

13-WEEK DEVOTIONAL



Living
HOPE

1 PETER

WEEK OF SEPTEMBER 15

EXILES UPON THE EARTH

Opening Prayer

Jesus,

We thank you for the beauty of your Word and the wisdom it has for us today. Please open our ears to hear you, our eyes to see your beauty, our hearts to receive your love, and our hands to be of service to you.

Amen.

Read 1 Peter 1:1-9

What Does It Mean?

Ever feel out of place in the world? Like you don't belong somewhere? That nobody gets you and what you are going through? That nobody knows your struggle, or wonder if anyone else is struggling as much as you are? Well, then you might relate to Peter's audience in this letter. Peter writes to a wide audience who all share the commonality that they are facing struggles in life due solely to their allegiance and identification with Jesus. It is why Peter describes them like exiles, as people who no longer feel accepted or at home with the world around them. But Peter writes to encourage these exiles that what they have gained in Christ is better than anything they have lost in the eyes and reputation of the world. They are part of the new thing that God is unfolding in the world, the fulfillment of his promises, the rescue of humanity, the salvation longed for from the days of creation. Peter's audience, and all those in Christ today, possess something now which is imperishable, that not even the present sufferings they face can take away from them. The strange twist of fate is that this gives their sufferings a new perspective—as it should for us in our present difficulties. They can look at the trials they face because of their faith as gifts. Why?

For several reasons. First off, difficulties grow faith, character, and our witness. Second, it identifies our union with a Messiah who suffered for his people. Today we might look to avoid sufferings, and avoid feeling like we don't fit in, and might, when faced with trials, ask "Why God?" more than anything else. Peter, here, encourages us to ask God to show us where he is growing us during this time, and to take joy in the benefits our struggles provide for us. That doesn't make things easier, but it does give them purpose.

Reflection

1. When was a time you felt out of place with those around you because of your faith?
2. When was a time you accepted hardship today for a better future?
3. When facing trials, are you more likely to ask "Why God?" or "What work do you want to do in me, God, at this time?" What do you think is necessary to switch to this second state of questioning?

Going Forward

See tough times as a gift to be closer to Jesus.

Closing Prayer

Jesus,

You suffered on our behalf and saw it as a joy worth stepping into. By following you, we have stepped down a path filled with uncomfortable, even painful, experiences because of our union with you. The enemy wants us to feel discouraged and ashamed at those times. But remind us then of how good your salvation is. Open our eyes to see the joy you offer us at such times of great refining. And through these times, grow our love and dependence on you.

Amen.

WEEK OF SEPTEMBER 22

A CHOICE TO BE HOLY

Opening Prayer

Jesus,

We thank you for the beauty of your Word and the wisdom it has for us today. Please open our ears to hear you, our eyes to see your beauty, our hearts to receive your love, and our hands to be of service to you.

Amen.

Read 1 Peter 1:10-21

What Does It Mean?

Have you ever gotten something so special that it was worth all the work and hardship to get? Maybe it was a job or a diploma. Maybe it was that first car you had to save up to buy. Maybe it was a marriage or a child. Peter's audience faced tremendous hardships because of their walk with Jesus, but Peter wanted them to know that they held something truly special as a follower of Jesus that made the hardship worth it. Followers of Jesus possess something that the ancients longed for, and that was a regenerate state in union with the Messiah. They foresaw the day coming; they wrote about it; they prayed for it; they worked hard to prepare the world for it, but in the end they knew they were gardeners planting seeds for which they would not see the blooming. Peter shares about their work to remind us of the gratitude and appreciation we should have for our salvation, to not take our salvation for granted, as is so tragically common, and this is for an audience who are facing times of deep struggle. In the unpredictable turmoil of life, we need to live rooted deeply in a hope that is always ready to put faith into action and in appreciation for the work of Christ and those who have gone before us. Two options rest before us: we can either slip into

an ungrateful posture by conforming ourselves to the ways of the world or we can take the grace God has given us to lead us into the life God always desired for us to have with Jesus. This second option is an invitation to a partnership with the God who rescued us, redeems us, and is always there for when we call out to Jesus. Therefore, see yourself possessing something wonderful that makes you into a new creation, and lean into that grace today with gratitude and praise.

Reflection

1. What sacrifices can you see prior generations of your family made that has provided you opportunities and positions today? How does that make you feel?
2. Read through this passage again. What blessings and benefits do you possess because of Jesus? How might that encourage a struggling audience to hear
3. Peter presents an ultimatum to his audience of two options. Which speaks to your heart in this season of life?

Going Forward

Choose which side you will stand on.

Closing Prayer

Jesus,

Your blood makes us free. Your sacrifice makes us whole. And your identity gives us freedom through our union with you. All that you offer, so many longed to see. And so many have made sacrifices so that we may be where we are today. As a sign of our gratitude, we choose you. Give us more of you.

Amen.

WEEK OF SEPTEMBER 29

WHAT DOESN'T PERISH

Opening Prayer

Jesus,

We thank you for the beauty of your Word and the wisdom it has for us today. Please open our ears to hear you, our eyes to see your beauty, our hearts to receive your love, and our hands to be of service to you.

Amen.

Read 1 Peter 1:22-2:3

What Does It Mean?

Much in our world withers with age. The hot new car of today will one day rust away in a junkyard. The house we envy will one day crumble and be replaced. Much of this world is perishable—even our bodies. God's word, however, is an imperishable truth, living and abiding in the hearts of followers of Jesus. By the preaching of it, God's people are refreshed and reminded of their new status, urged to love, and called to obedient servitude to their King. This obedience is not out of fear of tyranny and oppression, as the world demands obedience and as Peter's audience experienced. The difference is that we give our obedience freely and eagerly in response to our ransom and redemption. Therefore, we put perishable things away, which tear and rust our souls, such as old habits of malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander, in order to adopt a spirit of a child that hungers for God. Overcoming old pursuits is not about sheer grit, but about redirection into a new and greater pursuit, after the one who offers something imperishable. Spiritual maturity always matches spiritual hunger. The more we crave the things of God, the less we will crave the things that are not of God. May we pray

to develop a stronger longing for the things of God than for the things that are not of God.

Reflection

1. What have been some things that you were once so eager to have but later found them perishable and later discarded them?
2. Peter calls for obedience to God. How is this obedience different from how the world calls for obedience?
3. Would someone catch you guilty of praying for a craving of the things of God more than the craving of the things of this world?

Going Forward

Pray to desire the things of God more than the things of this world.

Closing Prayer

Jesus,

You are so good, and what you offer is imperishable. Forgive us for the ways we chase after and submit to lesser things that are perishable. You are worthy of letting go of those things that only want to tear our souls apart. We want You. Help us want you more.

Amen

WEEK OF OCTOBER 6

SEEING OUR TRUE SELVES

Opening Prayer

Jesus,

We thank you for the beauty of your Word and the wisdom it has for us today. Please open our ears to hear you, our eyes to see your beauty, our hearts to receive your love, and our hands to be of service to you.

Amen.

Read 1 Peter 2:4-10

What Does It Mean?

Peter knew that every follower of Jesus has moments when how they see themselves is not what is true reality. We are hard on ourselves, slow to give ourselves grace and mercy, and often think little of ourselves or feel we are incapable of doing much. We compare ourselves to others and limit the scope of what God wants to do in our lives. If it's true in our day, it was true in Peter's day for his audience, but Peter shares some encouraging words here for how God now sees those who have faith in Jesus. And it had everything to do with rewriting and reinterpreting their faith history in a fresh light because of the revelation of Jesus. When Peter refers to living stones, his audience would have immediately thought of the Jewish Temple. Much of what Peter says in this passage relates to the Temple, and what it originally stood for in intention, but not in practice. The early followers of Jesus believed that the work that God intended the Temple to serve in the world was now being fully worked out in the followers of Jesus as God's new Temple. God has done a great reversal in this act that results in a restoration of our created purpose as God's creatures. Christ has not only saved us from something, but he has saved us to something and

in this we have a family, have mercy, and live to share the excellency of Christ.

Reflection

1. Salvation is not just being saved from something, but being saved to something. According to this passage, what does that involve? How does that reality affect the way we should view ourselves?
2. Peter describes us as both God's new Temple and his new priesthood, who are called to offer spiritual sacrifices to God through Jesus. What thoughts come to mind hearing this, and what do you think it means to offer spiritual sacrifices to God through Jesus?
3. Read Exodus 19:5-6 and then read verses 9-10 in Peter's letter. How do you think each audience would have felt hearing these words, and how does that relate to how you feel hearing them? What significance do you think that means for how we should see ourselves now?

Going Forward

See yourself as made new in Christ to point back to Jesus in all you do.

Closing Prayer

Jesus,

We are often cruel to ourselves in how we speak and act. We discredit what we do, or feel capable of being able to do. But you tell us greater things. You show us a better vision for who we are now in you. Help us let go of how we once viewed ourselves and guide us to a new perspective of who we are in you and what you can do in us.

Amen.

WEEK OF OCTOBER 13

SOJOURNERS AND EXILES

Opening Prayer

Jesus,

We thank you for the beauty of your Word and the wisdom it has for us today. Please open our ears to hear you, our eyes to see your beauty, our hearts to receive your love, and our hands to be of service to you.

Amen.

Read 1 Peter 2:11-17

What Does It Mean?

Have you ever been to a reunion, or reconnected with old friends and realize that you are no longer the person you were before? You know it. They know it. And now things feel very different in the relationship because you and them are no longer in the same place anymore. Peter describes our union with Jesus having this type of effect. God has given his people a new identity that is growing more into its full being. But that puts us in an out-of-place position with the rest of the world. Peter calls us sojourners to describe this new state. We are in this world, but no longer part of it as we once were. And the enemy does not like that we have claimed ownership of something he once got stripped from us. As such, threats always lurk to take from our new identity. Though our inheritance is assured, and God might be redeeming us now, we must not forget that a world awaiting redemption does not accept our new state. We see it in the home, on the streets, at the job site, and in our private life. To be a Jesus follower is an invitation to be at war with an enemy and a world still in rebellion to God. We fight by being vigilant, abstaining from evil, and committing ourselves to good deeds. We have been called to be royal priests in this world. As such, we look out for what's best for our community and opportunities

to serve in a God-honoring way while maintaining our true loyalties to God. Sometimes the most difficult temptations to face are not ones to do evil, but ones to abstain from doing what is good and right and God-honoring. God has made us free and citizens of heaven, but while we remain in this world, we must work out what it means to do God-honoring work in our world while remaining no longer part of it. If we can walk this line, even those who hate us and call us evil will have to acknowledge that we have brought glory to God. As a follower of Jesus, what a glory that would be!

Reflection

1. Why do you think Peter would describe his readers now as sojourners and exiles?
2. When was a time when someone who wasn't a follower of Jesus complimented you for acting like Jesus?
3. Peter's audience lived under an oppressive empire that hunted Christians. In this space of opposition, Peter does not call for Christians to rebel or resist, but to rise to a higher character to do good for their community to honor God, whose true loyalty they had. What lessons can we take from that for how we can honor God when we are in a context where Jesus and his way is opposed?

Going Forward

Remembering who you are now in Christ, abstain from evil, seek to serve where you can honor God and bless your community, and maintain your true loyalties to God.

Closing Prayer

Jesus,

Bless you for the new identity you give us, but it is not always easy to live out. A world watches us, a world that wants us to fail, a world that wants us to crawl back into despair and darkness. It tempts us to do evil rather than to do good. It threatens our true selves. But we hold fast to you. Give us strength now to honor you. Use us to bless others. And may in the end, people see Jesus in us despite whatever happens. Amen.

WEEK OF OCTOBER 20

KNOWING GOD'S CALLING

Opening Prayer

Jesus,

We thank you for the beauty of your Word and the wisdom it has for us today. Please open our ears to hear you, our eyes to see your beauty, our hearts to receive your love, and our hands to be of service to you.

Amen.

Read 1 Peter 2:18-25

What Does It Mean?

Do you want to know God's calling for your life? Really? What if it was something unpleasant, unfair, or too painful to fully process? This is part of what makes Peter in this text so challenging to read. So much of our life is the pursuit of peace, comfort, and happiness. We say we deserve to be happy; we buy what makes us comfortable, and we structure as much of our life and prayers around this desire to have peace in our lives. Peter's words here challenge this dream of ours. As royal priests in God's new kingdom, called to represent the Messiah to the world, for some, this will mean giving an example of his sufferings and sacrifices. It might mean embodying his suffering, facing scorn and disrespect, walking in loneliness, facing unjust hardship, and doing it as a service to the rest of the world. Under such a possibility, we are called equally to go forward to not succumb to the ways and mannerisms of the world, responding with cruelty to the cruelty we face, but to respond to evil with good. Even if we suffer for doing good, we are rewarded knowing that we have pleased God, for we have experienced the self-giving nature of God and his suffering Messiah. We have followed the footsteps of our King and shared in his hope and

his trust. And we have taken steps down a path that resulted in our own salvation and sanctification and know God can use our sufferings in some cosmic way to bless others. That realization doesn't always make the pain easier, but it makes it worth it considering eternity.

Reflection

1. How badly do you want to know God's calling for your life?
2. How do you typically react when someone treats you unfairly? Where do Peter's words challenge you here?
3. If God called you to a position of suffering like Jesus, how would you respond? Would you accept that calling, or run from it?

Going Forward

Pray to know and accept God's calling for your life

Closing Prayer

Jesus,

Following you is difficult. Your way led to the cross, and you call us to take up our own cross to follow you. You catch us praying to know your will and calling on our lives, but to be honest, what we hope to hear is something pleasant and easy and visibly rewarding. But your suffering led to our redemption. We trust that if it is your will for us to suffer that something similar will be done. Please teach us to have the perspective that you can do something good in our suffering, and help us in that space to represent you and your character well.

Amen.

WEEK OF OCTOBER 27

AN OUT OF BALANCE MARRIAGE

Opening Prayer

Jesus,

We thank you for the beauty of your Word and the wisdom it has for us today. Please open our ears to hear you, our eyes to see your beauty, our hearts to receive your love, and our hands to be of service to you.

Amen.

Read 1 Peter 3:1-7

What Does It Mean?

It would be wonderful if everyone shared our own personal beliefs and values. It would certainly eliminate some problems we create. However, this is obviously not the case and is a reality even within the home, where many couples share different values and beliefs about God. Sometimes one partner has a fervent love for God while the other lacks that same love, or is even adamantly opposed to a walk of faith with Jesus. Some find Christ after a marriage and struggle to navigate down this new journey with a feeling of loneliness while their partner isn't in the same place as them yet. As true as this is for many today, it was true—even more so—when the church was in its infancy at the time Peter writes this letter. Here Peter speaks to both husbands and wives to encourage them that in that tense relational space of difference of beliefs, those who follow Jesus have a powerful opportunity to showcase Christ and his conduct to their spouse. Why? Beyond the simple truth of proximity and opportunity, there is the reality that God is doing a work in your soul that your spouse will get a front-row seat to see. This is a powerful force to our witness to show the credibility of our faith that those closest to us should be able to tell there's a

difference now in our relationship. Not only that, but there is an obligation on our part now, because a failure to follow Jesus in our marriage, and represent him well by treating our spouse well, has a detrimental effect on our prayer and relationship with God. We cannot be right with God if we are treating our spouse wrong.

Reflection

1. Peter suggests that our conduct has a powerful effect and witness to our spouses about the credibility of our faith. When has the conduct of your spouse positively or negatively affected your faith? What impact have you had on your spouse's faith?
2. Peter highlights the importance of appreciating a person's inner attributes rather than focusing solely on their external appearance. What were some internal qualities that drew you to your spouse? After making this list, brag about those to your spouse.
3. Peter says that treating our spouse wrong has a terrible effect on our prayers being heard. What thoughts and feelings does that give you?

Going Forward

Commit to follow Jesus in your marriage as much as you commit to doing so in church.

Closing Prayer

Jesus,

Relationships are messy and complicated. We are different people coming together to be united into one, and that often involves friction and frustrations, especially in the areas of beliefs and the practice of our faith. But our marriages are gifts, and opportunities to follow you in a unique way. Help us here to follow you, and to be the partners you have called us to be.

Amen.

WEEK OF NOVEMBER 3

GOOD DESPITE OPPOSITION

Opening Prayer

Jesus,

We thank you for the beauty of your Word and the wisdom it has for us today. Please open our ears to hear you, our eyes to see your beauty, our hearts to receive your love, and our hands to be of service to you.

Amen.

Read 1 Peter 3:8-17

What Does It Mean?

After finishing up how we live as royal priests in the home and amid our most intimate and vulnerable relationships, Peter turns his attention toward our conduct in the larger community, both in the faith community and in the wider community. Read again Peter's words and think about this being heard by those living in a state where their faith doesn't just make them unpopular in their community, it makes them a threat to the cultural norms. Many cultures and communities see Christian values and ethics and beliefs in a similar fashion. Peter doesn't sugar-coat things. Following Jesus does not guarantee pleasant or easy relationships in the community—even sometimes in faith communities like the church. We can't control how others act. However, we can practice what Peter calls us to practice: to seek unity, to practice sympathy and love, to treat others with tenderness and honor (even those who hurt us). To those who hurt us, we are responsive, not reactive, and we respond with hearts free from fear and with eyes that see the power of doing good in response to hate. Don't give people more cause to hate you. Respond to their hate with good, letting God sort them out, for you know God now and walk with him, knowing that your response honors God. If more of us were prepared to

give a defense of our hope by how we responded with goodness, rather than reacted with uncontrolled anger and desire to get even toward evil, then the world would have no excuse not to know Jesus. For they will have seen him in us.

Reflection

1. When was a time you faced a struggle or opposition for seeking to do something good?
2. What is the difference between reacting to a wrongdoing and responding to a wrongdoing?
3. Go back and read these verses again. What clues does Peter share about how we can prepare our hearts to respond to evil to glorify Christ?

Going Forward

Let God deal with the evil done toward you and focus instead on being a blessing for others in the name of Jesus.

Closing Prayer

Jesus,

In a world still messed up and in rebellion toward you, you have called us into a glorious mission to share your goodness. No surprise, the enemy doesn't want this, and surprisingly, our reward for doing good sometimes is not pleasant. But you know all about this and what this is like. Help us here so that even our response only further shows how good you really are.

Amen.

WEEK OF NOVEMBER 10

GOOD COMING OUT OF THE BAD

Opening Prayer

Jesus,

We thank you for the beauty of your Word and the wisdom it has for us today. Please open our ears to hear you, our eyes to see your beauty, our hearts to receive your love, and our hands to be of service to you.

Amen.

Read 1 Peter 3:18-22

What Does It Mean?

Peter once again uses Christ as the model for our suffering, a very common encouragement through the writings of the New Testament, but here the approach carries a different weight. Instead of focusing on the character Jesus showed in the face of his sufferings, or the hopeful outlook Jesus had for what was on the other side of his suffering (common ways the biblical authors refer to Christ's sufferings) Peter emphasizes here the why for the suffering and the effects of that suffering that led to his glorification. Christ suffered innocently for the sins of humanity in order to bring us to God, even though in his patience some continue to reject him. God is patiently gracious with us despite our unworthy nature for such grace and mercy. Baptism here, in this context, becomes the means by which we identify now with a new model of being human that Christ showed, and that includes how we come to times of suffering. Peter's words here in these verses serve as a model for us today that in our sufferings from a world that still rejects The Messiah, we remember how gracious Jesus was with us during our rebellion, and we urge others, like Noah did in his time, for people to make appeals to God for their salvation. Christ did that for us, and now we carry that mantle forward, having our suffering

not only shape us, but be a call unto others for their repentance.

Reflection

1. When you face difficult times, how likely do you seek to emulate how Christ faced his difficult life moments?
2. Peter shows us here how God brought great good out of Christ's suffering. What good are you seeing God do in your own difficulties?
3. Peter states that baptism identifies us with a crucified Messiah that we are appealing to for our rescue. Have you taken steps to getting baptized? If not, why not?

Going Forward

Trust that God can bring good out of your difficulties as you focus on representing Christ well.

Closing Prayer

Jesus,

Your suffering bought my redemption. I was unrighteous, but you have made me righteous. And you show for all the world to see that God can bring the greatest light, even from the darkest depths. In my present darkness and sufferings, may the cross and resurrection be the stories that are seen through me. Help me trust you. Help me show you to others. Help me love you deeper through this time so others may see you.

Amen.

WEEK OF NOVEMBER 17

PERSEVERING TO DO GOOD

Opening Prayer

Jesus,

We thank you for the beauty of your Word and the wisdom it has for us today. Please open our ears to hear you, our eyes to see your beauty, our hearts to receive your love, and our hands to be of service to you.

Amen.

Read 1 Peter 4:1-11

What Does It Mean?

We've all seen examples, and lived a few of them, when those who do evil get away with what they have done. And we have all heard it and questioned what's the point of doing good when good people suffer and evil people prosper. We might value virtue in principle, but we don't always witness the reward in practice. Many have complained about the reality that the more they strive to do good and make things better, the more evil stands against them — and this should not surprise us. This age is evil, and when we refuse evil, it always lashes back. It insults, mocks, and pressures, and when these things do not work, it then exiles and attacks with greater effort. If we feel the fight today, imagine how Peter's audience felt when their faith led to their persecution. But Peter doesn't tell them to give up; rather, he advises them to have a longer perspective on things. Despite what is seen today, one day all will stand before the Messiah in judgment. Live today considering that future reality, even if it means hardship. Our Messiah won a glorious victory over evil, and our identification with the Messiah puts a target on our back. But our Lord has brought about God's promises and so at such a time as this we must be self-controlled and vigilant

Everyone will have to give an account before God, and then God will settle and make everything right. Knowing what is approaching, live today seeking good in the face of evil. Remember Christ's model of his suffering. Be hospitable. Show love in response to evil and sin. Do all things for God's glory and by God's presence. Be people who work today in the face of evil with our eyes set on our future reality.

Reflection

1. Do you ever find it tempting to think it isn't worth it to work so hard to do what is good? Where have you experienced the temptation to think this?
2. Faced with evil, God invites us to live by a different means. What are some examples according to this passage?
3. Read verses seven through eleven again. What is one thing you can do in response to this passage?

Going Forward

Go do the thing you listed in the final reflection question.

Closing Prayer

Jesus,

This world is messed up, and we are so tempted to follow in its example than to follow your example. It's easier and following you can be really hard, and often feel meaningless in the short run. But grant us the ability to see a longer perspective on things, and with that, empower us to persist in the face of hardships, knowing that at the end of this age, we will stand before you, abide in you, and witness the outcome of our endeavors for good.

Amen.

Opening Prayer

Jesus,

We thank you for the beauty of your Word and the wisdom it has for us today. Please open our ears to hear you, our eyes to see your beauty, our hearts to receive your love, and our hands to be of service to you.

Amen.

Read 1 Peter 4:12-19

What Does It Mean?

So much of our lives revolve around reducing and limiting pain. We want to be comfortable. We want to be accepted and we want to feel secure. Wanting these things is not bad. It's perfectly natural to want to reduce and limit suffering in our lives. Yet Peter says some really challenging things here. Over the past few sections, he has talked about doing good despite opposition, trusting that God can bring good out of any circumstance, and persevering in what mission for good God has called us to. His audience is one who faces great suffering, who would find great encouragement in these prior statements. But Peter reminds us that suffering and struggles are an expected part of following Jesus. When we first come to Christ, it is full of joy and new life and many early passions and successes in our walk, but a point in time comes when the God who called us out of darkness into his light leads us back into darkness to mature us. It should not surprise us that if the world crucified our Messiah, it will also seek pain for those who identify with him. . The Christian life is not an easy or prosperous one, and while there is true joy in it, there is also true pain. Yet Peter calls us not to resist, but to rejoice in this reality—to live in the space of suffering as one who trusts themselves to God. Why?

We know the glory of Christ in partaking in his sufferings, and therefore, we proudly identify ourselves with him. If we are to face suffering in this life, let it not be attributed to our evil deeds, but rather to our union with our crucified and resurrected Messiah.

Reflection

1. What are some things in this passage that Peter says that go against common advice and ways we deal with hardships and troubles in our life?
2. What about these words from Peter do you like or dislike hearing? Where do they challenge or encourage you?
3. When was a time you, or someone close to you, faced hardship for their faith?

Going Forward

Remove yourself from evil, trust and rejoice in God, and live unashamedly identified with Christ, regardless of the price.

Closing Prayer

Jesus,

Thank you for your suffering on the cross and what it accomplished to allow us to be children of God. We want greater union with you, but we know that isn't always a pleasant endeavor. If it is your will that we should face suffering because of our association with you, give us the strength to face it with rejoicing that you see us worthy of such suffering, and give us hope in our trust that in time we will see your glory.

Amen.

WEEK OF DECEMBER 1

CLOTHED IN HUMILITY

Opening Prayer

Jesus,

We thank you for the beauty of your Word and the wisdom it has for us today. Please open our ears to hear you, our eyes to see your beauty, our hearts to receive your love, and our hands to be of service to you.

Amen.

Read 1 Peter 5:1-7

What Does It Mean?

For the past few segments, Peter has talked about suffering and what hope, perseverance, and resilience we can draw from God to face such times. Now he turns his focus toward how we interact with each other in the face of suffering, and much of this reading focuses upon church leaders. Which makes sense. When we are hurting, we look to leaders to lead us through the trials, tribulations, crisis, and disasters we find ourselves in. In a faith community, these leaders, referred to as elders by Peter, have the responsibility to shepherd the community, not for any personal gain, not to feel a sense of control or power, but to exemplify how we walk with Jesus during suffering. This responsibility requires elders to practice oversight of the church to help lead them more into the arms of Christ. This is a humble task, and those under this leadership also have the responsibility of practicing humility. It is an easy trap of pride to judge and think yourself better or more capable of leading others through trials, but Peter warns that this will only lead a community away from submission to God. Therefore, the command for both leaders and for those under leadership is the same. Humility before God and waiting on God to exult us out of our difficulties rather than our efforts as we cast the anxieties we face in our

circumstances onto the shoulders of a God we can trust to take care of us.

Reflection

1. What are some lessons of humility that Peter addresses for those in leadership? Where does this speak to you?
2. What are some lessons of humility that Peter speaks to those under leadership? Where does this speak to you?
3. What would it look like for you to practice humility and submit to God in your circumstances?

Going Forward

Humble yourself before God.

Closing Prayer

Jesus,

We give you everyone and everything. It is our nature to want control, power, self-assurance, personal gain. Our deep anxieties often fuel our pride, and we are driven by a desire for control, power, self-assurance, and personal gain. And many times we have hurt ourselves and the community of faith by anxieties and pride and greed. So we submit afresh to you. We give you everything, and ask you to give us greater humility.

Amen.

WEEK OF DECEMBER 8

SPIRITUAL WARFARE

Opening Prayer

Jesus,

We thank you for the beauty of your Word and the wisdom it has for us today. Please open our ears to hear you, our eyes to see your beauty, our hearts to receive your love, and our hands to be of service to you.

Amen.

Read 1 Peter 5:8-14

What Does It Mean?

Here, at the close of his letter, speaking to an audience that feels burdened by life, weighed down by grief, harmed by evil, and living in fear of persecution, Peter emphasizes in conclusion much of what he has said throughout this letter. His audience, and this extends to us today, not merely face common life difficulties or matters which some might refer to as “bad luck”. They, and us as well today, face a real enemy. Because of our alignment and allegiance to Jesus as our Messiah, the enemy he faced is the enemy wanting to destroy us. Peter describes our adversary like a lion seeking someone to devour, to separate individuals from the herd and harm them. It is an enemy that wants to ruin our lives and witness to the truth. Knowing this to be reality, we must be on guard. We must be watchful. And together, with other believers, we must resist him. Resistance is possible in faith, knowing that rescue and vindication will arise in Jesus, who holds the greater authority. In such trials and difficulties, it is to the authority of Christ that we turn to, the shoulders of Jesus that we trust, the Father’s love that we embrace, and the presence of God’s Spirit that we lean upon. Learn to look to Jesus, and together resist what we know seeks our demise.

Reflection

1. How comfortable are you recognizing and walking through spiritual warfare?
2. Resisting evil is a community engagement, so who do you have in your corner that you can call upon to be praying for you?
3. Resisting evil is also about turning to the hope of Jesus, so what would it look like for you to draw closer to Jesus in your circumstances?

Going Forward

Be watchful and lean on faith in the battle, knowing you are not alone and that Jesus is the Victor who will right all that is wrong.

Closing Prayer

Jesus,

When our guard is down, we forget how weak we are and stumble into the jaws of an enemy that wants to devour us. Forgive us for our arrogance and forgetfulness, and draw us into your strength. Bring into our lives people who will fight the battle with us and lead us to be people who will come alongside others to help fight their battles. Please, Jesus, give us eyes to see your victory and glory on the other side of the battle.

Amen.

