

Leader's Guide

Session 1: 1 Peter 1:1–25

**SESSION GOALS**

*Every session has a point—what we want to walk away from the discussion knowing, feeling, and doing.*

**Main Idea:** Rightly understanding our identity as citizens of God’s kingdom and aliens in the kingdom of darkness will equip us to love our fellow Christians well.

**Head Change:** To know that our experience in our world as foreigners is part of what God has planned for his people.

**Heart Change:** To feel welcome in the family of God despite our alien status in the world.

**Life Change:** To identify and modify the behavior patterns we’ve picked up by living in the world.

**OPEN**

**When have you felt left out or excluded from something?** Maybe from a game during school, a group of friends, or a planned event. **How did you respond to being left out? What emotions did it spark in you?**

No one likes rejection. It’s never comfortable feeling like an outsider, but it might surprise you to know that it’s part of our identity as Christians in this world. That’s one of the main themes of 1 Peter—exile. In Christ, we have become citizens of heaven and our hope no longer lies in our lives today, but in the second coming of our Savior.

**READ**

Read 1 Peter 1:1–25.

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### DISCUSS

The book of 1 Peter carries all of the pastoral warmth of an apostle who'd seen just what the world thought of those who followed Jesus and learned to live well despite it. It's a message of hope in the midst of darkness, encouragement in the midst of exhaustion, and a promise in the midst of this world of struggle.

**What do you hope to take away from this series?** List 2–3 ways in which you would like for the Lord to grow you as a result of this study.

Kyle opened this session with the illustration of the pilgrims landing at Plymouth Rock. Fleeing governmental restrictions and persecutions, they sought to create their own spaces for worship, but in doing so became “exiles” and “aliens” in their new land. The same was true for the recipients of Peter’s letter, yet their status changed not because of a geographical shift, but because of their faith in Jesus Christ.

**What are some examples of ways that you have felt like an outsider because of your faith?**

Peter’s letter was not written to instruct believers *if* they experience suffering, but *when* they experience it. Suffering is a guarantee for the Christian life, but that should not be a source of discouragement for those who follow Christ. As Kyle explained, opposition provides opportunity.

Think back to some of the suffering or trials you’ve faced. **How did you react toward your circumstances? What did your reaction reveal about the posture of your heart? What obstacles might keep you from seeing suffering and opposition as an opportunity for Jesus?**

As Kyle explained, Peter wrote his letter to Christians experiencing persecution throughout the Roman Empire. During the first three centuries of the Church, believers were feverishly oppressed for their faith. They were threatened, imprisoned, and violently executed as entertainment, like that of the gladiatorial exhibitions. This is the context Peter was writing to address so let’s take a look at what he had to say. Someone read 1 Peter 1:1–12.

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### **PEEK AT THE GREEK**

Peter addresses his readers as “exiles” in verse one, but he prefaces the term with an important modifier—*eklektois*. In English, we typically translate the term “elect,” but it describes someone or something that is selected or chosen. Peter is not writing to exiles in general, but to those “elect” or “chosen” exiles of God who have been scattered across the Roman Empire under the sovereign care of their Lord.

Throughout the Old Testament, God speaks of Israel in these terms as his chosen people (Deut. 4:37; Ps. 106:5; Isa. 14:1), but now Peter applies similar terminology to believers in Christ—a theme woven throughout his letter (1 Pet. 1:2; 2:9). Even more, most scholars believe that Peter’s primary audience would have been Gentiles instead of the Jews, who were used to being exiles. From the outset, Peter reminds his readers of their identity. Salvation in Christ extends beyond the borders of Israel. The church of Jesus Christ is God’s chosen people, a new nation composed of every tongue and every tribe. Peter saw fit to assure his readers of who they were before offering instruction for how to behave, a priority we would do well to embrace in our own spiritual lives.

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In these first few verses, it's clear that faith and suffering are not mutually exclusive. The truth is quite the opposite. From the beginning of the Church, Christians have always faced opposition and we would be naïve to expect anything different. Because of that, we should place our hope not in our temporary circumstances, but in the new life we have through Christ.

**Based on these verses, how would you define the “living hope” Peter mentions?**

**What are some of the words or phrases that stick out to you from Peter’s description of our life in Jesus Christ? What words or phrases stand out from Peter’s description of our experiences with suffering?**

**According to verse 11, what did the “Spirit of Christ” predict about the earthly ministry of the Messiah? How should Christ’s experiences inform the way we think about our own suffering?**

After reminding his readers of who they are, Peter makes a surprising statement in verse 6: “In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.” He doesn’t tell his readers that soon their faith will bring them reprieve, that God will reward them with worldly comfort. Rather, he makes it clear that suffering and joy can—and should—co-exist.

**Who is an example in your life of someone who demonstrated joy in suffering? How was their joy visible? What kind of effect did it have on you?**

**According to verses 6–7, how does Peter describe the “grief” and “trials” we face in life, specifically in terms of their duration? Why does God allow us to experience them?**

Like children adopted into a loving family, we have been chosen by God and blessed not only with a birthright, but also with an inheritance sealed for us by the Holy Spirit. We belong to a loving Father who allows hardship into our lives for the sake of maturing our faith. Once again, throughout these verses Peter is explaining who we are because our hope comes from a new identity, not merely new instructions.

**How should this truth about your identity in Christ shape the way you respond to suffering and hostility? What could change about your behavior in light of the truth that your suffering is never a surprise to God?**

Scripture contains a lot of commands, but God never tells us what to do before he tells us who we are. Through the first twelve verses of his letter, Peter follows this same model reminding persecuted Christians that they are children of God and their suffering is being used to refine their faith. But that still leaves us with the question of what we are to do with our lives between now and the time that we meet Christ in glory? Someone read verses 13–25.

**Which of Peter’s instructions stand out to you the most from these verses? In what ways are they relevant to your spiritual walk today?**

There are a number of imperatives throughout this passage, but Kyle grouped them into two general commands—live holy and love others. That’s the abbreviated version of what Peter is communicating. During the session, Kyle defined the meaning of holy as something that is “separate” or “set apart.”

**Where do you find it most difficult to “live holy” in your daily life? What truth can you take away from this week’s passage as an encouragement toward holiness?**

Living holy in the context of suffering means facing our circumstances in a way that is set apart, namely, with the joy of our hope in Christ. **How has suffering provided you with opportunities to share your faith? If not you, then how have you seen it provide opportunities for other Christians to share theirs?**

The second half of this section calls Christians to love their brothers and sisters sincerely. Through faith in Christ, we are family, children of the same Father.

**What opportunities do you have to serve other believers in your midst today? How can you be an encouragement, especially to someone who may be suffering?**

In the weeks ahead, we’ll see this principle applied more broadly to unbelievers, but Peter begins his letter to a suffering community by reminding them of their identity in

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