



## A STUDY OF the 1<sup>st</sup> letter of Peter

**PRAYER:** Pray for any personal needs of your group, church, community, etc.

**NOTE:** Our insights are important so remember to respect each other's thoughts/reflections.

### **DISCUSSION:**

The idea of holiness can leave some feeling they must become a "saint". The image of holiness in 1 Peter though is about how we choose to respond to the internal struggle. Rather than succumbing to our old nature, we invest in our new nature by reciprocating the love God first showed us in Jesus. This was represented in the sermon through a container, jug of water and ping pong balls.

- Share with those who didn't see the illustration, what this was all about.
- What stood out to you from this illustration?
- What "ping pong balls" have gone out of your life? What ones are you trying to push back in?

**READ:** 1 Peter 4 – feel free to break up the chapter and invite others to read sections aloud.

This next section has caused some controversy and misinterpretation. There are some areas which seem to be giving approval for things today we push back against. Unfortunately, over the generations of Christians, people have used these verses out of context.

(Discuss as many or as few of the following questions as you wish)

- What negative behaviours defined the lives of "*the gentiles*" (non-Christians)? Vs 1-6
- What positive behaviours defined those who believed the gospel and why would those who choose to live differently be blasphemed? Vs 7-11
- What was the response Peter encouraged Christians to have and what was the profound reason he expected that they not only endure, but endure with rejoicing?

### **GOING DEEPER:**

Pray for the following (found on the Open Doors website): [www.opendoors.org.au](http://www.opendoors.org.au)

- Those who share their faith with others – may they be bold, protected by God's Spirit and know the right words to share with those who are open to hearing about Jesus.
- Those who decide to accept Jesus as Lord for whom becoming a Christian is illegal and can lead to their imprisonment, separation from family, persecution or death - may they be protected.
- Those who remain in prison, captives or persecuted – may they find support from outside agencies, churches and local church communities in the midst of their trials and trauma.

## 1 PETER 3 – HOLINESS – A CALL TO ENJOY GOD

Last week we dug into areas of faith identity – what God has done for us - what is our response

When we understand how God sees us and why God did what God did for us – that’s when our natural response is to return the same love and affection.

Dylan posed a question on our community Facebook page around the issue of evil and good.

If, from our perspective, God doesn’t intervene, is it because God is not able or chooses not to?

The question is, where do we begin – with a relational God who pursued us and died for us, so that we might choose eternal life with God – or a God in heaven, disengaged from his creation?

What I find interesting is how we humanly approach God’s character and nature in these topics.

If I based my understanding of a relationship with someone through other people’s perceptions, negative experiences of other relationships or what I “felt” – I could come away with a nice but perhaps uninformed image at best – a warped, unhealthy and distorted image at worst.

I often find that many Christians, if they come away with a negative theology or perspective of God – is because they aren’t engaged in relationship with God – *they don’t enjoy God*

When we try to understand God but aren’t engaged in developing an understanding of God through the Word, prayer, worship and with others – we will always come away with a distorted theology.

Now I’m not judging as this happens in me when I am struggling with something of God’s nature – it’s often when I’m not engaged or actively developing my relationship with God *to enjoy God*

So, this is when I need to step back - ask better questions about what’s going on in me – am I enjoying God - ultimately, God’s character and actions aren’t what needs to change – mine do

As discussed last week, Peter is calling the believers in Asia Minor – many of whom were new converts – to live so counter culturally for their time, that their lives beckon others to seek God

Now there’s some scriptures we need to address before we can see the bigger picture

1. Women submit to your husbands
2. Don’t adorn yourselves outwardly
3. Pay honour to woman as the weaker sex
4. Do this so your prayers are not hindered
5. Suffering for doing right is ok as you will be blessed

The scriptures and faith are a cosmic puzzle – we’re trying to fit pieces together – some fit nicely – others we’re trying to make fit when they don’t – sometimes we just really believe they go together

When we look at 1 Peter 3, the church has tried to fit verse to their agenda. As the Bible 360 group found, it’s our job to do the work to get a broader view and ask how they apply to us today.

First point, from earlier passages, Peter had raised some troubling and challenging points.

To be obedient and committed to expressing their faith - even if it meant suffering for it.

The reason being – this is the same obedience and commitment Jesus showed which, as he says, enabled us to be free from sin, live for righteousness and brought about our eternal healing.

He follows this by calling women to submit, in the same way, to their husbands so that their faithful submission, just like Jesus, will help their spouse seek God's forgiveness.

Unfortunately, this has led some churches to tell women to remain with abusive spouses.

I won't go into detail, but I'd like to make a few points on this and the other topics.

There were no laws at the time to protect women and philosophical views of women were harsh. Men therefore could only be *encouraged* to treat women differently based on greater moral values.

We have laws against abuse, so I believe even Peter would say today to uphold these laws. If a woman chooses to stay to win a spouse to faith – that's their choice – but I'll be reporting them.

Second point - you can invest a lot of money on outward beauty and it's going to keep going south - inner beauty keeps getting better the more you invest in it. This is the point being made.

Culturally and socially, what revealed a spiritual inner beauty like those seen in godly women of the OT were gentleness, a quiet or soft spirit and a servant attitude, when amongst others, to husbands.

What about today though – ladies - if you want your husbands to seek God by becoming an image of the *suffering Christ* and our God who *pursued us* even in our sin – what do you need to do?

Third point is short – this is about physical weakness - not emotional, mental or spiritual weakness. Interestingly the writer notes that men, Christian men, *must pay honour to this weakness – why?*

This leads to the fourth point – allow me to “mansplain” - I believe the vast majority of men get tunnel vision - in a positive way it leads us to a steadfastness – negative is stubbornness.

More often than not, we put large amounts of energy into work but not family - or the meek - or those in need - or on the margins – that's often seen for more “*emotional*” people to look after.

What we miss is that this is where God, more often than not resides – to give attention to these areas of “weakness” is to actually give greater – prayerful – attention to the nature of God.

The final point about suffering is similar to Peter's earlier point – being a light within relationships - through humility lies the opportunity to share the light of Christ.

Then all the way to verse 15 Peter unpacks how suffering – allows us to not only not fear or be intimidated by this oppression – but to use it as an opportunity to *bless* those who persecute us.

This upside-down image of the kingdom of God is – difficult – messy – not always clear to define

And there's a way to live that helps this connection and a way that hinders that connection.

Verse 8 reveals this – *Finally, all of you, have unity of spirit, sympathy, love for one another, a tender heart, and a humble mind* – this is the church God desires us to be which enables a connection

Without this attitude, we won't

- interpret the nature and character of God in a healthy way
- *give to – and receive from* – Christ's community
- desire to deepen our connection with God
- understand how to develop maturity in our walk with Christ

*15b Always be ready to make your defence to anyone who demands from you an account of the hope that is in you; 16 yet do it with gentleness and reverence.*

Here's Peter's reasoning why you will find people *demand* this from you

When people encounter you – they will experience something they've not experienced before.

They will encounter a person of peace – they will want to know what it is – and why you have it.

Here is why you can speak about the hope in you (*use visual of ping pong balls*)

These ping pong balls represent the things in our life which get in the way of enjoying God

Somewhere along the line – we experienced the love of God flow into us – something changed

Things in our life began to be pushed out – we got excited – we kept seeking more of God

You felt peace because you asked Jesus Christ to save you from your sins

You've had the chains of the human condition which kept you from this new perspective removed

You've received the cleansing of your minds which allows you to choose to live differently

You have the ability to choose a life of holiness - to let the Holy Spirit pour new life in

Perhaps you rejoiced at this – yet you stopped seeking God – so what does the world see?

Maybe, life pushed back on you – you got more of the world – less of God

Our faith isn't convincing – our sin still stands out more than what's been poured in!

The more we're filled, the less opportunity those things have to return – to distort our image of God

Holiness is seeking to enjoy God – then the Holy Spirit can overflow from us to bless others

If you know this peace – keep seeking to be filled, holy and enjoying God

If you don't know this peace – let's pray you may know and enjoy God today

Let's pray...