the crown of life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

*(Collect for the Third Sunday after Trinity, BCP)*

O God, who by your Son Jesus Christ gave to your Apostle Peter many excellent gifts, and commanded him earnestly to feed your flock: We ask you to make all bishops and pastors diligently to preach your holy Word, and the people obediently to follow the same, that they may receive the crown of everlasting glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

*(Collect for St Peter's Day, BCP)*

O God, from living stones you prepare an everlasting dwelling—a place for your majesty. Grant that in the power of the Holy Spirit those who serve you may always be kept within your presence. This we pray through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

*(Prayer for Dedication of a Church [adapted], CW)*

The God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, support, strengthen, and establish you. To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.

*(1 Peter 5.10b-11)*

Like living stones, precious in God's sight, go in peace to proclaim the mighty acts of God.



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