

1 PETER

1 Peter 1:1-5	2
1 Peter 1:6-12	4
1 Peter 1:13-16	6
1 Peter 1:17-21	8
1 Peter 1:22-2:3	10
1 Peter 2:4-10	12
1 Peter 2:11-25	14
1 Peter 3:1-7	16
1 Peter 3:8-17	18
1 Peter 4:1-6	20
1 Peter 4:7-11	22
1 Peter 4:12-19	24
1 Peter 5:1-5	26
1 Peter 5:6-15	28

4. There are things that creep into our lives and take the place of our hope in our inheritance? In the last ten days what are some things you realized can easily do that to you?

5. Who is someone you know who is far from Jesus that you could start or continue to faithfully pray for?

A HIGH-YIELDING, BONUS ACTIVITY

A great activity for you to engage this week is to read the short book of Joel in the Old Testament. Here's what it's about. Joel was witnessing a catastrophic plague of locust. The hungry horde was destroying all the edible food in Israel and surrounding areas. Israel would survive. But Joel pondered the plague and viewed it as a picture of the warning of the Law of Moses, that two things lay in store for Israel and the entire world. First, the plague of locust pictured a time in the future when Israel would be overrun by foreign armies. This would happen as a consequence of their neglect of Yahweh's words. Second, the plague of locust also pictured a world wide era in the future when the entire world would face the consequence of centuries of spiritual negligence (see Isaiah 2:12-22).

Read Joel! Think about all that our current crisis might be picturing of the world's appointment with Yahweh our Creator. A memory of Joel's words will continually give you a healthy kind of respect for Yahweh's word whatever your present life holds.

BECAUSE YOU CAN TURN TO YOUR ROCK IN CRAZY TIMES...

WORK THROUGH THESE QUESTIONS 1 PETER 1:6-12 RAISES.

1. Through Peter's words God is convicting us, because He wants to make us people of conviction. What convictions do you want to strengthen in you? What convictions have taken root in you that you want to root out?

2. We reflected together on Sunday on our great heritage as Christ-followers. It is one of joy! We sang a song together that had this phrase, "We will keep our eyes on you." How do you think this relates to your experience of joy? What things help you keep your eyes on Him amid the concerns of these times?

3. We also reflected together on the grief we have. What grief are you feeling these days for those who do not have Christ at their side? What needs to happen for their welfare that you can be praying for hundreds of times each day?

4. 1 Peter 1:6-12 reminds us that nothing is as precious to us as our salvation. Take time to list for yourself why that is true, not just eternally but for today.

5. What are some things that you have pursued to feel worth and value? What can you do to re-order these so they take their proper place in your life?

6. What might be some things that God is doing in the middle of Earth's present trial that Angels love watching?

A HIGH-YIELDING, BONUS ACTIVITY

A great activity for you to engage this week is to read the short book of Micah in the Old Testament. Micah was a prophet in the latter half of eighth century B.C.

Here's what the book of Micah is about. Micah was looking at the nation of Israel through God's eyes. He saw a mixed-up mess. The faith they lived was a mixture of Yahweh and the superstitions of the gods of the people around them. It was a mixture of God's laws of conduct and the laws of convenience. When injustice delivered something the average Israelite wanted, they employed it. As they did business they behaved dishonestly. They had stopped seeing God as their trustworthy source and taken matters into their own hands. Micah knew that in Moses' writings God had predicted that this mixed spiritual bag was in them. It would shape them. It would produce awful consequences (Read Deuteronomy 28 sometime!).

Micah spoke of these awful consequences. They were closing in on Israel. He also spoke of Israel's hope. A child would be born in Bethlehem. Micah said centuries before He was born that Jesus would be our peace. He would not be just another who would attempt to legislate peace. He IS peace!

Read Micah! Remember when you read about Israel you are seeing a picture of us. It's who we are as humans and where we go. Think about all that our current crisis is showing about who we are. Own the words and phrases that speak to what you yourself drift into. Repent. Take joy in the great words of hope that Micah speaks, particularly in 5:2-5. The baby born in a manger in Bethlehem IS our peace! He was given the name Jesus. Jesus means Yahweh saves! He does!

TO PREP YOUR MIND FOR ACTION...

WORK THROUGH THESE QUESTIONS 1 PETER 1:13-16 RAISES.

Having our minds prepped for action had become a big deal for Peter. Can you recall from Peter's story, thinking that kept him from being a faithful servant of Jesus? What are some things that hinder you? What thinking in you needs to be strengthened?

1. Today there are many things we lean on to give us hope. What are some things you have thought about that are part of your "hope package?"
2. After some really great experiences, most of us have felt this: "Is that it? Is that all there is?" To what degree is this healthy and right? To what degree could it become unhealthy?
3. What have been some key achievements in your journey of holiness, victories the Holy Spirit has helped you rise to? What is something that seems to keep coming undone?
4. There is a clear linkage in Scripture between trusting Yahweh more and that growth producing growth in both holiness and hope. The story of Peter illustrates this. What are some areas you have seen recently where your trust in Jesus falters? How can you strengthen trust?

A HIGH-YIELDING, BONUS ACTIVITY

It is always good to remind yourself of what Jesus suffered so that your sins could be forgiven. Re-reading the accounts of His suffering in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John will do that for you. That's always an exercise that is high-yielding. It preps our minds for godly actions. Here is another great exercise.

This exercise is based on what we can see in the descriptions we have of Jesus' words and responses as He suffered. They were being continually shaped by thoughts from the Old Testament. And so, as He addressed His mourners on the way out to be crucified (Luke 23:27-31), what He said to them was shaped by Scriptures like Isaiah 2:12-22; 29:1-3. Other things He said as He was tortured indicate that during the entire ordeal His thoughts and responses were being shaped by Scripture. That's how He endured. His mind had been prepared by time spent knowing the Scripture.

This week read and meditate on Psalm 22 and 31, Isaiah 2 and 53. Think about how the Spirit used these to give Jesus grit for His hard mission. Think about what the Holy Spirit wants to use in these same Scriptures to strengthen you in the mission. Be inspired by the fact that the thoughts in these Scriptures work! They prep you to do much more than just survive and "get through it" even as they did Jesus!

AS YOU CONDUCT YOURSELVES THROUGH THIS WEEK, OUR FOURTH WEEK IN ISOLATION (MAYBE LONGER)...

WORK THROUGH THESE QUESTIONS 1 PETER 1:17-21 RAISES.

1. Do you view your “heart,” as something you are to give direction to or as something that you have no control over, something that shapes you independent of you?
2. The “lens” Peter says we should view our life activities and thinking through is that we live in a foreign country. Along these lines, what are some of the thoughts/attitudes that are “earthy” in you that the Holy Spirit has challenged so far in our study in 1 Peter?
3. It is a privilege to be able to “call on Him as Father.” It is also a stewardship. What is healthy about your “fear” of God, and what is unhealthy? What would you like the Spirit to do in your heart to make this healthier in you?
4. Jesus is both our Judge and Savior. How is this impacting the direction your thoughts take in the events of this week?

5. Christianity is a system of beliefs, but it is more. List some things that this faith of yours IS because of the beliefs it has taught you.

A HIGH-YIELDING, BONUS ACTIVITY

It is always good to remind yourself of three important ideas; sin, righteousness and judgment. I know, it sounds like three subject areas to avoid!! The Judge's ideas about these are very different than what we might think. Early this week, read Jesus' words in John 16:5-11. There He talks about the Holy Spirit developing convictions in us on these three ideas.

Each day see if you can discern His instruction and His thoughts flowing into your mind about sin, righteousness and judgment. He might identify sin in you in some new way or teach you something about sin that you had not thought through before. He will do the same about what is righteous and just. He will also bring to mind Jesus' future judgment. He will remind you of your hope in that judgment, that He will make wrongs right and establish forever His justice. He will also remind you of WHO matters most in your mindset and decision-making.

Each day write some of this down, new things or things that you are becoming more aware of. You will grow quickly as you make yourself aware of what He wants you to know about sin, righteousness and judgment! You might expect this to fill you with anxiety and guilt. It will not if as you do it you recall what is true about Him. As you come to know the truth about these three subject areas you will be filled with hope and a great sense of purpose. Try it. It leads to freedom!

AS YOU CONTINUE YOUR ADOPTED ROUTINES THIS WEEK...

We are thinking more these days about when life returns to normal. Remember, Peter was inspired to write to people like us to change our normal. That's God's heart too, as the author behind the author. It's His heart because He knows our normal can compromise our lives in every way. Our normal can hold us back from His best. So YES! Let's think about normal. But let's help each other allow Jesus to lead that conversation.

WORK THROUGH THESE QUESTIONS 1 PETER 1:22-2:3 RAISES.

1. "Born again" has become a political label in America. But why did God coin that term to use of us who trust Him? What are some great things in these verses that it means about you?
2. During these present circumstances what sins/excesses do you sense God trying to filter out of your life?
3. The fruits and beauty of our lives tend to spoil and pass. What kinds of hopes and dreams have you been thinking about in view of all the things that Peter is teaching?
4. Peter's exhorts us to crave what helps us grow up spiritually. That implies we can shift our cravings. What would you like to crave? What might you need to taste to help you develop that craving?

5. Jesus has you here thinking about these verses. Kyle suggested four applications of them. Which one got your attention as the one Jesus wants you to focus on?

A HIGH-YIELDING, BONUS ACTIVITY

Check out Psalm 19! It talks about the “milk” Peter refers to. As you read Psalm 19 you’ll see that God has left a message for us through the things He made. At verse seven you’ll feel the Psalm abruptly change direction. The second half of Psalm 19 talks about the message God has left for us in writing. That message is much more specific. It helps us understand Him better as we look at all He has made. Jesus lived it! Take time to stare at these statements about Yahweh’s messages. Think about the implications of His messages.

Here is some help in focusing on this Psalm in a very profitable way. What do you learn about God from all He has created? Don’t stray into thinking about HOW He created it right now. Just think about what His work says about Him. What have you learned from His written word, His book, that would otherwise be unknown to you? How does that change your perspective on what He has made? What is the great thing about each of these messages? And think this thought, “Since this that I am reading is true then the implication for me is that ...”

Mark Psalm 19 in your Bible so that you can find it and return to it often. Each short phrase has great meaning and each is life-giving. Each one is easily forgotten. Remember, His word to us is our life-blood as we live in this fallen world!

AS YOU CONTINUE YOUR ADOPTED ROUTINES THIS WEEK...

Think about things you want to become normal for you in the weeks ahead. What do you want to get back to? What do you want to leave behind? What are some things you want to be resolute, determined and even stubborn about? What are some things you need to be willing to “die on the hill for?” The verses Kyle talked about on Sunday speak to potential purposes of God for us that are way beyond normal!

WORK THROUGH THESE QUESTIONS 1 PETER 2:4-10 RAISES.

1. Why is our community, Red Mountain Community Church, so valuable in God's estimation to this place, Mesa, Arizona?
2. As you look to your future, how would you like to be more of a priest to others?
3. What are some of your strengths and weaknesses when it comes to representing Jesus as King?
4. As you saw the word “precious” in verses 6-7, what are some things that occurred to you about the value of your personal faith in Jesus Christ?

5. Verses 7-8 talk about unbelief and unbelievers. What are some of the sad things that should move us deeply about unbelieving family members, acquaintances and people in general? What are some things you can easily do for them?

6. What are some of the excellent things about God that move you? How is He moving you mirror these to those you love and to strangers?

7. As you saw the word “precious” in verses 6-7, what are some things that occurred to you about the value of your personal faith in Jesus Christ?

A HIGH-YIELDING, BONUS ACTIVITY

There are two Psalms that serve us very well as personal vision statements. They are “moving-forward-I-want-to-be-this-person” kind of Psalms. The first is Psalm 16. It is messianic, meaning it describes the vision Jesus had as He tackled life among fallen people in a fallen world. The second is Psalm 101. It is the mindset David pursued during his years.

As you meditate on the words and phrases of Psalm 16 ask questions like these: Who or what is the big thing to me right now? Have I prayed about it? What is THE thing I must not let go of as I live? Who are the people I mimic, my heroes? What are some things that become like a god to me? What is my potential heritage in the Lord? What am I looking to as my source of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness?

As you meditate on Psalm 101 ask these questions: Do I regularly ask the Lord to meet me and minister to me? Do I live well at home with those I love? Do those of marginal faith influence me too much? Do I need to courageously face my own heart? What people do I need to give greater influence to? Who should have less influence?

Now, remember three things. First, these Psalms represent God’s vision for you. They can become true of you. Second, you need to pursue God’s vision with the Holy Spirit’s help. That’s where His book, His people and His stirrings inside you are all important. Third, the key thing with this godly vision is to see yourself falling short of it each day. Really! Because success in it is when you find yourself practicing confession and repentance. You will succeed through practicing confession and repentance over the long haul. Psalm 16:6 will come true and be your testimony as your life comes to a close!

AS YOU ANTICIPATE NORMAL THIS WEEK...

Carry around with you the conviction that God wants to change every relationship that you have, for the better. He started by offering you a healthy relationship with Him. He has no interest in just leading you into normal human relationships.

There are relationships that are unhealthy in all our lives. In some cases these must be stopped and re-started with new motives, new respect and new vulnerability. Some simply must be ended. But in these verses God asks us to have relationships with unreasonable, self-centered people. He did. Aren't you glad? We must not decide to end relationships such as these too quickly. God didn't.

The verses Kyle taught through on Sunday have crazy potential. They involve making ourselves uncommonly vulnerable. That idea has been rejected by humanity. So we are left in a world of people unskilled at love, though they are crying out for it.

Now, there are people you cannot be vulnerable with. But don't jump to that posture too quickly or you will never be skilled at love. Be wise in your vulnerability. But remember this, He wants us to love as He did. So we must be willing to be vulnerable. He greatly uses our suffering.

Many have taken advantage of God. Or have they? Do we really think anyone can take advantage of the One who knows all, has power over all and has the final say in everyone's eternal destiny? You're safe as you stay with Him, trusting and imitating Him.

WORK THROUGH THESE QUESTIONS 1 PETER 2:11-25 RAISES.

1. What experiences have you had that taught you false wisdom, making you less willing to be vulnerable and subject to others?

2. As you think about becoming more like Jesus in your actions and thoughts, what acts are you praying for transformation in? What thought patterns are you praying for transformation in?

3. Unreasonable bosses, neighbors, friends, family members are a trial! Given Peter's words, what do you want said about you and your handling of such people in the future?

4. Would others say that you need to win, or would they say you can let it go? What is the big win you could seek to gain instead of the hollow

5. Read Psalm 139:23-24. As you think about praying this prayer are you fearful? How can you grow past those fears?

A HIGH-YIELDING, BONUS ACTIVITY

There are seven short notes Jesus had John write to seven first century Churches. They are recorded for our benefit in Revelation chapters two and three. It has turned out that the weaknesses of these seven churches are inherent in all people. So they have been passed on and can be seen today. These notes then, are a great source of wisdom from Jesus Himself. They give us great counsel as we journey together until He comes again.

Read one of these short notes each day this week. Meditate on the words and phrases. Think about each church's weakness. Listen for how the Spirit wants to change how you THINK. That's why Jesus wrote the notes and it is why each note ends with the same phrase, "Let the one who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

There's a couple of things that might puzzle you in these notes John wrote. Watch for this term, the Nicolaitans. There was a system of thought people were falling for (2:6). The Nicolaitans twisted God's grace into permission to sin. Sin was "no big deal" to them, because God would forgive them. You need to catch yourself imagining this at times. Watch for this term, the Nicolaitans.

In Israel's past there was a spiritualist named Balaam (2:14). He actually made some great prophetic statements about Israel's future, though he was evil. He became a consultant to an enemy of Israel, a king named Balek. He told Balek that no curse had power over Yahweh's people. But Balaam advised Balek in a devious way. He taught Balek to have his people be friendly to Israelites and invite them to participate in their own religious celebrations. These included rites that involved promiscuous sexual activity. The Israelites were only too happy to take part, to their own spiritual demise. Out from under Yahweh's protection, the curse that came with the evil they engaged punished the Israelites. One of the hazards of the Christian journey is that the wrong people can lead us into what will become a curse to us.

AS YOU EXPERIENCE A BIT OF NORMAL THIS WEEK...

You will have one eye on the future. What will the virus do next? One thing is a great investment no matter what the future holds. It is our marriages and families.

As we are being taught in our study of 1 Peter we are learning about submission. Now there is a unhealthy kind of submission. But it is impossible to live well if we altogether refuse it. The passage Kyle dealt with Sunday drops submission squarely into the laps of both husbands and wives. It's a long shot for marriage to work without both husband and wife embracing submission.

God lays down some of His advice for making marriage work among fallen people in a fallen world. If we ponder it and seek to live it out in our times we are on page with our Creator. If we dismiss it, we make the decision to be our own master. Wise people are asking themselves these days this question; how well it working out for us in our world to decide for ourselves what is good and bad? In particular they are asking how well are our marriages and families doing now that we have freed ourselves from God?

So looking forward to normalcy in our culture, these verses are really timely! There is nothing we want to do better than keep our homes on God's course. There is great reward for husbands and wives that determine together to pursue God first and foremost as their master.

WORK THROUGH THESE QUESTIONS 1 PETER 3:1-7 RAISES.

1. Would you say you have gotten good at dealing with the voice of your own mind that reads something in the Bible and says, "I don't agree"? What makes a person good at this skill of submitting themselves to God?

2. Peter speaks of the power in a home of respectful and pure conduct by wives. How does a wife show honor and respect today? What does it take to develop and sustain this conduct?

3. Peter also speaks of the power in a home of a man that shows understanding and honor towards His wife. How should a man in the 21st century demonstrate he understands his wife? What are ways to honor her? What things do you have to renounce to become this kind of man?

4. If you are married, talk with your spouse about how the two of you have let these verses shape your home and how you have chosen to set them aside.

5. There has been much needful conversation about boundaries in marriage. The risky side of that conversation is that we can stray into focusing on building boundaries rather than on loving more sacrificially. Do you think you have become more sacrificial as a spouse or less?

A HIGH-YIELDING, BONUS ACTIVITY

Submission is a life skill. Peter had to learn it. He had come to realize how life-changing it was. It had bestowed great dignity on him. He wanted that for us.

Submission begins with reverence and respect for God above all others. It is a refusal to live by what comes natural. It is a quest to live as God wishes us to live. There is a ton of counsel on what submission to Yahweh looks like in the book of Proverbs. This week take time to think through Proverbs 3:1-12.

These verses talk about the great reward those who choose to submit to God in real-life lay hold of. They also tell us HOW to do that. Identify in these verses the kinds of quests you need to submit your lives to and what they will gain for you. Identify the kinds of quests you instinctively fall into instead and what the consequences of those are. Verses 11-12 talk about submitting to the Lord's discipline when it comes. How is He disciplining you these days?

Submitting to God in the moments of each day takes diligence on your part. It is not natural. A great place to go from time to time as you try to master this skill is Proverbs. It will give you reams of advice in short sentences. The Holy Spirit will speak to you powerfully. Every so often in your life read a chapter of Proverbs a day for a month. It is a great Bible-reading habit!

AS WE SEEK TO MOVE FORWARD...

Who knows what we will say about the coronavirus in a decade, or what medical and history books will say about it. What we know is that God has a vision and plan for humanity and for us individually that will make sense of all the circumstances along the way when His plan has run its course. Whatever our circumstances going forward, we want to live them in touch with Him.

When Peter was a young man he hadn't been shaped to any exceptional degree by eternal things. Here is what Jesus said to Peter after being his friend and close companion for three years: "Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go" (John 21:18). Those words were ominous sounding. But when Peter wrote the letter we are studying, there is no doubt that he had let go of the young man he once was. He had discovered real living, submission to Jesus.

Similarly, Peter's words in his letter can sound ominous to us. But they are spoken by a man who had tasted of real living and wanted that life for everyone. So don't aim at maintaining who you are. Don't aim at the life you have carved out for yourself. Don't hang on to all the coping styles you've developed to survive in relationships. Don't aim to be who you've made yourself to be so far. Aim at all Jesus has for you. Aim at stripping away the veneer you've covered up with. You'll have no regrets!

WORK THROUGH THESE QUESTIONS 1 PETER 3:8-17 RAISES.

1. Of the five things Peter tells us to aim to develop in verse 8, which is developing the slowest in you?

2. How much of your personality as people see it, is what God has created, and how much of it has been life-created? What experiences have shaped you that God now wants to undo?

3. Verses 9-11 show us that a healthy relationship to God involves things we say and how we say them. What are some things about your speech that are the results of insecurity, abuse, or image-making that God wants to change.

AS THE HEAT BEGINS TO CLOBBER US THIS WEEK...

We wouldn't think of maintaining all of our winter practices as the heat rolls in over us. We have "armed" ourselves for it in a number of ways. We have AC units in our homes and cars. We have summer wardrobes. We change our schedules so as to do hot things in the early morning. It all positions us to survive and thrive.

God's heart for us is that we be well-armed for living well when surrounded by evil. It requires certain things from us, namely, intentionality in certain practices. His heart is that we not succumb to the evil that is IN us. He used Peter, whom He had helped break free from so much, to counsel us about escaping evil's traps.

WORK THROUGH THESE QUESTIONS 1 PETER 4:1-6 RAISES.

1. We suffer from evil all around us and evil IN us. What passions seem stubbornly present in you (4:4), that have caused you pain and that you must constantly rule over? Do you feel like you've had enough of these?
2. What are some ways in which you can "arm" yourself to win these battles within?
3. Peter says Christ died in order to bring us to God (3:18). What are some of the ways in which you have been "brought to God." What are some ways you will experience this in the future?
4. Commitments are important to any who would follow Jesus. What commitments have you made to Him that have been life-changing? What do you think are "next commitments" you should make?

5. Whom might God have you pray for that is far from Him right now, that needs to “have enough” of the life they’re living so as to get free?

A HIGH-YIELDING, BONUS ACTIVITY

As Kyle said, “Commitments are a big part of following Jesus.” So, as he suggested, thank Jesus this week repeatedly for His unequivocal victory over sin. There is so much for you ahead because of His victory.

As you do that, read and think about Psalm 32. It has many important things to say about confession and transparency in your relationship with God. Ponder the statements you read in verses 1-7. Evaluate your own practices of confession. What can you do to enrich your practice of confessing the passions in you that keep leading you back into the same pain? What commitments is God leading you into?

Now, listen for His instruction to you as you read verses 8-9. They’re critical. Then, read on about the blest life He wants you to enjoy in verses 10-11. Now, be glad in Him!

Repeat that six times. That’s one set! Do three sets. Get the point? If we made commitments in spiritual things like we do in other things, how might those commitments strengthen us and enrich us for all of eternity?

THIS WEEK WITH HIM...

As we have said before, God's heart for us is that we be well-armed for living well when surrounded by evil. It requires certain things from us, namely, intentionality in certain practices. His heart is that we not succumb to the evil that is IN us. The Holy Spirit used Peter, whom He had helped break free from so much, to counsel us about escaping evil's traps.

WORK THROUGH THESE QUESTIONS 1 PETER 4:7-11 RAISES.

1. The mission of Jesus requires serious and sound judgment of us. What comes to mind when you think of these two things? How are these developed?
2. When you are thinking right, what kind of prayers does the Spirit lead you into? What kinds of prayers do you pray when you are being driven by anxiety, self-centeredness, guilt and the like?
3. What are some signs in you that your love for people of our church is fervent, and what are some signs your love is lukewarm?
4. Who is someone you know that you could encourage right now by showing them hospitality?

5. Peter says God has given each of us a “gift.” The Spirit uses our gift to grow the faith of others. What is the gift God has given you that helps others grow in faith? What can you do to sharpen that gift and to steward it well?

A HIGH-YIELDING, BONUS ACTIVITY

Because we easily develop preferences in our relationships with people we soon also develop prejudices against others. Both can be caused by bad experiences, fear, envy, our own insecurity, and our own idolatry. Preferences and prejudices can focus on ethnicity, personality, body type, age, dress, cool, occupation, socio-economics, personal talents and abilities. The list could go on endlessly.

We have become quite defensive about prejudice in the modern era. We act as if we not only don't have this sin, but as if we never have. We harshly shame any caught in it. This is a wild hypocrisy that puts us on dangerous ground. Remember, we prove daily we are capable of listening to our own self-serving thoughts rather than those of the Holy Spirit. The moment we do so, we stray into the stronghold of preferences and prejudices. So prejudice is well-within our capabilities and takes root in each of us.

This observation is not meant to normalize prejudice, to excuse it as “only human.” It is to clearly declare it to be sin, to be repented of the moment we feel it in our hearts. It is to arm us against a game being played in our culture that will destroy us. We have normalized sins of all sorts. They are sins we want to freely do. We have even proudly embraced them. When we do that it should not surprise us that some have chosen to embrace this particular sin and all the injustices that go with it.

Rooting out the sins of preference and prejudice requires our greatest vigilance! So it is really good to visit three passages of Scripture regularly to confess and cleanse our hearts from them. Do that this week. Visit Galatians 5:13-24. It identifies the thoughts that spring up in us from “the flesh.” Our “flesh” is our thinking that we slip into when we are not controlled by the Holy Spirit. It is self-centered, self-serving and ugly in every way. Then these verses talk about the thinking that is of the Spirit. You need these verses to tell the difference in your own mind. Visit James 2:1-13. It deals with the injustice that flare up in us of favoring certain people and marginalizing others. Then visit Matthew 5:17-48. It speaks of our tendency to not look deep enough for particular sins, to look only at our outward actions and not at our hearts. You will catch yourself pleading guilty to many sins when you become more aware of where your heart drifts. You will gain freedom as you meditate on these truths.

THIS WEEK WITH HIM...

Part of being well-armed for imitating Christ when surrounded by evil is learning to think right when being rejected and when suffering. Peter had to learn this. He hadn't done so well early on. He became very good at it. His instruction is priceless!

WORK THROUGH THESE QUESTIONS 1 PETER 4:12-19 RAISES.

1. Persecution has not been a part of the surprises of the last four months in the U.S. But there have been many surprises. What are some of the things that have surprised you that should not have? Why?
2. As you listened to the explanation or Peter's words in these verses, did you become aware of some of expectations you have of life and of the Lord that need to be changed? What is at stake in you making these changes?
3. Can you identify some things about God that should give you joy that surpasses all other joy life gives you? Why don't they?
4. Identify a time when you suffered because you were a Christian. What were some things about that experience that were your own fault? What part of it came about just because you are a follower of Jesus?

5. What has the Spirit led you to do in the past that you intentionally avoided because you might be ridiculed? How can you change that in the future?

A HIGH-YIELDING, BONUS ACTIVITY

This is a faith-building activity. It is a “do-you-believe-this exercise”! It will help you process some of the most difficult things in life, like having your identity stolen, or being a victim of severe and devastating injustice and deceit, or being a victim of abuse, or being taken advantage of in some other way.

Read Isaiah 2:12-22. It’s really sobering! It talks about a “day” Yahweh has scheduled in His plan to confront evil and deal with it once-for-all. Much of your processing of your own life and all that happens on this planet will be helped by knowing this Scripture. Read these verses several times. Do you trust that God has such a day and that it will happen? There are many situations in life when we feel and behave as if we do not believe this. To trust in this “day” changes everything!

All through the Scripture this “day” is spoken of as earth’s hope of escaping the horrible curse of evil. The “day” is actually a season of time, likely a little over 1,000 years long. Jesus will be visibly present on earth and rule earth by His standards of justice and fairness. The book of Revelation is about this period of time. Renew your trust often in this certainty that God has assured us of repeatedly! Remember, when God’s plan is done, every injustice will have been made right. And better, at the end of that day Yahweh’s right judgment will stand for all of eternity.

THIS WEEK ENVISION...

God giving grace to you, to help you in your needs. What are some things you need His help in right now? Hold these before Him and watch what answers He gives you as you read the words of His book and take the following steps to process them more.

WORK THROUGH THESE QUESTIONS 1 PETER 5:1-5 RAISES.

1. God has called all of us to model the faith well for others. As a Christian what are some things about Jesus that you model well? What are some things you can hold before God and ask Him to help you to change so you model Him better?
2. Peter names some things that should NOT be part of your leadership style. What are some of these? How prevalent are these in our culture?
3. Some people need to lead and look to be in the leadership mix. Others seek to avoid leading. Who are you in this regard? What are the dangers associates with either of these two ends of the pendulum? Why should both extremes be corrected?
4. What is a key idea about humility that the sermon made you aware of or reminded you about?

5. Church is largely an extra-curricular activity in our culture. It gets our leftover time. That changed in Peter. Why did it? How has this changed in you as you have read Peter's teaching and advice on the roles we fill in life?

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It is said of Moses that there was not a more humble person in all the earth (Numbers 12:3). Read the story about him you'll find in Numbers 12. It is about a time when his own brother and sister were sharply critical of his leadership. Think about what may have been driving them. How did Moses show humility in responding to them? What are some of the things you notice about God's defense of Moses? What impressions and lessons are you left with about leadership after reading Numbers 12?

THIS WEEK...

Think about how the Covid experience has changed you in your relationship with God. As you think about the last three months are there things that you felt led to give attention to by Him that are unfinished? That is not an uncommon experience for Christians. We need to return to lessons learned, and learn them in still deeper ways. That is how habits are established. Think about God's unfinished business in you as you do some further reflection on Peter's words. And remember, these are the words he wants to leave you with. They have great significance!

WORK THROUGH THESE QUESTIONS 1 PETER 5:6-14 RAISES.

1. Humility is a way of thinking, thinking about ourselves rightly, in harmony with God. What are some ways of thinking about yourself that you fall into, that are not God's will?
2. What are some anxieties you have that get in the way of humbling yourself under God's rule?
3. Write down the things we are told to do with respect to the devil. Which one(s) did God seem to call your attention to as you listed them?
4. What are four things that verses ten and eleven say God will do for you and what is particularly significant about each of them?

5. To many people, grace means you don't have to do anything with respect to your walk with Jesus. In verse 12 Peter says that his letter is the "true grace of God." What have you learned from studying 1 Peter about what God by His grace wants to help you start thinking and doing? What are some things God has led you to do to "stand firm" in His grace?

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Grace always has to do with God freely giving Himself for our benefit. His grace has a purpose, that we will experience more of His saving power. He wants to be our savior. He wants to help us lay hold of what He has for us rather than settling for however our own instincts might shape our lives. When Peter says his letter has laid out the true grace of God to us, this is what he means. Grace doesn't lead us to coast. It leads us to grow. We are to stand firm in that grace, not dabble in it.

Another great statement is made on the grace of God in this regard in Titus 2:11-14. It says that God's grace trains us. In other words, it aims at developing us as people of God. We should understand that God's grace is like a personal trainer! Trainers guide us to say "No!" to certain things, good tasting things! A trainer also tells us to pursue other things, good things that help us get to a better spot. God's own Spirit seeks to be this to us so that our lives are transformed in every way. He's present in us to help us experience real life!

Read these verses in Titus and process each of the things the verses say grace is training us to do. Does one of these seem particularly important in your life right now? Do you think you have made good spiritual and emotional progress in the time you have followed Christ? What do you think He is leading you to do to experience more of His grace/power?