

MILE

1

1 PETER – Living Out Our Identity in Christ Amidst a Challenging World

Mile Marker 1 ... “An Introduction to 1 Peter”

1 Peter 1:1-2 (with a glimpse at the whole letter)

For this particular six-session discipleship journey, we are reflecting on the New Testament letter of 1 Peter. This first mile marker offers a brief glimpse at the letter as a whole (*this will be part of the first session within Deeper Life Groups on January 23*) through a specific focus on 1 Peter 1:1-2 as we look at the original author and audience. The remaining five mile markers will focus on texts and themes that appear throughout the rest of the letter. Peter wrote this letter to God’s people who were living as “strangers” on earth while awaiting their eternal *home*. He wrote to encourage them about the “strange” way such people faithfully should live out their identity in Christ amidst a challenging (and at times, even hostile) context. As those who are in Christ, we too find ourselves in such a world. We would be wise to listen and apply these ancient words to our lives still today.

Introductory Reflection

Reflect on an occasion when you felt most “out of place” amidst your surroundings in life. Write down a reminder of that particular situation.

As we think about the letter of 1 Peter, it’s valuable for us to consider an experience being in a foreign country (if you’ve had such an experience). That can be a fun and exciting adventure. It can also bring on challenges from being in a different culture – the phrase “culture shock” is even used to describe what that experience can be like. ***Consider such a time from your own life experience when you’ve spent time in a place that doesn’t feel like “home” (if you haven’t had such an experience, use your imagination ☺).***

What are some practical ways you can feel that difference from others?

Of course, there can be something about *our own conduct* in a foreign place that sets us apart as being different or strange (perhaps in a way similar to the Beverly Hillbillies) ... ***when it comes to such an experience, what are some practical realities that can be different about our own conduct?***

Into 1 Peter – A Broad Introduction with a Focus on 1 Peter 1:1-2

Standard letter writing in the 1st century Greco-Roman world makes it very easy to identify the author and recipients – it’s all right up front. Our goal in this journey is to consider how the words of this letter apply to us in our 21st century world. As we prepare for that, it’s good to get a sense of who wrote it originally (even recognizing the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, there is still value in acknowledging the human author) and the original audience. Understanding what God’s Word meant in its original context is important for grasping the way it continues to speak to us today.

READ 1 Peter 1:1-2 (from the NLT and ESV below)

(NLT) – This letter is from Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ.

I am writing to God’s chosen people who are living as foreigners in the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. ² God the Father knew you and chose you long ago, and His Spirit has made you holy. As a result, you have obeyed Him and have been cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ.

May God give you more and more grace and peace.

(ESV) – Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ,

To those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, ² according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with His blood:

May grace and peace be multiplied to you.

Author:

Peter – 1 of Jesus original 12 disciples, in fact, one on the “inner circle” of 3 with James and John. There are several key scenes involving Peter throughout the New Testament.

In the story of Jesus’ life and ministry, he plays a key role – here is a basic sketch of some key events (it may be helpful for you to read these scenes):

- He is one of the first to hear Jesus’ invitation to “follow Him” as a disciple (see Matthew 4:18-22).
- He courageously walks on water in a display of faith in Jesus – of course, he immediately begins to sink as well (see Matthew 14:22-33 ... he gets both high grades and low grades for this scene; part of what makes Peter seem so much like us is the way that his faith journey with Jesus is particularly filled with highs *and* lows).
- He is the first to explicitly declare/confess Jesus’ identity as “the Messiah, the Son of the Living God” receiving Jesus’ affirmation in return, even a promise of receiving “the keys of the Kingdom” (see Matthew 16:13-20).
- Of course, he immediately follows *that* up with being called “Satan” by Jesus for being a “dangerous trap” or “stumbling block” after Jesus’ predicts His death for the first time (see Matthew 16:21-23).
- He is with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration with James and John (see Matthew 17:1ff – these “inner three” are together with Him in the Garden of Gethsemane as well, see Matthew 26:36-37).

- On the night before Jesus' death, Peter proclaims loyalty to Jesus when told he would deny knowing Jesus (Matthew 26:31-35). Of course, that very night he did exactly as Jesus had predicted he would, three times denying knowledge of Jesus (Matthew 26:69-75).
- He goes with John upon hearing the report that the tomb was empty on "the third day" after Jesus' death (see John 20:1-10 – later that same day, he is with the other disciples when Jesus' appears to them, see John 20:19-23).
- On the shore of the Sea of Galilee (back to the fishing roots), Jesus again appears to His disciples. He "reinstates" Peter asking him three times if he "loves" Him (the number is significant given the denial three times).

Even in the book of Acts, he has a key role for the first 12 chapters especially:

- He is the main spokesman as the early believers gathered (Acts 1) and on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2).
- Along with John, he heals a crippled beggar and preaches in the Temple (Acts 3) leading to their arrest and an opportunity to speak before the same Jewish Council that had sentenced Jesus to death in very recent history (Acts 4 – it seems significant that it was outside this gathering that Peter denied knowing Jesus three times).
- He goes with John to Samaria as people become believers there (Acts 8 – this scene represents the Gospel expanding beyond the pure Jews).
- He heals some and even raises a woman back to life (Acts 9:32-42).
- He is instrumental in helping to open the door to the Kingdom for Gentiles with Cornelius (Acts 10-11).

Needless to say, Peter's life was one transformed by his experience with Jesus – both during His ministry, but especially as a witness of His resurrection. As part of this transformation, he continued to serve as a leader in the church. Even this letter is an expression of such a role as he pastorally encourages and instructs God's people in living out their identity in Christ.

Original Audience:

In the texts printed above, there are some key words used to describe the original readers. Again, as we strive to understand and apply the words of 1 Peter during these sessions, it is important to see how their situation is not that different than ours. Here are those descriptions from v. 2:

(NLT) – I am writing **to God's chosen people who are living as foreigners** ... ² God the Father knew you and chose you long ago, and His Spirit has made you holy. As a result, you have obeyed Him and have been cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ.

(ESV) ... **To those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion** ..., ² according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with His blood:

Before considering the highlighted portion, ***reflect on the words in verse 2 – it's a reminder of God the Father's role, the sanctifying work of the Spirit and obedience to Jesus (as well as being cleansed by His blood); what stands out to you as significant?***

Within the highlighted portion of this text, there are two key aspects of their identity to consider; these are going to be significant throughout this journey. What's true of them is also true of us in Christ as well!

1. Like us in Christ, they are God's "elect" or "chosen" people.

There are two basic ways to understand this language.

One view says that those who are in Christ are "pre-destined" for salvation, simply picked/chosen/elected by God to be saved and He then provides the faith for people to respond. This way emphasizes the sovereignty of God in the process.

Another view emphasizes the importance of human free will. Instead of picking people individually, God responds to the choice that is made by a person to respond with faith to the Good News of Jesus. Anyone who places his or her faith in God is then "chosen" as God's adopted child.

Some people even attempt to bring these two elements together in various ways.

While there are some major differences in these views, here's the reality: **either way, anyone who is in Christ has been CHOSEN by God – this is part of our identity in Him.**

What is the significance of knowing that in Christ we have been "CHOSEN" by Him?

How is that encouraging to us as we go about our lives in what can be at times a challenging world?

2. Like us in Christ, they are living as "exiles" or "foreigners" in various earthly places.

These people may be living in their native lands, but they do so as those who don't truly belong in these places. Why? Because their true home is beyond this world. We will consider this theme more along the way (especially when we get to 1 Peter 2:11ff). Of course, this is an important part of the identity of God's people (see Hebrews 11:13ff as well). It's a part of our identity that has significant implications for the way we go about life in this world.

For now, in a preliminary way, what stands out to you about this identity and its implications for the way we live our lives in this world as "foreigners?"

Basic Purpose of 1 Peter: As we make our way through this letter over these sessions, we're going to read as Peter helps these 1st century pilgrims and us today consider what it means to live out this identity in Christ amidst the world in which we live as "strangers." Maybe this language captures it well: in Christ, we're a PECULIAR PEOPLE living PECULIAR LIVES.