

THE Living HOPE

A Study of 1 Peter

Small Group Booklet
February - March 2016

Do you feel overwhelmed, angry, fearful, devastated, and far from God? Do the daily news and your life circumstances steal your capacity for hope-filled living? The reality is that life in South Africa is difficult and full of challenges. We have to cope with stress, violence, unemployment, corruption, lack of education, scarcity of resources, and unethical behavior. Many people live with high levels of anxiety, levels brought about from physical threats, financial pressure, or family dysfunction. **What does it mean to be a Christian in South Africa, at BMC and in our families today?**

1 Peter was written to give hope to the people of Rome in 67 AD. The Emperor Nero chose to blame Jesus' followers for the great fire of Rome which left thousands of people homeless. Historians concluded that Nero actually started the fire in order to clear the ground in front of the imperial palace, but he blamed the Christians. He resented them for not taking part in public ceremonies (not supporting him). At the time, Christians were seen as depraved people who engaged in love feasts where they ate flesh and drank blood. Jesus-followers subsequently fled in fear of their lives, experienced economic hardship, the disruption of family life, persecution and even death.

In the past 2000 years this letter has become a living hope bringing encouragement for anyone who faces difficulty. If you are facing family troubles, dislocation, financial stress, or the pressure of holding on to your faith when you are discouraged - this letter was written in such times! It invites us to find hope in the midst of the struggles of life.

For this Lenten season we are going to look at how Peter suggests we cope with life's challenges. We will see that his advice can still be applied in our lives today. Despite his difficult circumstances, Peter kept his hope and faith in God and he urges us through this letter to continue our loyalty to Christ as we contemplate our lives and what Jesus's death means for us today. He gives us HOPE as we grow closer to God. May this Lenten journey help you to reflect on your faith; and may this season of Easter bring you closer to God.

Key verse: "The purpose of these troubles is to test your faith as fire tests how genuine gold is. Your faith is more precious than gold, and by passing the test, it gives praise, glory, and honour to God. This will happen when Jesus Christ appears again." (1 Peter 1:7).

If you have questions or feedback regarding this Series please do not hesitate to contact: Pete Grassow or Nadja Atkinson (nadjaa@bmc.org.za).

God Bless!

"If I were ever prosecuted for my religion, I truly hope there would be enough evidence to convict me." - **John Wooden, *Wooden: A Lifetime of Observations and Reflections On and Off the Court* (www.goodreads.com/quotes).**

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Week 1: Living in HOPE



1 Peter 1:3-12 New International Version - UK (NIVUK)

Praise to God for a living hope

³ Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who through faith are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.

⁶ In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. ⁷ These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith – of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire – may result in praise, glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed.

⁸ Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, ⁹ for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls. ¹⁰ Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, ¹¹ trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of the Messiah and the glories that would follow. ¹² It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things.

Key thoughts:

All of us have felt moments of hopelessness with the world, our country, our circumstances, or ourselves. We get stuck in behaviors, situations, and habits that seem impossible to change. Our words reflect these feelings as we offer negative commentary on something. Our country faces resource shortages, educational and unemployment challenges, poor

leadership skills and communities divided by racist anger. What does it mean to walk in hope in South Africa today?

Peter lived and walked with Jesus for 3 years. He saw what Jesus did, he heard what Jesus said and therefore could speak with authority. He wanted to encourage the persecuted Christians in Rome. He saw their suffering and realised that they felt lost, afraid and hopeless.

Peter reminds us that God chose us even before He created the world. We belong to Him, this means that we are shielded by His power and sanctified by His grace! He chose you to be His from the beginning of time for eternity! There will always be darkness and suffering in this world. That is our reality. However, we can believe and hope despite circumstances showing us differently. Like He did for the Romans, God helps us to remain true to our faith; we don't have to do it alone. He said (2 Corinthians 5:17) that if we are in Christ, we are a new creation, old things have passed away. He is our shield no matter what we go through in life. Our souls cannot be harmed so death does not scare us! We need to unlearn hopelessness and re-learn to praise God, walking in faith, hope and love!

Small Group Questions:

1. How do you feel today: hopeless, despondent, angry, fearful, overwhelmed, terrified, hopeful, filled with joy? Why do you feel this way?
2. Are you a "prophet of doom" when you talk about the future, or does your speech reflect hope? Give ways in which your speech can give hope to people?
3. Make a list of the things you can control and the things you can't. Pray over both lists, ask God for discernment and wisdom to tackle the challenges in your life that you have influence over and to let go of those that you cannot control. Please share with the group one of your challenges and what you intend to do. Commit to hold each other accountable in the future.
4. Are you aware of God's shielding power in your life? Explain.

For thought: Living without hope is worse than death. God has a plan for you – today. There is a reason why you live where you live and why certain people are in your life. You have new life through Jesus. You have a choice – if you are choosing to be God's light in the darkness – what are you going to do to change the way you think about your circumstances?



Week 2: Living HOLY



1 Peter 1:13- 2:3 (NIVUK) Be holy

¹³ Therefore, with minds that are alert and fully sober, set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming. ¹⁴ As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. ¹⁵ But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; ¹⁶ for it is written: 'Be holy, because I am holy. ¹⁷ Since you call on a Father who judges each person's work impartially, live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear. ¹⁸ For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, ¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. ²⁰ He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. ²¹ Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God. ²² Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart. ²³ For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. ²⁴ For, 'All people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall,²⁵ but the word of the Lord endures forever.' And this is the word that was preached to you. **2** Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. ² Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, ³ now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.

Key thoughts:

What does living a holy life look like today? Who sets the standard? If in Roman times the Christians had followed Nero's example it would have been disastrous: compulsively cruel and corrupt, his rule was associated with tyranny and extravagance. A false report was spread that Nero was going to be denounced as a public enemy and thus had to be executed. He committed suicide because of this rumour. It is clear that not everyone has your best interest at heart. Who controls your worldview: the news, your boss, spouse, a close friend or family member, or do you allow God to guide your life?

The fact is that most of us want peace not conflict. We do not want to "rock the boat". However, God calls us to be holy, to stand out and live as foreigners in this world. That means that we should feel as alien as the Syrians in Europe today - we are citizens of another kingdom (Romans 2:2 and Ephesians 2:19).

Peter says we need to be Holy in all we do; we need to be like Jesus - our living example. We need to be consecrated to God, put our faith and hope in God and live holy lives. In order to do this we must know God's promises and character. We should strive to get closer to God every day and holiness needs to permeate every aspect of our characters and life.

We cannot do it alone. The Bible is our source and the Holy Spirit is our guide. Remember that God has loved us from the beginning – it was not a spur of the moment thing or only meant for certain people. We have been set apart for Him and through Him (1 Peter 1:23). The Word, Will and Work of God endure forever. It is permanent and everlasting. We need to step up!

Small Group Questions:

In Peter's letter holiness means putting our faith in God, obeying His truths and caring deeply for others – as he himself experienced with Jesus. He warns us against the all too human behaviours of deceit, falseness and gossiping. He experienced firsthand the consequences of being human: he usually spoke before thinking and he denied Jesus three times. He also knew what it meant to stand out: he was crucified for his faith.

1. Which of your bad habits do you struggle with most? Outbursts of anger? Gossip? Deceit? Self-control? Complacency and comfort for the sake of it? These habits take us further and further away from God. Please share with your group your weakness and why it is hard for you to change. Ask them to keep you accountable to try and change it. Pray for each other.
2. What huge personal challenge have you overcome in the past? Please share how you accomplished this.
3. Does your neighbour know you are Christian? Why or why not? How do you feel about your answer?

Has the spirit stirred a longing for God's forgiveness for your personal challenge as described above? Pray the prayer below by yourself or as a group:

My God, my hope is in you. You are holy and have sanctified me by your blood. Words cannot describe my gratitude for this forgiveness and Grace. Please purify my heart, help me to obey you in truth, and to have deep sincere love for others. Rid me of malice, hypocrisy, slander, envy and deceit of every kind. Help me to believe in your living and enduring word – and to not fear earthly things. May I "grow up" in my salvation to be the person you created me to be. I am yours and You are mine! Thank you for your enduring love that lasts for all eternity.

Amen



Week 3: Living in CHURCH



1 Peter 2:4-10 (NIVUK)

The living Stone and a chosen people

⁴As you come to him, the living Stone – rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him – ⁵you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house^[a] to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. ⁶For in Scripture it says: ‘See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.’⁷ Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, ‘The stone the builders rejected has become the

cornerstone,⁸ and, ‘A stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.’ They stumble because they disobey the message – which is also what they were destined for. ⁹But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. ¹⁰Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

1 Peter 5:1-11 (NIVUK)

To the elders and the flock

⁵To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ’s sufferings who also will share in the glory to be revealed: ²be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, watching over them – not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; ³not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. ⁴And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.⁵ In the same way, you who are younger, submit yourselves to your elders. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility towards one another, because, ‘God opposes the proud but shows favour to the humble.’^[a]⁶ Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. ⁷Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. ⁸Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. ⁹Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings.¹⁰ And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. ¹¹To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.

Key thoughts:

BMC has been through a very difficult time during the past two years. We have suffered losses, disappointments and many leadership changes. We as the congregation had no control over these changes. As a result we have seen people leave the church, stop tithing, only come to certain services or events, argue with each other and just give up (on God and church). But we have also seen deep love between people, joy, respect, forgiveness and support. Change brought opportunity for growth and there is a new hope amongst the congregation for the future. How do we keep this hope alive?

Peter sees the church as a living spiritual house with Christ as the cornerstone and each believer as the stones that make up community. One stone is nothing without the other. In today’s society, where individual rights are celebrated, it is easy to forget that we are

dependent on each other. When God calls us to a task we need to remember that he called others as well. The church should not and cannot be dependent for survival on the minister's personality, the youth program, the Sunday sermon, the type of music, or the welcome received at the door. The church is and will always be God's Bride. God is our cornerstone – the most important part of the church. Each one of us is the church!

How do we love each other through challenges, loss and difficulties? Peter instructs us to love God and obey His commands. We need to put God first, not a person, tradition, or ourselves. He reminds us that we are the shepherds of God's flock - not because we have to but because our love for God compels us to. He also urges us to remain humble and resist evil: "be living examples" to those around us – serve in the Church. God has and will continue to strengthen us. He will restore His Bride in 2016 as he did 2000 years ago.

Small Group Questions:

1. Do we at BMC put our trust in God or in people such as Ministers, Stewards, and Leaders? Please explain your answer.
2. You are one of the stones in this living spiritual house – what does it mean to you to be part of BMC? Are you doing your part - "taking care of the flock" with a serving heart? Why or why not?
3. Who or what "destroys our hope" at BMC? Do we know what to look out for? Please share your thoughts.
4. What can we do as an individual and a small group to ensure that BMC keeps God as its cornerstone?

Week 4: Living within the LAW



1 Peter 2:13-25 (NIVUK)

¹³Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human authority: whether to the emperor, as the supreme authority, ¹⁴or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. ¹⁵For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people. ¹⁶Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as God's slaves. ¹⁷Show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, honour the emperor. ¹⁸Slaves, in reverent fear of God submit yourselves to your masters, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh. ¹⁹For it is commendable if someone bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because they are conscious of God. ²⁰But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. ²¹To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in his steps. ²²'He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.'²³ When they hurled their insults at him, he did not

retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.²⁴ 'He himself bore our sins' in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; 'by his wounds you have been healed.'²⁵ For 'you were like sheep going astray,' but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

Key thoughts:

Nero was Roman Emperor from AD 54 to 68. According to the historian Tacitus he was viewed by the Roman people as compulsive and corrupt. He bankrupted Rome, persecuted Christians, and killed off most of his family. Christians were dressed as animals and fed to lions for sport, crucified and burned as human torches. The great challenge for those who followed Jesus was how to live as citizens of the Roman Empire: should they obey the Law or were they to disobey it?

This is the challenge for us today, when we struggle with life in our world, our country and our homes. What laws do we obey, and are we permitted to disobey unjust laws? Peter tells us to "do good" and submit to authority so that we can silence the talk of ignorant and foolish people. We have to stand out as people that do not break the law – even if the rest get away with it – or when we are treated unfairly! We need to do this so that we can win others for Christ with our example

However, Peter is not telling us to compromise our conscience! Remember how he said in Acts 5:29 "We must obey God rather than (men)". Laws make countries, governments and society work. If they are fair and democratic they create order and protect people from being exploited and getting hurt. If they are not just they will lead to the abuse of power, the disruption of society and even to revolution. Our task is to help human beings in the ongoing process of living more justly. This involves changing the law to reflect the love of God, and challenging rulers and figures of authority to remember that their authority is given to them by God – who holds them accountable for their actions.

Followers of Jesus have an obligation to speak up on behalf of those who suffer from unjust laws. However we cannot fight injustice and corruption with anger or despair; we need to trust God who will judge justly. As is said in 1 Peter 2:15: "For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people" We need to show - by what we say and what we do – that we are different, and that we believe the way of God to be the best way of living. He has a plan for our lives and our country. He is our care-taker and the overseer of our souls – whom shall we fear? Peter shows us that we can, with confidence, know that God is in control of the future.

Small Group Questions:

1. Have you ever been treated unjustly? Please share your story and the consequences of your actions.

2. It seems like we are getting used to certain laws being broken (bribing traffic cops, ignoring red traffic lights, lying on CV's). What is your response to this? What impact does it have on your life?
3. What can you as a person, us as a small group, and we as a church do to uphold the law?
4. What can we do to ensure that we have just, Godly laws in our homes, community and country?

NOTE: Have you joined the “unashamedlyethical.com” campaign yet?

Week 5: Living with your FAMILY



1 Peter 3:1-7 (NIVUK)

Wives, in the same way submit yourselves to your own husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behaviour of their wives, ² when they see the purity and reverence of your lives. ³ Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as elaborate hairstyles and the wearing of gold jewellery or fine clothes. ⁴ Rather, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great

worth in God's sight. ⁵ For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to adorn themselves. They submitted themselves to their own husbands, ⁶ like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her lord. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear. ⁷ Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.

Key thoughts:

Many people live in difficult family circumstances. There are many single parent families, where children shuttle between divorced parents. There are many families who live in relentless conflict with one another, or with the extended family. Many families are stressed by financial pressure, the demands of work, and the pressures of living in South Africa. In this era of instant gratification we want challenges to be solved quickly and easily, but relationships take time. It can sometimes bring out the worst in us. How do we make sure we see these special people with God's eyes and not our own? How do we keep on walking in hope after many disappointments, hurt and pain?

Peter was a married man. He too knew the stresses of being in a home with a mother-in-law (Matthew 8:14). He was one of God's chosen disciples. He gave up everything to follow

Jesus. Peter needed to accept Jesus's authority in his life in order to become who Jesus wanted him to be as disciple, husband and son-in-law. We see the change in his character as he submits to Jesus's will and no longer seek his own glory. Love is the greatest give we can give someone -without love we are nothing!

What is love? **1 Corinthians 13: 4-7** (Worldwide English):

Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous. Love is not proud and does not boast. Love does not do things that are not nice. Love does not just think of itself. Love does not get angry. Love holds no wrong feelings in the heart. Love is not glad when people do wrong things. But it is always glad when they do right. Love forgives everything. Love is always trusting, and always hoping, and never gives up. Love never ends.

Peter invites us to understand that we are in relationships to learn how to love. It means that we put God first, and act with Him in mind when we interact with others. We need to change our thoughts to see that which is good in one another. Peter writes out of a culture that expected a woman to be submissive to a man, and believed that a woman had no spiritual capacity. He challenges this by urging men not only to treat women with respect, but to discover that women are co-heirs of the blessings of God (vs7). **A Note:** this passage is not asking women to put up with abuse "for the sake of the Gospel". Peter is quite clear that husbands must treat their wives with respect and honour. When this does not happen there needs to be intervention from the church leadership in order to protect the woman. Secondly, Peter is not saying that women cannot wear jewelry or beautiful clothes. He is pointing out that external adornment is not as important as the inner spiritual beauty that is born out of love.

Small Group Questions:

Peter says in order to inherit the gracious gift of life and to have nothing hinder our prayers, we need to show people that we are Christians by how we treat our family and spouse (our behaviour). We need to be gentle, respectful and considerate to each other.

1. What things remind you most that God loves you (a song, poem, verse, nature)?
What one thing can you do today to show God how grateful you are for His love?
2. How does your family influence your faith? Do or did they teach you how to love?
How?
3. Have you got difficult or broken relationships in your family? If you look at Peter's advice, is there something you can do differently to try and mend it? Can you see through different eyes? What would it take for you to do this?
4. In which way can you influence your family to prioritize God? Would any of your family patterns have to change in order to achieve this? What small thing can you do today to effect change?

Week 6: Living with OTHERS



1 Peter 3:8-22 (NIVUK)

Suffering for doing good

⁸ Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble. ⁹ Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. ¹⁰ For, 'Whoever would love life and see good days must keep their tongue from evil and their lips from deceitful speech. ¹¹ They must turn from evil and do good; they must seek peace and pursue it. ¹² For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil. ¹³ Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? ¹⁴ But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. 'Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened.' ¹⁵ But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, ¹⁶ keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behaviour in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. ¹⁷ For it is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. ¹⁸ For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit. ¹⁹ After being made alive, he went and made proclamation to the imprisoned spirits – ²⁰ to those who were disobedient long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, ²¹ and this water symbolises baptism that now saves you also – not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience towards God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, ²² who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand – with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.

Key thoughts:

We live in a world where we have learned to become self-sufficient and independent at the expense of others. It has become acceptable to hurt other people as they have hurt us or to get back at them for hurting us. This has resulted in communities that experience a cycle of retribution, loneliness and despair! These emotions are not new or different from 2000 years ago. Peter had firsthand experience of living in community - the disciples had different gifts, backgrounds and characters. There were times of shared joy and love, but there were also moments of greed, envy, and hurt. Remember that Peter asked Jesus how often we must forgive (Matt 18:21).

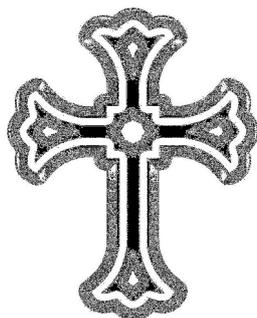
Put people together and you have emotions, history, personalities, past hurts and many other factors that make up the dynamics of the interaction. Conflict has always been part of our faith's story. Being a Christian always involves people - we need other people to grow. Our biggest challenge is to learn how to love despite ourselves and our differences.

Peter gives us a few pointers with regards to healthy relationships:

- Try and understand and accept how others differ from you.
- Show sympathy towards others – look at it from their perspective.
- Show compassion and love to others – do they think you have their best interest at heart?
- Repay evil with blessings – so that you can be blessed too and God can be praised.
- Do not let evil or untrue speech come out of your mouth.
- Do good - actively build good relationships and commit to them.
- Pursue peace – deal with conflict before it escalates.
- Revere God – he is in control – Lord of Lords.
- Have an answer ready as to why you believe (your story can change a life).
- Have a clear conscience toward God.

Small Group Questions:

1. Where are you in your relationship with God at present? Is it intimate, close, distant, running into trouble, or even a disaster? What do you think caused the relationship to be in this place? What can you do to help you get closer to God?
2. Peter gave us a few general pointers towards healthy relationships in the list above. Which one (or more) of these do you struggle with most? Why is this hard for you?
3. As you think of the people in your life, is/are there a name(s) that triggers very strong feelings? Can you apply something from the list above to try and rectify this relationship? If not, please pray to God to give you wisdom and peace in this situation (and if needed forgiveness).
4. Have you been hurt by someone so much that just thinking of it brings tears to your eyes? Forgiving people heals us. Who do you need to forgive and bless? If you want to share with the group, feel free – otherwise pray a general prayer together for forgiveness of others.



Week 7: Living for GOD



1 Peter 4 (NIVUK)

Living for God

4 Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because whoever suffers in the body has finished with sin. ² As a result, they do not live the rest of their earthly lives for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God. ³ For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do – living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing

and detestable idolatry. ⁴ They are surprised that you do not join them in their reckless, wild living, and they heap abuse on you. ⁵ But they will have to give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. ⁶ For this is the reason the gospel was preached even to those who are now dead, so that they might be judged according to human standards in regard to the body, but live according to God in regard to the spirit. ⁷ The end of all things is near. Therefore be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray. ⁸ Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. ⁹ Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. ¹⁰ Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. ¹¹ If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.

Suffering for being a Christian

¹² Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³ But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. ¹⁴ If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. ¹⁵ If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. ¹⁶ However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name. ¹⁷ For it is time for judgment to begin with God's household; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? ¹⁸ And, 'If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?' ¹⁹ So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.

Key thoughts:

Pause for a moment and ask what values shape your life. Some of us might answer that a secure income for our families is our highest priority. Some of us might answer that we will do anything to avoid suffering, and so a comfortable life is our aim. Some of us might answer that we seek a quiet life.

This is no different from the world in which Peter lived. Those who followed Jesus wanted to be left alone to live life in peace and quiet. Unfortunately this was not the case. They struggled for everything in life. Nothing came easy, and they were tempted to be resentful about this. Lent is a good opportunity to remember that suffering is part of life. Just as Jesus suffered for his obedience to God, so too for the Apostle Peter, and for those who

read his letter. The simple fact is that we cannot avoid difficulty. We will always have challenges in this world; there will always be power struggles, selfishness and evil.

We do not always have control over what happens in our lives but we do have a choice in how we react to our circumstances. We cannot abandon our faith and values just because we are struggling, we need to think and act differently from the world. We need to choose “a living hope” – GOD – despite our circumstances.

Live to make an eternal difference! Live in hope – whilst growing closer and closer to God daily – our Savior, Master, Counsellor, Protector, and Abba! Peter encourages us to walk the talk – to stay true to what we believe in: God and His promises. We need to train our brains with positive input. Peter says we must speak as if we “speak the very words of God” (1 Peter 4:11). God honours and encourages all our efforts to be the light in this dark world. He is our strength and our only living hope! There is no other way!

Small Group Questions:

1. If the world had to end today: would you be ready or would you have to run back to get something or someone. If yes, what would it be and why? If no, how did you get ready?
2. Can people see that you are Christian by your lifestyle and speech or are you a secret disciple? If yes, please explain how they know. If not, what can you say or do differently?
3. Have you been ridiculed or shamed because of your faith? If yes, what did you do? If not, what would you do?
4. Can suffering change a person’s life for the better? How have you seen this in your own life?
5. What is stopping you from living in LOVE, peace and joy (no matter the circumstances): your family, friends, and trials, or your own beliefs? How can you increase the LOVE and HOPE in your life?

Please pray for each other at the end of this series:

- for the challenges highlighted,
- the way of life that we need to live,
- the kind of people we need to be for each other, and
- each one’s journey in getting closer and closer to God every day!

God Bless you!

Daily Devotions:

Week 1: Living in Hope

Sunday	We are a new creation, the old has passed.	2 Corinthians 15:31
Monday	He will make our paths straight.	Isaiah 42:16
Tuesday	The Lord will be our light.	Micah 7:8
Wednesday	We no longer have to walk in darkness.	Isaiah 9:2
Thursday	You can be secure because there is hope.	Job 11:18
Friday	Our bodies can rest in hope.	Psalms 16:9
Saturday	The Lord looks after those who put their hope in Him.	Psalms 33:18

Week 2: Living Holy

Sunday	New Nature	2 Timothy 1:7
Monday	Your integrity is your hope	Job 4:6
Tuesday	God gives to his children what they need.	Luke 11:13
Wednesday	We are growing in Christ.	1 Peter 2:5
Thursday	We are baptized with the Holy Spirit.	Matthew 3:11
Friday	My body is a living sacrifice – holy.	Romans 12:1
Saturday	Treasure what is Holy.	Matthew 7:6

Week 3: Living in your church

Sunday	Give the leaders over to God.	Acts 14:23
Monday	You are a living stone.	1 Peter 2:4
Tuesday	There is surely a future for you.	Proverbs 23:18
Wednesday	Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strengths.	Isaiah 40:31
Thursday	God has plans to prosper us.	Jeremiah 29:11
Friday	He will restore our hope.	Zechariah 9:12
Saturday	Rejoice in affliction.	Romans 12:12

Week 4: Living within the Law

Sunday	The Lord hears us.	Psalms 34: 4-7
Monday	We can trust God no matter what happens.	Job 13:15
Tuesday	Let those that treat you badly be ashamed, not you.	Psalms 25:3
Wednesday	Perseverance begets character and character, hope.	Romans 5:4
Thursday	Stay patient in hope.	1 Thessalonians 1:3

Friday	The scriptures give us hope.	Romans 15:4
Saturday	Hope as God is faithful.	Hebrews 10:23

Week 5: Living with your family

Sunday	The Lord is near those with broken hearts.	Psalms 34: 17-18
Monday	Hope deferred makes the heart sick.	Proverbs 13:12
Tuesday	We hope in what we do not see.	Romans 8:25
Wednesday	Only 3 things remain: faith, hope and love.	1 Corinthians 13:13
Thursday	Hope anchors our soul.	Hebrews 6:19
Friday	Put your hope in God's word.	Psalms 119:74
Saturday	By faith we understand.	Hebrews 11:1

Week 6: Living with others

Sunday	The Lord will take revenge.	Nahum 1:2
Monday	Do unto others as you would have them do to you.	Matthew 7:12
Tuesday	Don't be sad – hope on God.	Psalms 42:5
Wednesday	Rejoice in hope.	Romans 12:12
Thursday	God promised us the hope of eternal life.	Titus 1:2
Friday	The God of hope fills us with His spirit.	Romans 15:13
Saturday	Love always perseveres	1 Corinthians 13:7

Week 7: Living for God

Sunday	Stay awake because you do not know the time.	Matthew 25:1-13
Monday	Greatest Commandment.	Matthew 22:36-40
Tuesday	2 nd Commandment.	Mark 12:31
Wednesday	God keeps His promises and shows mercy to those that obey.	Daniel 9:4
Thursday	We suffer as we trust the living God.	1 Timothy 4:10
Friday	God's Promise.	Revelation 21:4
Saturday	The great Commission.	Matthew 28: 16-20

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