

STRANGERS ^{IN THE} WORLD

A Study of 1 Peter

Small Group
Leader's Guide

SESSION ONE

Resident Aliens

Lesson Summary

Christians are weird. Or at least they used to be. Early Christians tended to stick out, being often regarded by their neighbors as odd, as different, as people who lived by strange values and strange morals. And according to Peter, that is precisely how it should be, because Christians are “sojourners and exiles” (1 Peter 2:11), strangers within their own communities, resident aliens who know that their citizenship lies elsewhere.

Appointed Scripture

This week, read and discuss **1 Peter 1:1-16** as a group. What grabs your attention as you read this passage? What do you think Peter means when he talks about a “living hope”? How does Peter relate this hope to our present life?

Group Discussion Questions

1. What was one point from this week's teaching that stood out to you?
2. Do you think that Christians are regarded as strange today? Why or why not? If so, what do you think makes Christians stand out?
3. The 2nd century *Letter to Diognetus* describes Christians this way: “They love everyone, and by everyone they are persecuted. They are poor, yet they make many rich.... They are cursed, yet they bless; they are insulted, yet they offer respect.” What do you think enabled those early Christians to live that way? Do you think that this is still a fair description of Christians?
4. One of the primary distinctives of Christians, according to Peter, is the hope that motivates and encourages them. Do you feel hopeful? What makes you hopeful? How can we help each to remember the “living hope” of resurrection from the dead?
5. What do you find most challenging about Peter's message? What is one way that you could apply Peter's teaching to your life in the coming week?

Prayer & Assigned Reading

Spend some time sharing prayer requests with one another and end in prayer. Encourage your group members to spend the next week reading and reflecting on **1 Peter 2**.

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SESSION TWO

The Christian Revolution

Lesson Summary

The Roman world was very similar to our own. Just like us, they longed for the respect and honor and admiration of those around them. As with us, this made it very difficult for them to submit to and serve one another. And yet, that is precisely what Peter told them to do. Not to fight for their own honor or status but serve one another. This was a strange, even revolutionary message. It went complete against the normal ways of the world. But for Peter, this was the clear implication of the revolution that had taken place in the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Appointed Scripture

This week, read and discuss **1 Peter 2:13-25** as a group.

Group Discussion Questions

1. What was one point from this week's teaching that stood out to you?
2. Talk about Martin Luther's two propositions about Christian freedom: (1) A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none; (2) A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all. How have you experienced both this freedom and this call to your service in your own life?
3. The Roman world to whom Peter's audience belonged was obsessed with the pursuit of honor and status. How do you see this longing for honor or respect or status in our culture today? How do you see it in yourself? How does Peter address this longing?
4. What do you think about Peter's admonition to us to submit ourselves to one another and those in authority (even if they don't treat us justly or respectfully)? Talk about a time when you have struggled to serve or submit to an authority that you did not respect? How did you handle that situation? What advice do you think Peter might have given you?
5. What do you find most challenging about Peter's message? What is one way that you could apply Peter's teaching to your life in the coming week?

Prayer & Assigned Reading

Spend some time sharing prayer requests with one another and end in prayer. Encourage your group members to spend the next week reading and reflecting on **1 Peter 3**.

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SESSION THREE

Unrevolutionary Implications?

Lesson Summary

In chapter 3 of his letter, Peter begins to discuss the concrete implications of the gospel. In comparison with his revolutionary message about Jesus' death and resurrection, however, these implications seem to be disappointingly mundane. But Peter makes it clear that it is through these mundane things, the everyday ways we treat one another, that Christians bear witness to the hope which defines them.

Appointed Scripture

This week, read and discuss **1 Peter 3:13-17** as a group. How does this passage speak to Christian experience today? How could we put its teaching into practice?

Group Discussion Questions

1. What was one point from this week's teaching that stood out to you?
2. Discuss the quote that is often (though falsely) attributed to St. Francis: "Preach the gospel at all times. Use words if necessary." Why do you think this quote resonates with people? In what way can we preach the gospel without words? Can you think of any specific examples where Christians have done this well?
3. Why does Peter give specific instructions to husbands and wives about how they should treat one another? Now read Ephesians 5:22-33. How would you compare what Paul says there to what Peter says in 1 Peter 3? How might Christians bear witness to the gospel through their marriage?
4. In 3:9 Peter says, "Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary bless, for to this you were called..." Why do you think it is so difficult to bless people who mistreat you? How could you put this teaching into practice in your relationships with family members? Coworkers? Fellow church members?
5. What do you find most challenging about Peter's message? What is one way that you could apply Peter's teaching to your life in the coming week?

Prayer & Assigned Reading

Spend some time sharing prayer requests with one another and end in prayer. Encourage your group members to spend the next week reading and reflecting on **1 Peter 4**.



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SESSION FOUR

What Was, What Is, What Is To Come

Lesson Summary

"I wonder what sort of a tale we've fallen into?" That's a question that Sam Gamgee poses to his friend Frodo Baggins in *The Lord of the Rings*. That's also a question that the apostle Peter seems to be answering in the fourth chapter of his letter. Peter wants to instruct Christians on how to conduct themselves in the world, and to do so, he reminds them of the grand story of which they are a part and of where they are in that story.

Appointed Scripture

This week, read and discuss **1 Peter 4:1-11** as a group. What do you think about the contrasting behaviors that Peter describes in verses 3 to 4 as opposed to verses 7 to 10? What reasoning does he give for Christians to avoid the first set of behaviors and embrace the second?

Group Discussion Questions

1. What was one point from this week's teaching that stood out to you?
2. Discuss the question that Sam poses to Frodo: "I wonder what sort of a tale we've fallen into?" How would you answer that question? What kind of a story is the story of your own life? Do you feel like you are a part of a larger story?
3. Read Genesis 4:7 and 1 Peter 5:8. How do these two verses impact the way you think about sin? How do they explain Peter's urgency in encouraging Christians to avoid sin? How can we take the danger of sin seriously without falling prey to fear or despair?
4. Read and discuss 1 Peter 4:12-13. What sort of "fiery trials" have you experienced recently? How does knowing your future glory change your experience of suffering? How can you rejoice and be glad when you experience suffering?
5. What do you find most challenging about Peter's message? What is one way that you could apply Peter's teaching to your life in the coming week?

Prayer & Assigned Reading

Spend some time sharing prayer requests with one another and end in prayer. Encourage your group members to spend the next week reading and reflecting on **1 Peter 5**.

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SESSION FIVE

The Way of the Cross

Lesson Summary

Peter began his letter by reminding early Christians that they were “aliens” and “strangers” in their own hometowns. Now, at the end of his letter, he helps us understand why this is the case. It’s because the Christian way of life is patterned after the way of a crucified Messiah. It’s because Christians are called to follow the way of the cross.

Appointed Scripture

This week, read and discuss **1 Peter 5:1-11** as a group. What stands out to you about Peter’s description of Christian leadership in verses 2 and 3? What do you think Peter means when he instructs us to “humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God” in verse 6? Why does he explain it by talking about “casting all your anxieties” on God?

Group Discussion Questions

1. What was one point from this week’s teaching that stood out to you?
2. Having come to the end of 1 Peter, what is one theme that has stood out to you about this letter? What is something that you’re hoping to take away from your study of it?
3. Why do you think the cross was so repulsive to people in the ancient world? Why would they have recoiled with such hostility at Christian devotion to a crucified Messiah?
4. How would you relate Peter’s description of Christian leadership in verses 2 through 4 to Jesus’ own pattern of leadership? In other words, how does Jesus model what Peter is asking from Christian leaders?
5. Peter’s “cross-shaped” instructions to the Christian community include exhortations to humility and submission. How might you apply Peter’s exhortations in your own life? Why is it difficult for you to do as Peter says and “clothe yourself with humility”?
6. What do you find most challenging about Peter’s message? What is one way that you could apply Peter’s teaching to your life in the coming week?

Prayer & Assigned Reading

Spend some time sharing prayer requests with one another and end in prayer. End your prayer by saying together the words of this prayer from the Book of Common Prayer:

*Almighty God, whose most dear Son went not up to joy but first he suffered pain, and entered not into glory before he was crucified: Mercifully grant that we, walking in the way of the Cross, may find it none other than the way of life and peace; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord. **Amen.***