



LifeLight

"In Him was life, and that life was the light of men." John 1:4

1 and 2 Peter



LEADERS GUIDE



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1 Peter revised from material prepared by David Marth and Lenore Buth. New material (2 Peter) written by Roland Cap Ehlke.

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Introduction

Welcome to LifeLight

A special pleasure is in store for you. You will be instrumental in leading your brothers and sisters in Christ closer to Him who is our life and light (John 1:4). You will have the pleasure of seeing fellow Christians discover new insights and rediscover old ones as they open the Scriptures and dig deep into them, perhaps deeper than they have ever dug before. More than that, you will have the pleasure of sharing in this wonderful study.

LifeLight—An In-depth Study

LifeLight is a series of in-depth Bible studies. The goal of LifeLight is that through a regular program of in-depth personal and group study of Scripture, more and more Christian adults may grow in their personal faith in Jesus Christ, enjoy fellowship with the members of His body, and reach out in love to others in witness and service.

In-depth means that this Bible study includes the following four components: individual daily home study; discussion in a small group; a lecture presentation on the Scripture portion under study; and an enhancement of the week's material (through reading the enrichment magazine).

LifeLight Participants

LifeLight participants are adults who desire a deeper study of the Scriptures than is available in the typical Sunday morning adult Bible class. (Mid-to-older teens might also be LifeLight participants.) While LifeLight does not assume an existing knowledge of the Bible or special experience or skills in Bible study, it does assume a level of commitment that will bring participants to each of the nine weekly assemblies having read the assigned readings and attempted to answer the study questions. Daily reading and study will require from 15 to 30 minutes for the five days preceding the LifeLight assembly. The day following the assembly will be spent reviewing the previous week's study by going over the completed study leaflet and the enrichment magazine.

LifeLight Leadership

While the in-depth process used by LifeLight begins with individual study and cannot achieve its aims without this individual effort, it cannot be completed by individual study alone. Therefore, trained leaders are necessary. You fill one or perhaps more of the important roles described below.

The Director

This person oversees the LifeLight program in a local center (which may be a congregation or a center operated by several neighboring congregations). The director

- serves as the parish LifeLight overall coordinator and leader;
- coordinates the scheduling of the LifeLight program;
- orders materials;
- convenes LifeLight leadership team meetings;
- develops publicity materials;
- recruits participants;
- maintains records and budgeting;
- assigns, with the leadership team, participants to small discussion groups;
- makes arrangements for facilities;
- communicates outreach opportunities to small-group leaders and to congregational boards;
- follows up on participants who leave the program.

The Assistant Director (optional)

This person may assist the director. Duties listed for the director may be assigned to the assistant director as mutually agreeable.

The Lecture Leader

This person prepares and delivers the lecture at the weekly assembly. **(Lesson material for the lecture leader begins on p. 9.)** The lecture leader

- prepares and presents the Bible study lecture to the large group;
- prepares worship activities (devotional thought, hymn, prayer), using resources in the study leaflet and leaders guide and possibly other, outside sources;
- helps the small-group discussion leaders to grow in understanding the content of the lessons;
- encourages prayer at weekly leadership team and discussion leaders meetings.

The Small-Group Coordinator (optional; the director may fill this role)

This person supervises and coordinates the work of the small-group discussion leaders. The small-group coordinator

- recruits with the leadership team the small-group discussion leaders;
- trains or arranges for training of the discussion leaders;
- assists the director and discussion leaders in follow-up and outreach;
- encourages the discussion leaders to contact absent group members;
- participates in the weekly leadership team and discussion leaders equipping meetings;
- provides ongoing training and support as needed.

The Small-Group Discussion Leaders

These people guide and facilitate discussion of LifeLight participants in the small groups. **(Lesson material for the small-group leaders begins on p. 51.)** There should be one discussion leader for every group of no more than 12 participants. The small-group discussion leaders are, perhaps, those individuals who are most important to the success of the program. They should, therefore, be chosen with special care and be equipped with skills needed to guide discussion and to foster a caring fellowship within the group. These discussion leaders

- prepare each week for the small-group discussion by using the study leaflet and small-group leaders guide section for that session (see p.53);
- read the enrichment magazine as a study supplement;
- guide and facilitate discussion in their small group;

- encourage and assist the discussion group in prayer;
- foster fellowship and mutual care within the discussion group;
- attend weekly discussion leaders training meetings.

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Leadership Training

LifeLight leaders will meet weekly to review the previous week’s work and plan the coming week. At this session, leaders can address concerns and prepare for the coming session. LifeLight is a 1½-hour program with no possibility for it to be taught in the one hour typically available on Sunday mornings. Some congregations, however, may want to use the Sunday morning Bible study hour for LifeLight preparation and leadership training. In such a meeting, the lecture leader and/or small-group coordinator may lead the discussion leaders through the coming week’s lesson, reserving 5 or 10 minutes for problem solving or other group concerns.

While it requires intense effort, LifeLight has proven to bring great benefit to LifeLight participants. The effort put into this program, both by leaders and by participants, will be rewarding and profitable.

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The LifeLight Weekly Schedule

Here is how LifeLight will work week by week:

1. Before session 1, each participant will receive the study leaflet for session 1 and the enrichment magazine for the course. The study leaflet contains worship resources (for use both in individual daily study and at the opening of the following week’s assembly) and readings and study questions for five days. Challenge questions will lead those participants who have the time and desire a greater challenge into even deeper levels of study.
2. After the five days of individual study at home, participants will gather for a weekly assembly of all LifeLight participants. The assembly will begin with a brief period of worship (5 minutes). Participants will then join their assigned small discussion groups (of 12 or fewer, who will remain the same throughout the course), where they will go over the week’s study questions together (55 minutes).

Assembling together once again, participants will listen to a lecture presentation on the readings they have studied in the previous week and discussed in their small groups (20 minutes). After the lecture presentation, the director or another leader will distribute the study leaflet for the following week. Closing announcements and other necessary business may take another five minutes before dismissal.

In some places some small groups will not join the weekly assembly because of scheduling or other reasons. Such groups may meet at another time and place (perhaps in the home of one of the small group's members). They will follow the same schedule, but they may use a cassette tape to listen to the week's lecture presentation. The discussion leader will obtain the leaflets from the director. A congregation may record the lecture given by the lecture leader at the weekly assembly and duplicate it for use by other groups meeting later in the week.

3. On the day following the assembly, participants will review the preceding week's work by rereading the study leaflet they completed (and that they perhaps supplemented or corrected during the discussion in their small group) and by reading appropriate articles in the enrichment magazine.

Then the LifeLight weekly study process will begin all over again!

Recommended Study Resources for 1 and 2 Peter

Lenski, R. C. H. *The Interpretation of the Epistles of St. Peter, St. John and St. Jude*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1963. This volume (originally published by Lutheran Book Concern, Columbus, OH, 1938) is a reliable, comprehensive, confessionally sound commentary by a Lutheran theologian.

The Lutheran Study Bible. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009. This resource contains more than 26,000 study and application notes, a most thorough reference guide, and over 90,000 cross-references, as well as a 31,000-entry concordance, maps, charts, and timelines.

The Lutheran Bible Companion. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2014. This new resource is a highly visual two-volume handbook that welcomes Christians to a deeper exploration of the cultural and historical contexts of the events captured in Scripture and the Apocrypha.

Called to Live in Christ—Forever

1 Peter 1:1–12

Preparing for the Session

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Central Focus

In the resurrection of Jesus Christ, God's people are assured of an eternal inheritance, which is theirs by faith. Peter writes to people who have just turned their backs on the pagan world by being baptized into Christ's name. These new Christians would face intense pressure through persecutions and hardships. In this first session Peter writes about who Christians are, who God is, and how God equips His people to do battle without being intimidated by the oppression to come.

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Objectives

That the participant, as a child of God and with the Holy Spirit's help, will be led to

1. know who we are as baptized children of Jesus Christ;
 2. affirm the importance of Jesus' resurrection in our faith and life;
 3. understand the godly purpose of suffering and persecution.
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Note for the small-group leaders: Lesson notes and other materials you will need begin on page 53.

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For the Lecture Leader

The lecture leader has a key role in portraying the Good News of life in Christ. Your presentation climaxes a week of reading the Word and answering daily questions as well as the small-group meetings. Consider it a privilege to be chosen as an instrument for proclaiming the Gospel. View this study of 1 and 2 Peter as a unique privilege. Think Peter's thoughts! Pray for his zeal! Don't fudge on your enthusiasm for the Gospel! Be challenged by the Spirit as He guides your sharing of

practical applications for our world today!

Remember these parts of your assignment: (1) Pray for God's blessing and for the guiding presence and help of the Holy Spirit. (2) Read and study God's Word daily, for that Word will strengthen your own faith and life in Christ and make you a faithful witness. Read the daily assignments; answer the study questions; take part in a discussion group. (3) Prepare your presentations carefully. Put them into your own words, using the printed lecture as a guide to follow closely. Say it the way *you* would say it, especially if the way it is written is foreign to you. (4) Speak the Word boldly! (5) Ask someone in your audience to help you by watching and listening for ways to make your presentations more effective. Pick someone who will be a positive and helpful critic. (6) Pray again. Thank God for giving you an opportunity to pass His Word along to others. Ask Him to bless your effort.

Session Plan

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Worship

Begin the session with the hymn and responsive reading printed in the study leaflet. (Accompaniments are available in denominational hymnals, such as *Lutheran Worship* [refer to hymnal index]. Note: Concordia Publishing House has available *Every Voice a Song*, a 9-CD set of organ accompaniments for 180 hymns and liturgy. All the initial worship hymns in the LifeLight courses are included in this resource. It's especially helpful for mission congregations and small parishes. See the list of study resources on page 7.) Follow with the prayer.

Prayer

Lord God, heavenly Father, as we begin this study of Your Word, may Your Spirit give us a fresh understanding of the riches You shower on us through Your Son's death and resurrection. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

Lecture Presentation

You may want to display the title and three subtitles of the lecture presentation on the chalkboard, newsprint, an overhead transparency, or a PowerPoint presentation. Point to major divisions as you come to them in the lecture.

Introduction

“Howdy, stranger!”

That greeting may cause you to think of a bad Western movie. But it is really an appropriate line as we begin our study of 1 Peter. That is what Peter says as he begins: “Howdy, stranger!”

1 Who We Are (1:1–2)

As was customary in letter writing in the days of the apostles (when letters were often rolled up in scrolls), the signature comes first (1:1): “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ.”

Peter’s first Letter was written shortly before his martyrdom, probably around the year 64. He introduces himself by using the name given him by Jesus in Matthew 16:18. Peter knows who *he* is. He is an apostle; he belongs to Jesus Christ because Jesus had appointed him to that office. He is responsible to Christ and speaks under His authority.

Peter knew who he was—a new man! Jesus had restored him through His death and resurrection. The authority with which Peter and the other missionary disciples spoke and wrote came from the Master Himself. Peter’s listeners could be sure about the message he delivered. Peter knew that he had been “called.”

Peter also knew who his readers were. They were “strangers” to the world—but to God they were chosen, or His “elect.” Jesus used the same terminology at the conclusion of the parable of the marriage feast when He said (Matthew 22:14): “For many are invited, but few are chosen [elected].” Peter uses *chosen* other times in this Letter (2:4; 5:13). How wonderful to be among those people whom God has elected, or chosen, as His very own. Peter will tell us just how wonderful this is a little later on, when we come to 2:4–10. We have been elected, chosen, by God Himself!

But to the world around us we are rejected and regarded as strangers. Peter refers to his readers as scattered, or dispersed, among the people who belong to this world. Jews living in foreign lands were often referred to by their stay-at-home fellow Jews as “the Diaspora.” They were Jews living among the Gentiles, residing with people among whom they did not belong. Peter applies this concept to Christians, whether they are native to their neighborhoods or not. For if they ever did belong there, they did not anymore. Now they had become strangers, even to their relatives and former friends. They were Christians now with a new homeland. While they continued to live scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia (Roman provinces in what is now northern and western Turkey), their real homeland had now become God’s kingdom—ultimately, heaven. As people who have been chosen (elected) by God, the new Christians Peter addressed were persons who belonged to some other land and people, who were only living temporarily with people to whom they do not belong. They were like Abraham (Genesis 12), who had been “called” from his homeland to a place where God would bless him and make of him a great nation.

Like Peter’s first readers, we, too, live among people with whom we do not belong, because they are not heavenly minded but earthly minded. And those who are earthly minded are not always comfortable with heavenly minded people.

Have you heard the story of the harpist who lugged her cumbersome instrument from place to place in order to perform? One day she carried her harp into a hotel elevator. On the way up, the elevator stopped and a man started to enter. Noticing the unusual cargo, he hesitated. Then with a smile he quipped, “I don’t know if I want to get on with you or not. How far up are you going?”

Those who are earthly minded are not comfortable with the heaven-bound. Tensions arise when we decide that we are not going to live by the world’s ideals any longer. In fact, these tensions may become actual hatred on the part of the unbelieving world around us. Jesus explained why His disciples would experience this hatred. “If the world hates you,” He said (John 15:18–19), “keep in mind that it hated Me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not

belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.”

Some experience this hatred by the world as active and violent persecution. They may even have their lives taken from them. Some are abused or mistreated. Some only feel the scorn or ridicule of others. Whatever the degree of this persecution, it comes from an unbelieving world, incited by its prince, the devil. The world sees Christ’s followers as strange and unwanted, even as threatening, because they are living judgments against sin and unbelief.

So Christians continue to live in a world that is familiar (because they were once part of it) and yet strange. Jesus referred to the position of His believers as He prayed for us (John 17:14–18): “I have given them Your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. My prayer is not that You take them out of the world but that You protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; Your word is truth. As you sent Me into the world, I have sent them into the world.”

The new believers who first received Peter’s Letter were scattered, or dispersed, among the earthly minded, living as spiritual exiles in places that were the same and yet different. The dispersion of which Peter writes is a *spiritual* exile, for those who have been marked in Baptism by the sign of the cross are no longer *of* this world. They had become “fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household,” as we are today (Ephesians 2:19)!

The verbs in verse 2 indicate who we baptized believers in Jesus Christ are. We are chosen according to God’s foreknowledge, sanctified by the Spirit, and cleansed by the blood of Jesus. Notice the phrase “sprinkling by His blood.” It recalls Exodus 24:7–8, where Moses sprinkles the Israelites with blood as they enter into a covenant with God. Life with God, who chooses, redeems, and enlightens, is followed naturally by obedience. Who and whose we are go hand in hand with obedience to the will of Him who gave us physical life and new spiritual life. As New Testament people we know that the blood shed by Jesus on Calvary’s cross is the sacrificial blood that has been applied to us and has cleansed us. We need no other sprinkling. In the sprinkling of our Baptisms we are touched with the life-giving power that

the Savior so dutifully won for us. We are sealed as His people and brought into a new relationship with God.

And the result, as stated in verse 2, is that we have grace and peace “in abundance.” God pours grace—His forgiving love—into our lives through the Gospel of Jesus! That grace is ours in an amount more than enough to cover all of our sins and shortcomings—whatever they have been or are or will be. And as God’s abundant grace flows over us, peace settles within the deepest part of our hearts. We are altogether at peace with God, reconciled to Him through Christ.

What a way to begin this Letter! Chosen by God, made holy by the work of the Spirit through faith in the Gospel, and cleansed by the saving blood of Jesus! Bathed with grace! Filled with peace!

2 Who God Is (1:3–9)

No wonder Peter continues with a stirring exclamation of praise! Peter’s words praising God remind us of David’s songs (for example, Psalm 103) of “Praise the Lord.” We have so much for which to praise and thank Him! For *we* are who *we* are because *God* is who *He* is. The order of that sentence is extremely important.

Verse 3—The first thing Peter mentions in praise of God, who “has given us new birth into a living hope,” is that we have a new life. This is the new life Jesus spoke about when He told Nicodemus (John 3:3), “No one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.” Paul, in Ephesians 2:4–5, says that “God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions.” This new birth has come about only as the result of God’s mercy. The Greek word for “mercy” recalls the pitiful condition from which God raised us. Our resurrection from sin and death has come about only through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

So, does God deserve all the praise we can give Him? You know He does! If what Peter has told us about so far—the new life we have in Jesus and the hope of resurrection and eternal life through Jesus’ own resurrection from the dead—is not enough to move us to praise God, then consider what is waiting for us in heaven. There we have our inheritance. And what an inheritance! It can never be lost, stolen, damaged, rusted out, eaten up, or

faded away! Compare that with the best we can hope for—or even dream about—in this world! And what’s more, we will never grow tired or bored or disenchanted with our heavenly inheritance, as we often do with the best this world can offer. Praise God? Yes!

But what if I don’t hold out long enough to get my hands on this heavenly inheritance? What if I lose my grip on my salvation or weaken under the pressure of this world’s hatred? Peter replies: Not to worry! God will guard and keep you in faith until that day comes when you will receive your inheritance. He will hold His powerful hand over you to shield you. Just think of how God preserved Daniel in the lions’ den, Daniel’s three young friends in the furnace of fire, and John the Baptist in prison. God preserved them all in faith and shielded them with His power.

Verses 5–6—Peter’s term translated *shielded* literally means “to post a sentry.” It is a military word, reminding us that we are taking part in a war, that we have a fight on our hands. Our struggle is against God’s own enemies—the devil himself, the unbelieving world around us, even our own sinful nature within us. Against all of these we will have to struggle through “all kinds of trials.” There will even be grief to suffer. But we go off to battle, as the hymn writer says in “Onward, Christian Soldiers,” with the cross of Jesus going on before us. Are we not in partnership with a mighty God?

The God Peter would have us know and trust is the same one James introduces in his Letter (James 1:2): “Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds.” Peter admits that there may be some grief involved, but the joy produced in the long run is the fruit of a firm faith in the one true God. What a promise for new Christians to hear as they go into battle!

God’s power is not changed by whether or not we choose to trust Him. But what does happen when we trust God, Peter says in verse 7, is that *our* faith is established as genuine. Like gold, faith is tested by the fire of trial, even by suffering and persecution. Throughout such ordeals Christ may remain hidden (1 John 3:2), and that is all right. Faith is not seeing Jesus, but believing when He is unseen (Hebrews 11:1; John 20:29).

This point is illustrated by a story about a boy who was about to enter a dark cemetery at night. Through the

cemetery ran a path that provided a shortcut home. His friend asked him, “Aren’t you afraid to walk through the cemetery alone at night?”

“No,” answered the boy. “Do you see that light shining in the window there in the distance? My father puts it there so I can find my way home. I just follow the light!”

What a blessing it is to know this God! As Hebrews 6:5 encourages us, we “have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age.” The outcome of that faith, Peter declares in 1 Peter 1:9, is that we carry around with us the joy of our salvation. The God who offers us a living hope through the resurrected Christ is the same God who will bring us, His elect, through the fiery ordeals of life.

3 What the Prophets Have Said about God and Us (1:10–12)

Our life of faith comes as a result of God’s plan of grace, which was laid out by God and revealed by many different voices over the centuries. Peter revels in the fact that, as part of God’s salvation plan, there was much searching and inquiry among the prophets. In fact, Jesus tells us in connection with His teaching on parables in Matthew 13:17, “Many prophets and righteous men longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.”

Verse 11—The Old Testament is filled with stories that exhibit God’s grace. God saved His people again and again, restoring them with the spiritual help that came through His kindness and forgiveness. But not until the holy writers’ prophecies were fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ did the full glory of God’s grace appear. We are heirs of eternal life, because the predicted sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glory have taken place.

What a marvelous privilege we are given in God’s kingdom! To think that the Old Testament prophets were inspired by the Spirit for *our* sake, that we might hear and read of God’s plan to save sinners and that we might know that such things were written down for and about us! Long ago God conceived, planned, and carried out a way to save us! This is so wonderful that even the angels (who do not need to be forgiven and saved because they have not sinned) watched with excitement and joy as God’s plan was carried out. In

Luke 15:7, 10, Jesus tells us that the angels rejoice as each sinner is saved. All this that Peter has written has meaning for me. 1 Corinthians 9:25 reminds me I am one of the elect, chosen by a God who offers to me and to all believers a lasting crown, our salvation. We have the Savior of whom the apostles and prophets declared (Acts 4:12), "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."

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Concluding Activities

If time permits, sing a stanza or two of "How Great Thou Art." Invite the class to spend the next week looking for signs in the people and situations they encounter that cause them to reflect on the goodness of God. Tell several Christian friends how much it means to you to have them as coheirs of eternal life. Read Psalm 46.

Distribute the enrichment magazine and encourage participants to read it as part of their weekly study. Then distribute study leaflet 2.

Called to Reflect Our Redeemer

1 Peter 1:13–2:10

Preparing for the Session

Central Focus

As we feed on God’s Word, we more and more become the holy people He has made us. We have been born anew by God’s mercy “into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1:3). We are called to live this hope in action and conduct. As sojourners and foreigners on this earth because of the Gospel, which separates us as God’s holy people, we are to reflect that hope with lives of godly living. Jesus is the motivation for and model of the righteous living of which Peter speaks.

Objectives

That the participant, as a child of God and with the Holy Spirit’s help, will be led to

1. recognize our identity as God’s holy people through the blood of Christ;
2. hunger for God’s Word so that we may be equipped and mature;
3. see ourselves as part of the “priesthood of all believers.”

Note for small-group leaders: Lesson notes and other materials you will need begin on page 56.

For the Lecture Leader

This lesson provides an opportunity to testify personally of your love for God’s Word and how you use it. Tell your class how the Word has helped you in your faith and life. As you do so, do not disregard or play down the tension resulting when the imperative of the Word to live as Christ lived runs into our own weaknesses. As you discuss this tension, focus upon our Lord Jesus, the “stone the builders rejected” (2:7). Never under-

estimate the life-changing power of the Word in your listeners’ lives. As you help people become sufficiently acquainted with biblical texts and implications for life and mission, know and believe that the Holy Spirit is performing those transformations right before your very eyes! Come to every meeting, large-group lecture, and prayer time with high expectations.

Session Plan

Worship

Begin the session with the hymn printed in the study leaflet. (Accompaniments are available in denominational hymnals, such as *Lutheran Worship* [refer to hymnal index], or on the *Every Voice a Song* CD set.) Follow with the prayer.

Prayer

Father, You tell us that we are Your chosen people, Your royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to You so that we may declare the praises of Jesus, the light of the world. Now enable us to live out what You declare us already to be, through Your Holy Spirit working within our hearts. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

Lecture Presentation

Introduction

“Let’s get to work!”

That’s what a manager or supervisor might say at the conclusion of a department meeting. He or she may have evaluated what has been done and prepared the group for the task at hand. The conference is concluded: “Now, let’s get to work!”

That’s what St. Peter is saying to us in the section we studied this week. 1 Peter 1:13 says, “Prepare your minds for action.” Or, in the more literal translation of the King James Version, “Gird up the loins of your mind.” The girding of one’s loins, a frequent scriptural edict, referred to the long, loose robes worn by peo-

ple in the Middle East. These robes were drawn up and belted at the waist to allow for easier working or walking. We are exhorted to gird up our “minds,” decisively giving them over to God’s attention, thereby making it easier to work and to walk in His way.

1 The Call to Holy Living (1:13–16)

Peter sets a number of steps before us to start us on our way toward holy living. First, we are told to be self-controlled (“sober”). Soberness demands a calm, steady mind that considers situations and then makes good decisions. Two other times in this Epistle Peter admonishes his readers to approach Christian living soberly, in a self-controlled way (4:7; 5:8). Paul also admonishes the Thessalonians to live soberly, with self-control (1 Thessalonians 5:6–8).

Now we are encouraged to set our hope fully on God’s grace. Setting our hope means to focus on that which, when all is said and done, really matters. For Peter all that matters is to depend fully on the grace being revealed in Jesus Christ. Attentive minds, soberness of thought, hope in God’s grace—that’s the key to holy living.

The hope of eternal life, which Peter outlined so beautifully as he began this Letter, goes hand in hand with holiness. As we read in John’s first Letter (1 John 3:3), “Everyone who has this hope in Him [Jesus] purifies himself, just as He is pure.” Holy living means total dependence on the saving Gospel.

But holy living does not come naturally or easily—even for Christians. In fact, the attempt at holy living sets up a real tension within us. The tension is between the total obedience the Lord commands and the natural disobedience our sinful nature exhibits. Understand that this obedience is not simply a matter of living right and practicing good morals. Our obedience is a personal commitment to the Master Himself, not to some legalities.

In other words, Christian obedience always grows out of faith. That is why unbelievers cannot obey in this way, even when they behave themselves. Their evil desires—even when suppressed—block an understanding of Christlike living, leaving those without faith ignorant of the basis of holy living. A life without Christ dredges up

scheme after scheme of lustful living. Without Christ we live as though only we mattered, and we will do whatever it takes to please ourselves. Paul says (Ephesians 4:18–19) that those who live without Christ “are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more.”

Holy living is a Gospel calling. As Bible commentator R. C. H. Lenski notes: “To be holy is our obligation, not in the sense of an outward legal requirement laid upon us, for which we must furnish the ability and power, but as the result of God’s call, which furnishes us the power and ability.”

The Interpretation of the Epistles of St. Peter, St. John, and St. Jude (Columbus, OH: Lutheran Book Concern, 1938), p. 57.

When God calls us through the Gospel, He calls us to be holy. First and most important, God has made us holy in His sight by clothing us with the holiness of His Son. We are reminded in Galatians 3:27, “For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.” And, as God has given us holiness through faith in Christ, He *calls* us now to exhibit holiness in our daily living. He not only *calls* us to exhibit this holiness, but He enables us to do it. Through the Gospel the Spirit takes up residence within us and works through us, conforming our lives to Christ’s call to (1 Peter 1:15) “be holy in all you do.”

2 Christ’s Holy Living (1:17–21)

The Old Testament quality of holiness (Leviticus 11:44–45; 19:2; 20:7) quoted by Peter in verse 16 means a “setting apart for service.” The Lord, through Moses, redeemed Israel from Egypt and made a covenant with them. The terms of this covenant, with its system of sacrifices pointing ahead to Christ, made Israel holy before God. By this covenant Israel was consecrated, or set apart, as a nation holy to God as servants of His saving will for the world.

In the same way, the Lord has redeemed us through Christ and has made us holy through His sacrifice on the cross. The Lord has also consecrated us, setting us

apart as servants of His saving will in the world. We are holy to the Lord, set apart for His service. What a wonderful privilege and place God has given us!

Of course, our living does not always match our calling. Peter recognizes this as he points us to the One to whom we can look as we desire to live as we have been called. That we do not live up to our calling would cause us tremendous anxiety if we did not have the Savior to whom Peter directs us. After all, someone who does not live up to his or her calling in this world has something to be worried about. An employee who does not do the job will probably be fired. If we do not fulfill our responsibilities at home, we may have to contend with unpleasant consequences. If we do not live up to our calling as God's servants, what can we expect?

Verse 17—Peter reminds us that God judges with impartiality. God does not play favorites. He does not wink at the sins of His children; He is not an indulgent Father. He sees our behavior exactly for what it is and reacts accordingly. He “judges each man’s work impartially.” That is why it is important to take refuge in our Savior, for whose sake our sins are forgiven.

But in this section Peter is referring to the quality of obedience we exhibit now that we have been justified—or made right—before God, for Christ’s sake. Peter admonishes us: Don’t live in the futile way of those who belong to this world, but live as those who are strangers to this world. Remember who—and whose—you are. Remember the great price God paid to redeem you (1:19)—“the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.” Remember the great pains God took to plan and to bring about your salvation. You are holy—separate and set apart for the Lord. You are dedicated to Him. Accordingly, live in “reverent fear,” concerned that you might compromise your holy calling, with a solemn reverence and respectful obedience.

Who we are and whose we are cannot be explained without referring to how we were redeemed. The cross is the marker that both tells us where we were—sunk so low in the depths of degradation and our value to God. Nothing less—certainly nothing of this world’s treasure—could redeem us than the life of the Son of God, a life sacrificed with agony and complete self-loss. God did not shrink from paying that price for us! And the result is that I am now “His own and live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlast-

ing righteousness, innocence, and blessedness” (Martin Luther).

Faith in Jesus Christ is the obedience God seeks from us. The fruit of the Spirit will be manifested in us in direct proportion to that faith (Galatians 5:22–24; Ephesians 2:8–10). We will learn to serve, to live as holy people, when we look to Jesus in all matters. He is the perfect servant.

The blood of any animal would hardly be called “precious.” But when the Holy One, who knew no sin, became sin for us, then something wonderful happened. The action of Jesus at one point in time solidified the faith and hope of Adam, Abraham, Isaiah, Paul, Peter, and all the rest who have believed in Him.

Paul concludes in his argument to the Romans (5:7–8): “Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man. . . . But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” This terrific news, Peter says, was God’s design even before He created the world. But it took the death and resurrection of the Word made flesh to accomplish it and offer the full impact of Easter—the reconciliation of the world. Through Baptism we participate in Christ’s death and resurrection, dying to sin and being raised to new life in Him (Romans 6:3–4).

3 Growing in Holy Living (1:22–2:3)

Jesus told the crowds in His Sermon on the Mount that only the pure in heart can see God (Matthew 5:8). Faith purifies since through it God credits to us the righteousness of Jesus. This is what Peter means in verse 22 by the phrase “obeying the truth”—believing the Gospel, placing our complete and total trust in Jesus (who is the truth) for cleansing and being made holy before God.

The result of this cleansing is that the impure desires and hatred in our souls have been replaced with pure desires and love. The love we show others is the external evidence that we trust in Jesus, that we obey the truth. It is the outward sign that we have been born again by the work of the Spirit through the Gospel. In verse 22 Peter enthusiastically calls us to love “deeply, from the heart.” This love is not a pretense; it is not a mask, such as ancient actors wore to represent fictional characters.

Growth in holy living comes as we believers reach out to love from the heart, with the new attitude of the Gospel. We do not have time to study this topic in detail, but look back to the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5–7 and count the numerous ways in which Christ challenges His listeners to go the extra mile, to turn the other cheek, and so forth. Verse 24—Unlike living under the scorching desert sun, which causes everything to dry up and wither, we live under the brightness of the Son—the *S-o-n*—who makes everything come alive again. In looking to God’s Word for strength and new life, we confront the Savior, who constantly offers the life-giving power of His love. We are also reminded of the parable of the sower and the seed. The seed, which is the Word of God, is planted in many different types of soil. It produces a crop when planted in fertile soil.

The Holy Spirit rouses us to service as the Word dwells within us. He preaches to us, enters our hearts, regenerates us, imparts eternal life, overcomes the corruptible within us, and empowers us to live in fear and love. Peter maintains that the working of the Spirit through the Word can put away those harmful things that prevent the Gospel from taking hold in our lives: malice (meanness, disgracefulness), hypocrisy (insincerity), envy (ill-will because of others’ blessings), and slander (running down others).

When we study and think deeply about what God tells us in His Word, our spirits are refreshed and the Holy Spirit encourages us to live to serve our Lord by serving others. We find that the Bible is influencing how we think and is affecting how we act. Most important, it keeps our attention riveted on Jesus and thereby produces a guilelessness, a speech that does not mislead or deceive others but desires to build others up. In this way we will speak and act with a wholesome, childlike simplicity—honest, direct, without affectation.

There is another way in which we are to be like children in regard to God’s Word. We are to long for the wholesome spiritual nourishment we find in God’s Word, just as infants seek the nourishment they find in milk. That milk provides just what their growing bodies need at that tender stage of life. We also need to express the same longing for the spiritual nourishment of God’s Word that we may grow. This is particularly true of new believers, such as those Peter was addressing. Still, even

mature Christians find their solid food in God’s Word (Hebrews 5:12–14). In any case, Peter may have had this psalm verse in mind when he spoke of how good the kindness of the Lord tasted (Psalm 34:8): “Taste and see that the LORD is good.”

4 Living Stones (2:4–10)

Peter uses several images to indicate how newly baptized believers in Christ should see themselves and therefore submit to their calling. Verses 4–5—The first of these images is as living stones built into a spiritual house. In this Peter employs a scriptural image. God is the rock (Psalm 18:2; 62:2). Peter knew and preached of Jesus as the rock (Matthew 21:42; Acts 4:11). Peter sees himself as one of the stones, commended by Jesus in Matthew 16:18 for his faith, but no more than one of many other stones used to build the spiritual temple. He shares the spotlight with all new believers.

These former-pagans-turned-disciples must have found it strange to find themselves suddenly part of a holy temple, a royal priesthood. And yet that is what being set apart by the Gospel does. We look strange and out of place to those who do not understand or believe. But we are elected by God, and therefore we are called to be His temple and serve in it as priests.

Actor William Booth once played before the king of England and gave a great performance. The next three nights he played before smaller and less distinguished audiences, yet his performances were still masterpieces. When asked, “How can you keep that up night after night?” he answered, “I always play for the king!” Booth meant the heavenly King. We also are to “play” always for our King. That is the thought of St. Paul in 1 Corinthians 10:31, “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.”

That is the charge of 1 Peter 2. We are to live each day as if we are playing for the King—for we are! We are “elect,” chosen by God (Deuteronomy 7:6–9; Isaiah 43:10, 20; 44:1–2). We are part of a priestly team. As priests, we may come into God’s presence, bringing prayers and sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving. It is a royal priesthood because Jesus, the great High Priest, has made us His own. We are holy, for God Himself has decided to possess us. We have been bought with a price (1 Corinthians 6:20; 7:23), the precious blood of Christ (1:19).

We conclude this section of the Epistle by referring to three Old Testament quotations in 1 Peter 2:6–8. All of these passages refer to Christ as a stone. The first, Isaiah 28:16 (quoted in 1 Peter 2:6), speaks of Christ as the cornerstone upon which God’s kingdom of grace is founded and built. Only through Christ may we approach God, for only in Christ can we find salvation. However, if believers find Christ to be the cornerstone of God’s kingdom, unbelievers find Him to be the opposite. Psalm 118:22, quoted in 1 Peter 2:7, points out that for them, He is the rejected stone. Those who would presume to build God’s kingdom in their own way, after their own design, reject the stone that God provides as unsuitable for their purposes. But, in doing so, they reject salvation. Isaiah 8:14, quoted in 1 Peter 2:8, states that Christ, then, is the stone that will make men stumble. They stumble over Christ, leading not to their salvation but to their downfall and condemnation before God.

Peter draws on these Old Testament prophecies to clarify what the Lord has made of us. We are a “spiritual house,” a temple of God, built upon Christ as the cornerstone. While in our day a cornerstone serves primarily a ceremonial purpose, often bearing the date when the building was constructed and perhaps other information, in Bible times a cornerstone served a crucial practical purpose. It was the first stone laid in the foundation. From this stone the rest of the building was aligned.

This image, then, is quite appropriate when referring to Jesus, who joins the walls and, in fact, the entire building together. As the most significant component, Christ as the cornerstone governs all the angles and lines of the building.

And yet the “builders” rejected Christ as the cornerstone. These would-be architects of God’s kingdom—the Sanhedrin and other Jewish leaders who condemned and crucified Christ—judged Him to be unsuitable for their purposes. But God has overturned their plans and rejected *them*—and has made Christ the “capstone,” the loftiest and highest stone of the structure. The result is that the builders have stumbled and fallen over the stone they presumed to condemn and throw away! How ironic! By rejecting Christ they brought about their own rejection by God.

What a strange turn of events! Many of those whom God chose centuries ago—whom God cared for, cultivated, and nurtured carefully and patiently—stumbled and fell at the last moment. But some from among peoples who had never before had anything to do with God’s plan of salvation—a wild, uncultivated people— have now been brought forward. Verse 9: From them—from these nobodies and nothings—God created a “chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God.” From this surprising, unlikely quarter there now arises praise for God, who has called them out of darkness into His wonderful light.

The amazing fact is that you and I are among them! God has called us and set us among His chosen people! We are now kings and priests who serve and worship Him—as we will serve and worship Him for all eternity. Let’s praise Him now for the great things He has done for us! Let’s pray fervently that the Holy Spirit might produce in us holier, godlier lives! Let’s bring others before our great and merciful God in prayer! In our daily living, let’s be consistent with what God has already made us in Christ!

Let’s get to work!

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Concluding Activities

Distribute the enrichment magazine and encourage participants to read it as part of their weekly study. Then distribute study leaflet 3.