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A NavPress Bible study on the book of

1 PETER

NAVPRESS 

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SERIES EDITOR: KAREN LEE-THORP

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

Objectives

Each guide in the LIFECHANGE series of Bible studies covers one book of the Bible. Although the LIFECHANGE guides vary with the individual books they explore, they share some common goals:

1. To provide you with a firm foundation of understanding and a thirst to return to the book;
2. To teach you by example how to study a book of the Bible without structured guides;
3. To give you all the historical background, word definitions, and explanatory notes you need, so that your only other reference is the Bible;
4. To help you grasp the message of the book as a whole;
5. To teach you how to let God's Word transform you into Christ's image.

Each lesson in this study is designed to take 60 to 90 minutes to complete on your own. The guide is based on the assumption that you are completing one lesson per week, but if time is limited you can do half a lesson per week or whatever amount allows you to be thorough.

Flexibility

LIFECHANGE guides are flexible, allowing you to adjust the quantity and depth of your study to meet your individual needs. The guide offers many optional questions in addition to the regular numbered questions. The optional questions, which appear in the margins of the study pages, include the following:

Optional Application. Nearly all application questions are optional; we hope you will do as many as you can without overcommitting yourself.

For Thought and Discussion. Beginning Bible students should be able to handle these, but even advanced students need to think about them. These questions frequently deal with ethical issues and other biblical principles. They often offer cross-references to spark thought, but the references do not give

obvious answers. They are good for group discussions.

For Further Study. These include: a) cross-references that shed light on a topic the book discusses, and b) questions that delve deeper into the passage. You can omit them to shorten a lesson without missing a major point of the passage.

(Note: At the end of lessons two through twelve you are given the option of outlining the passage just studied. Although the outline is optional, you will almost surely find it worthwhile.)

If you are meeting in a group, decide together which optional questions to prepare for each lesson, and how much of the lesson you will cover at the next meeting. Normally, the group leader should make this decision, but you might let each member choose his own application questions.

As you grow in your walk with God, you will find the LIFECHANGE guide growing with you—a helpful reference on a topic, a continuing challenge for application, a source of questions for many levels of growth.

Overview and Details

The guide begins with an overview of the book. The key to interpretation is context—what is the whole passage or book *about*?—and the key to context is purpose—what is the author’s *aim* for the whole work? In lesson one you will lay the foundation for your study by asking yourself, Why did the author (and God) write the book? What did they want to accomplish? What is the book about?

Then, in lesson two, you will begin analyzing successive passages in detail. Thinking about how a paragraph fits into the overall goal of the book will help you to see its purpose. Its purpose will help you see its meaning. Frequently reviewing a chart or outline of the book will enable you to make these connections.

Finally, in the last lesson, you will review the whole book, returning to the big picture to see whether your view of it has changed after closer study. Review will also strengthen your grasp of major issues and give you an idea of how you have grown from your study.

Kinds of Questions

Bible study on your own—without a structured guide—follows a progression. First you observe: What does the passage *say*? Then you interpret: What does the passage *mean*? Lastly you apply: How does this truth affect my life?

Some of the “how” and “why” questions will take some creative thinking, even prayer, to answer. Some are opinion questions without clearcut right answers; these will lend themselves to discussions and side studies.

Don’t let your study become an exercise of knowledge alone. Treat the passage as God’s Word, and stay in dialogue with Him as you study. Pray, “Lord, what do you want me to see here?” “Father, why is this true?” “Lord, how does this apply to my life?”

It is important that you write down your answers. The act of writing clarifies

your thinking and helps you to remember.

Meditating on verses is an option in several lessons. Its purpose is to let biblical truth sink into your inner convictions so that you will increasingly be able to act on this truth as a natural way of life. You may want to find a quiet place to spend five minutes each day repeating the verse(s) to yourself. Think about what each word, phrase, and sentence means to you. During the rest of the day, remind yourself of the verse(s) at intervals.

Study Aids

A list of reference materials, including a few notes of explanation to help you make good use of them, begins on page 133. This guide is designed to include enough background to let you interpret with just your Bible and the guide. Still, if you want more information on a subject or want to study a book on your own, try the references listed.

Scripture Versions

Unless otherwise indicated, the Bible quotations in this guide are from the New International Version of the Bible. Other versions cited are the Revised Standard Version (RSV), the New American Standard Bible (NASB), and the King James Version (KJV).

Use any translation you like for study, preferably more than one. A paraphrase such as The Living Bible is not accurate enough for study, but it can be helpful for comparison or devotional reading.

Memorizing and Meditating

A Psalmist wrote, “I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you” (Psalm 119:11). If you write down a verse or passage that challenges or encourages you, and reflect on it often for a week or more, you will find it beginning to affect your motives and actions. We forget quickly what we read once; we remember what we ponder.

When you find a significant verse or passage, you might copy it onto a card to keep with you. Set aside five minutes during each day just to think about what the passage might mean in your life. Recite it over to yourself, exploring its meaning. Then, return to your passage as often as you can during your day, for a brief review. You will soon find it coming to mind spontaneously.

For Group Study

A group of four to ten people allows the richest discussions, but you can adapt this guide for other sized groups. It will suit a wide range of group types, such as home Bible studies, growth groups, youth groups, and businessmen’s studies.

Both new and experienced Bible students, new and mature Christians, will benefit from the guide. You can omit or leave for later years any questions you find too easy or too hard.

The guide is intended to lead a group through one lesson per week. However, feel free to split lessons if you want to discuss them more thoroughly. Or, omit some questions in a lesson if preparation or discussion time is limited. You can always return to this guide for personal study later on. You will be able to discuss only a few questions at length, so choose some for discussion and others for background. Make time at each discussion for members to ask about anything that gave them trouble.

Each lesson in the guide ends with a section called *For the Group*. These sections give advice on how to focus a discussion, how you might apply the lesson in your group, how you might shorten a lesson, and so on. The group leader should read each *For the Group* at least a week ahead so that he or she can tell the group how to prepare for the next lesson.

Each member should prepare for a meeting by writing answers for all the background and discussion questions to be covered. If the group decides not to take an hour per week for private preparation, then expect to take at least two meetings per lesson to work through the questions. Application will be very difficult, however, without private thought and prayer.

Two reasons for studying in a group are accountability and support. When each member commits in front of the rest to seek growth in an area of life, you can pray with one another, listen jointly for God's guidance, help one another to resist temptation, assure each other that the other's growth matters to you, use the group to practice spiritual principles, and so on. Pray about one another's commitments and needs at most meetings. Spend the first few minutes of each meeting sharing any results from applications prompted by previous lessons. Then discuss new applications toward the end of the meeting. Follow such sharing with prayer for these and other needs.

If you write down each other's applications and prayer requests, you are more likely to remember to pray for them during the week, ask about them next meeting, and notice answered prayers. You might want to get a notebook for prayer requests and discussion notes.

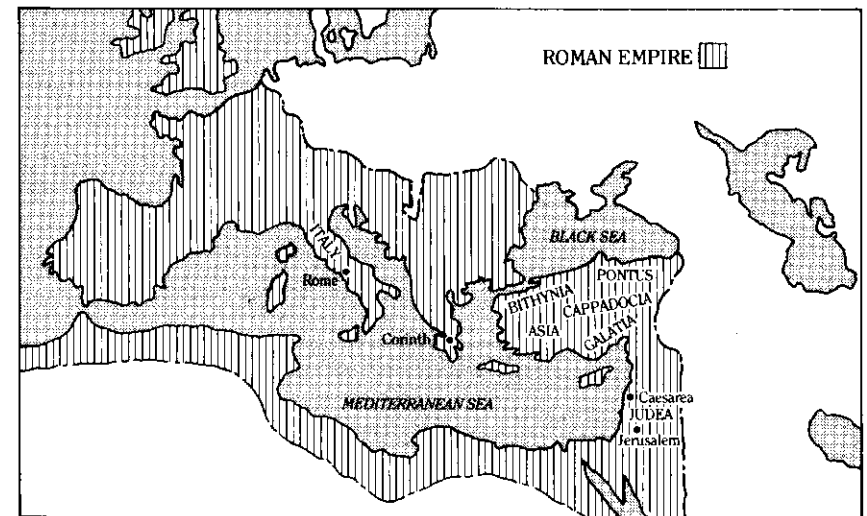
Notes taken during discussion will help you to remember, follow up on ideas, stay on the subject, and clarify a total view of an issue. But don't let note-taking keep you from participating. Some groups choose one member at each meeting to take notes. Then someone copies the notes and distributes them at the next meeting. Rotating these tasks can help include people. Some groups have someone take notes on a large pad of paper or erasable marker board (performed shower wallboard works well), so that everyone can see what has been recorded.

Page 136 lists some good sources of counsel for leading group studies. The *Small Group Letter*, published by NavPress, is unique, offering insights from experienced leaders every other month.

BACKGROUND

Peter and His Readers

Map of the Roman Empire



Simon Peter

Simon was a common name, the Greek version of the Hebrew name *Simeon* (Acts 15:14). Simon was born in Bethsaida (John 1:44), near the north shore of the Sea of Galilee. His family were Jewish fishermen, like many of their neighbors, although many Samaritans and Greek-speaking Gentiles also lived in Galilee. Simon probably received “the normal elementary education of a Jewish boy in a small town”¹—that is, he learned to read a little Hebrew and enough Greek to do business, and he spoke Aramaic and common Greek flu-

ently. He was not trained in the Jewish Scriptures and law as a rabbi, nor in literary Greek (Acts 4:13). Before meeting Jesus, Simon may have followed John the Baptist (John 1:35-42).

Simon was one of Jesus' first and closest disciples. He was always listed first among them (Matthew 10:2-4; Luke 6:12-16, 9:28; Acts 1:13), and he may have been their leader (Luke 22:31-32). Jesus renamed him *Cephas* (Aramaic), or *Peter* (Greek), which means a pebble, a small rock. This name suggested Peter's future strength, endurance, and foundational position in the Church, and his dependence on the Church's true Rock: Jesus (Matthew 16:16-18, Ephesians 2:19-20, 1 Peter 2:4-8).

Peter the Pillar

Peter seems to have remained the leader of the apostles after Jesus' death (Acts 1:15-26), although he was leader among equals (Acts 15:13-22). The first twelve chapters of the book of Acts show Peter leading the disciples' proclamation of the risen Christ. Paul called Peter a "pillar" of the Jerusalem church during this period, from about 33-47 AD (Galatians 2:9).²

Paul and Peter agreed at one point that Paul would evangelize Gentiles and Peter would evangelize Jews (Galatians 2:7). But Peter did preach to Gentiles in Caesarea (Acts 10:1-11:18). We don't know what Peter did after 47 AD, but 1 Peter suggests that he worked in Asia Minor at some point.

Martyrdom

Early sources say that Peter spent the last years of his life in Rome. In 64 AD a fire broke out in Rome, destroying much of the city. Many people suspected that Emperor Nero had ordered the city burnt, so that he could rebuild it in modern style. Nero found scapegoats in an unpopular religious sect—the Christians—who were social outcasts and already suspected of wicked practices. As the Roman historian Tacitus wrote some fifty years later, "a huge crowd was convicted not so much of arson as of hatred of the human race."³ They were executed horribly.

Although the disgusting executions made many Romans feel sorry for the Christians, the spectacle encouraged others to harass the sect. According to early Christian sources, both Peter and Paul were executed within a few years of the fire in Rome. A third-century Christian, Origen, records that Peter was crucified upside down, feeling unworthy to die as Christ had died.

Asia Minor

First Peter 1:1 says that the letter was addressed to Christians in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. These were Roman provinces in what is now called Asia Minor, or Turkey (see the map on page 9). Paul had founded churches in Asia and Galatia; we have letters from him to Ephesus,

Colossae, and Galatia. But Peter seems to have known these Christians as well.

By 60 AD, the churches in Asia Minor were probably converting many Gentiles and few Jews. There is some disagreement, but many scholars believe that Peter was speaking to all the Christians in the region he addressed, Jews and Gentiles, and especially newer converts.⁴ He called his readers by terms that originally Jews had given themselves (1 Peter 1:1, 2:5, 2:9), but he spoke of the Christians' formerly depraved lives in terms that Jews customarily used for Gentiles (4:3). He seems to have regarded all Christians as pagans at heart before conversion, but all the true Israel after conversion.

We believe that 1 Peter was written sometime after 60 AD, probably from Rome.⁵ If Peter wrote after the Roman fire, then his readers would have known of the persecution there. However, official investigations and executions were not held outside the capital city. The persecution in Asia Minor was unofficial (see the box, "Persecution in the Roman Empire," on pages 46-47).

We don't know just what prompted the great apostle to send this letter to distant Asia Minor. As you read 1 Peter, try to put yourself in the place of its first readers, and think about what Peter seems to have wanted to accomplish with this letter.

1. Irving L. Jensen, *1 and 2 Peter* (Chicago: The Moody Bible Institute, 1971), page 4.
2. Jensen, pages 7-8.
3. Tacitus, *Annals*, xv, 44.5 in F.F. Bruce, *New Testament History* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1971), page 401; for more, see "How Pagans Viewed Christians" on page 96 of this study guide.
4. J. N. D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and Jude* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1981[1969]), page 4. See also Jensen, pages 13-14, and Kenneth S. Wuest, *First Peter in the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1942), page 14.
5. Alan M. Stibbs, *The First Epistle General of Peter* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1983 [1959]), pages 64-67; Kelly, pages 218-219. See also Jensen, page 14, and Wuest, pages 132-133.

LESSON ONE

OVERVIEW

If you belonged to the cult of Isis in the first century AD, your neighbors probably would not have bothered you. And if they had bothered you, another Isis worshiper two thousand miles away would not have written to you about your troubles. The idea of being one Body, one Church, was unknown in paganism. As you read Peter's letter, try to imagine how you would have felt to receive it from the chief apostle in faraway Rome.

This overview asks you to read 1 Peter several times. Try to read it as you would approach a letter to yourself, not stopping to wrestle with individual phrases, but looking for the overall message. One reading should take an average reader about half an hour; if you don't think you are an average reader, you might try to read the letter just once or plan extra time. But even if you are "average," this may well be the most time-consuming lesson of your study. Don't get discouraged; just try to plan your time and do as much as you can. You can always return for a more thorough overview when you study 1 Peter again in a later year.

First Impressions

1. Read Peter's letter at least once in one sitting, so that you can see it as a whole. You may want to read it again in another translation. Try reading parts of it aloud. Get a general impression.

2. Describe the *mood* (tone, emotion) of the letter. In other words, what seem to be Peter's attitudes or feelings toward his readers and toward his subject matter? (Is Peter formal, intimate, angry, joyful . . . ?) If you think the mood changes anywhere, note where and how it changes.

3. Think about what Peter says and how he says it. How would you describe his *style*? (For instance, is he writing a story, personal news, a sermon . . . ? Is he trying to teach doctrine, urge people to act on something, encourage, rebuke, convince . . . ?)

4. *Repetition* is a key to the ideas a writer considers most important. What words or phrases occur over and over?

As you study 1 Peter in more depth, you may notice repetition or other general impressions that you overlooked on your first reading. If you like, you can come back to this lesson to write down what you notice for future reference.

Broad outline

If your impression of 1 Peter is vague after one reading, a broad outline can help sharpen it.

5. Reread the letter, preferably in a different translation if you have read it only once so far. (A different version can help you notice new things and can make a confusing passage clearer.) This time, think of a short phrase or sentence that can serve as a title for each paragraph. It may help you to include key words from the paragraph. Write your title below. (There is no one right answer; the first title is given as an example. Your Bible's paragraph divisions may differ, so feel free to alter those given here.)

1:1-2 Apostle to Strangers

1:3-12 _____

1:13-21 _____

1:22-25 _____

2:1-3 _____

2:4-10 _____

2:11-12 _____

For Further Study:
Try to grasp the overall thread of Peter's discourse by grouping some of its paragraphs together. Give titles to the following sections: 1:3-2:10, 2:11-4:11 (or 2:11-3:7, 3:8-4:11), 4:12-5:14.

- 2:13-17 _____

- 2:18-25 _____

- 3:1-7 _____

- 3:8-12 _____

- 3:13-17 _____

- 3:18-22 _____

- 4:1-6 _____

- 4:7-11 _____

- 4:12-19 _____

- 5:1-4 _____

- 5:5-7 _____

- 5:8-9 _____

- 5:10-11 _____

- 5:12-14 _____

Theme/purpose

People usually write letters in response to a particular situation in their own or their readers' lives. They normally have reasons for choosing the topics they cover in their letters. It is often not possible to reconstruct exactly what needs occasioned a letter, but the more we can reconstruct, the better we will understand the writer's message.

Our own purpose for studying the letter will often differ from its original purpose, but how we understand and apply a writer's words should be influenced by how he and the Holy Spirit *meant* them to be understood and applied in the first century.

6. In 5:12 Peter tells why he wrote this letter. He says he is "encouraging" (NASB: "exhorting") them to *do* some things and "testifying" that they might *believe* some things. In one sentence each, summarize what you think Peter wants his readers to believe and do. Take the whole letter into account.

believe _____

do _____

7. What seems to be the main theme or themes of Peter's letter? (Repeated and other important words may help here. You may also want to look for key verses.)

For Thought and Discussion: What do you think is the relationship between doing and believing in Peter's letter?

Study Skill—Outlining

In question 5 you gave titles to each paragraph of Peter's letter. In questions 6 and 7 you began to summarize Peter's overall message and purpose. These are good first steps toward making up your own outline of the letter.

If you think you might want to outline 1 Peter, you could take time now to group together any paragraphs in question 5 that seem to be connected. For example, you could draw a bracket around 2:13-3:7 because those three paragraphs begin with a repeated word of command.

An outline of 1 Peter might begin like this:

- I. [The purpose, or overall message, of 1 Peter]
 - A. Greetings—the Christian's identity (1:1-2)
 - 1. [any supporting details you want to include]
 - 2. [another supporting detail]
 - ...
 - B. Praise to God for a Living Hope (1:3-12)
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - ...
 - C. [the main idea of 1:13-2:3]
 - ...

You might prefer to outline the whole book at once after you have studied it in depth. Still, sometimes a first sketch (titles for the main sections—the "A's" and "B's" above) at the beginning helps you see the overall train of thought in the book.

8. If you have not already done so, read the historical background on pages 9-12. If you feel that additional background information would help you to better interpret Peter's letter, you might

write down your questions here. Some of your questions may be answered later in this study guide. The sources on pages 133-137 may help you answer others.

Study Skill—Application

The last step of Bible study is asking yourself, "What difference should this passage make in my life? How should it make me want to think or act?" Application will require time, thought, prayer, and perhaps even discussion with another person. You may find it more productive to concentrate on one specific application, giving it careful thought and prayer, than to list several potential applications without really reflecting on them or committing yourself to them. One step actually taken is more important than many steps supported only by good intentions!

10. Does any discovery from your first readings of 1 Peter encourage you in your current situation? If so, write down this discovery, along with any implications it has for the way you approach life. If you plan to do anything in response—such as pray, talk to someone, begin a habit, or whatever—you might write down what you plan to do.

For the group

The beginning of a new study is a good time to lay a foundation for honest sharing of ideas, for getting comfortable with each other, and for encouraging a sense of common purpose. One way to establish common ground is to talk about what each group member hopes to get out of your group—out of your study of 1 Peter, and out of any prayer, singing, sharing, service, outreach, or anything else you might do together. You could take about fifteen minutes at the beginning of your meeting to give each person a chance to share his or her vision for the group. If you have someone write down each member's hopes and expectations, then you can look back at these goals later to see if they are being met.

After that, you might approach your overview like this:

- First impressions of the book (questions 1-4)—
10 minutes
- Outline (question 5)—5 minutes

Themes and goals (questions 6-7)—10 minutes
Group members' questions (questions 8-9)—5
minutes
Examples of how you might apply something
in 1 Peter to yourselves (for members who
are less familiar with doing
this)—10 minutes

Don't feel you must follow this structure or its time allotments rigidly; it is just a model for how to go about structuring a discussion. Also, be aware that some people are better than others at outlining, seeing themes, and so on. Some people are better at close analysis of a verse, or at seeing how a scripture applies to their lives. Give thanks for each other's strengths, and don't be embarrassed to give and request help.

Chart of 1 Peter

Purpose: To encourage his readers to live holy lives in the midst of suffering because of their identity and hope in Christ.

1:1-2	Peter greets the “strangers.”
1:3-12	Peter praises God for the strangers’ hope, which gives them joy despite trials.
1:13-2:3	Peter exhorts his readers to grow in holiness and love because of their hope.
2:4-10	Peter describes the identity and purpose of his readers—a temple and priesthood made to worship God.
2:11-12	Peter urges the strangers to set godly examples for unbelievers.
2:13-17	Peter urges submission to governors as part of the godly example.
2:18-25	Peter urges submission to masters as part of the godly example and in imitation of Christ.
3:1-6	Peter urges wives to submit as part of the godly example.
3:7	Peter urges husbands to respect and be considerate as part of the godly example.
3:8-12	Peter urges all to seek harmony and so be blessed.
3:13-22	Peter urges all to face ill-treatment in light of Christ’s work.
4:1-6	Peter urges his readers to abandon sin in light of Christ’s work.
4:7-11	Peter urges godly community life in light of the coming end.
4:12-19	Peter urges joy in suffering for Christ.
5:1-4	Peter urges elders to lead as suits their hope.
5:5-7	Peter urges each reader to live humbly to obtain God’s grace.
5:8-11	Peter urges all to resist evil in God’s strength.
5:12-14	Peter summarizes his encouragement.