

How to use Explore

In this issue

The 92 daily readings in this issue of *Explore* are designed to help you understand and apply the Bible as you read it each day.

It's serious!

We suggest that you allow 15 minutes each day to work through the Bible passage with the notes. It should be a meal, not a snack! Readings from other parts of the Bible can throw valuable light on the study passage. These cross-references can be skipped if you are already feeling full up, but will expand your grasp of the Bible. *Explore* uses the NIV2011 Bible translation, but you can also use it with the NIV1984 or ESV translations.

Sometimes a prayer box will encourage you to stop and pray through the lessons—but it is always important to allow time to pray for God's Spirit to bring his word to life, and to shape the way we think and live through it.

We're serious!

All of us who work on *Explore* share a passion for getting the Bible into people's lives. We fiercely hold to the Bible as God's word—to honour and follow, not to explain away.

1
Find a time you can read the Bible each day

2
Find a place where you can be quiet and think

3
Ask God to help you understand

4
Carefully read through the Bible passage for today

5
Study the verses with *Explore*, taking time to think

6
Pray about what you have read

the goodbook
COMPANY

Opening up the Bible

Welcome to *Explore*

Being a Christian isn't a skill you learn, like carpentry or flower arranging. Nor is it a lifestyle choice, like the kind of clothes you wear, or the people you choose to hang out with. It's about having a real relationship with the living God through his Son, Jesus Christ. The Bible tells us that this relationship is like a marriage.

It's important to start with this, because many Christians view the practice of daily Bible-reading as a Christian duty, or a hard discipline that is just one more thing to get done in our busy modern lives.

But the Bible is God speaking to us: opening his mind to us on how he thinks, what he wants for us and what his plans are for the world. And most importantly, it tells us what he has done for us in sending his Son, Jesus Christ, into the world. It's the way the Spirit shows Jesus to us, and changes us as we behold his glory.

The Bible is not a manual. It's a love letter. And as with any love letter, we'll want to treasure it, and make time to read and re-read it, so we know we are loved, and discover how we can please the one who loves us. Here are a few suggestions for making your daily time with God more of a joy than a burden:

☛ *Time:* Find a time when you will not be disturbed, and when the cobwebs are cleared from your mind. Many people have found that the morning is the best time as it sets you up for the day. If you're not a "morning person", then last thing

at night or a mid-morning break might suit you. Whatever works for you is right for you.

☛ *Place:* Jesus says that we are not to make a great show of our religion (see *Matthew 6:5-6*), but rather, to pray with the door to our room shut. Some people plan to get to work a few minutes earlier and get their Bible out in an office or some other quiet corner.

☛ *Prayer:* Although *Explore* helps with specific prayer ideas from the passage, try to develop your own lists to pray through. Use the flap inside the back cover to help with this. And allow what you read in the Scriptures to shape what you pray for yourself, the world and others.

☛ *Share:* As the saying goes, *expression deepens impression*. So try to cultivate the habit of sharing with others what you have learned. Why not join our Facebook group to share your encouragements, questions and prayer requests? Search for *Explore: For your daily walk with God*.

And remember, *it's quality, not quantity, that counts*: better to think briefly about a single verse than to skim through pages without absorbing anything, because it's about developing your relationship with the living God. The sign that your daily time with God is real is when you start to love him more and serve him more wholeheartedly.

Tim Thornborough and Carl Laferton
Editors



1 PETER: Persevering in pain

When the Christian life feels like a struggle we can wonder: "Have we somehow made a mistake? Have we misunderstood God's plans for us and this world?"

Peter writes to reassure Christians to stick to God's unchanged pattern for our lives and plans for the world.

of our faith and lifestyle. Yet we have the comfort of knowing that the Holy Spirit has brought us to faith in Christ whose blood cleanses us from the guilt of sin.

God's pattern for life

Read 1 Peter 5:12

It's often helpful to look at the end of a letter to find out the writer's motivation for penning it. It's certainly true in the case of 1 Peter. We find in 5:12 a summary sentence that gives us a steer as to what the main aim of his letter is.

- ❓ *How does Peter describe his readers' circumstances and their beliefs?*
- ❓ *How then should they respond to their situation?*

God's plan for the world

Read 1 Peter 1:1-2

1 Peter was written to Christians scattered around Asia Minor which is now modern day Turkey. They knew hardship and struggle as daily realities.

- ❓ *How should they consider their situation in the world (v 1)?*
- ❓ *What certainty can they have about God's involvement in their lives?*

As Christians we belong to God (elect) and yet are strangers (exiles) in the world. We experience rejection and hostility because

Apply

- ❓ *What is the bigger struggle right now: knowing that God is involved in the difficult circumstances you face (5:12) or that this world is not your home (1:1)?*
- ❓ *How do God's words encourage you to persevere?*

Pray

Pray that God would help us to remember the momentous work that he has done to save us.

Ask God to help you to persevere through the trials of life.



Rejoicing in trials

All of us go through tough times as Christians. Peter reminds us why there is great hope in looking to God when we are going through times of difficulty.

Born into hope

Read 1 Peter 1:3

- ❓ *Why can we rejoice when we suffer (v 3)?*

The confidence that we have is because our hope is *living*. Just as Jesus has been raised from the dead, we have been raised to new spiritual life (new birth) which will one day culminate in new physical life (our living hope). It is not wishful thinking but a guaranteed reality. It is also not based on our performance but his mercy.

Apply

- ❓ *How does this affect how we think of God when we're going through tough times?*

Kept for heaven

An inheritance is typically something that comes to you after someone has died. In this case, the one who died has risen again! Peter reminds us what that inheritance is like.

Read 1 Peter 1:4-5

- ❓ *How is this inheritance different from an "earthly" inheritance (v 4)?*
- ❓ *How can we be sure that we will receive it according to Peter (v 5)?*

Apply

- ❓ *What difference could this make when we feel abandoned by God?*
- ❓ *How could these verses help us to keep rejoicing when we are struggling with our faith?*

TIME OUT

We often pass over praising God when we face tricky life situations. This passage challenges that perspective. Even in the midst of trials Peter's first response is praise.

Pray

- ❓ *Praise God for our new birth through the resurrection of Christ.*
- ❓ *Praise God the future inheritance that this new birth secures for us.*



Purpose in Pain

Have you ever wondered, "why is this happening to me? What is God's plan in all of this?" Peter was writing to Christians who may well have been asking this very question.

His answer is that though what they were experiencing may have been painful, it was purposeful.

Refining faith

Read 1 Peter 1:6-9

- ❓ *Are our trials accidental or intentional?*
- ❓ *What is their purpose?*

A severe trial is sometimes called an "acid test." This term originated during times when gold was widely circulated. Nitric acid was applied to an object of gold to see if it was genuine or not. If it was fake, the acid decomposed it; if it was genuine, the gold was unaffected. The point of the acid wasn't to destroy the gold, it was to prove that it was genuine treasure.

Rewarded faith

Our trials not only reveal something about our faith, but they ensure an incredible celebration in the future. Just like the reward at the end of a gruelling marathon might be the medal at the finish line and the congratulations of friends, so there is reward at the end of our spiritual finish line.

Read 1 Peter 1:7-9

- ❓ *What do you think is meant by "praise, glory and honour" (v 7)?*
- ❓ *How are we comforted now in the midst of our trials (v 8-9)?*

Normally when we read words like praise, glory and honour, we rightly connect them with Jesus. But Peter is saying that we are the ones who gain praise, glory and honour. Because of our faithfulness during our trials in this life, we will share in the praise, glory and honour that belongs to our Lord. So we enjoy him now and will join in the praise of him later.

TIME OUT

Take time to reflect on the privileged status Christians enjoy compared even to the prophets and the angels in verses 10-12. Despite sometimes being despised by society Peter wants to remind us of our privileged position.

Apply

- ❓ *Have you seen your faith stand the test of difficulty?*
- ❓ *How should this encourage you?*
- ❓ *What motivation from these verses most encourages you to persevere in faith?*

Pray

Ask God to help you to know that trials have purpose, even if it is not obvious to us at the time.

Pray that the prospect of our celebration with Christ at the end would keep us persevering in faith.



Threes and fours

The rest of this chapter is mainly taken up with a haunting and thought-provoking series of lists that illustrate some principles of wisdom.

Incomprehensible

Read Proverbs 30:18-19

As the writer looks around, he sees many things in nature that he cannot hope to understand: a bird's flight; how slithering snakes move on rock; how vessels move through the water; and exactly how meeting and dating a young woman works! But his lack of comprehension leads him not to frustration or depression, but to wonder and praise.

Science and human enquiry have answered many of these questions. We know something about the gripping scales on a snake, and fluid dynamics and the psychology and biology of humans. But we should never cease to be amazed and to wonder at the rich diversity, beauty and ingenious brilliance of God's creation.

Unbearable

Read Proverbs 30:20-23

- ❓ *What is it about these things that makes them unbearable?*

Do any of the categories fit you or someone you know? Then spend some time praying for yourself and for them...

Wise little creatures

Read Proverbs 30:24-28

- ❓ *What worthy features is he drawing our attention to in these observations?*

TIME OUT

To the eyes of a pagan scientist, these things may be the blind forces of selection and evolution. But the truly wise discern that the God who created all things has woven into nature lessons for us. Nature is God's other book of revelation. So next time you go for a walk, look for lessons to illustrate biblical truth. You'll be amazed how much is there for the learning.

Four dignified creatures

Read Proverbs 30:29-31

- ❓ *What is Agur drawing our attention to?*
- ❓ *Why?*

Four outcomes

Read Proverbs 30:32-33

Proverbs constantly makes us face up to this inescapable truth: *actions have their outcomes*. As surely as a thump on the nose will cause it to bleed, so allowing anger to rule your life will embroil you in conflict. But verse 32 gives us good news. The situation is potentially recoverable. Even if you have been stupid, and thought yourself better than others, or have allowed your mind to devise "revenge schemes", you can do something about it





Focusing on holiness

Do you ever find yourself stuck when it comes to making progress in holiness? Today, Peter will give us some powerful motivation to keep working at it...

The family way

Several members of my extended family are adopted. They would testify that when you find yourself brought into a new family, there are new family ways that you must begin to get used to. So it is when we are born again into God's family.

Read 1 Peter 1:13-16

- ❓ *What attitude should we have towards our life in general (v 13)?*
- ❓ *How should this affect our actions (v 14-16)?*

Drunk people are less aware of what is going on around them. By contrast, to be sober minded is to have a clear view of reality. Peter wants to remind us to always keep in mind the reality that Christ is coming back and we are his children.

Future grace

Read 1 Peter 1:17-21

- ❓ *What is it about the future that should encourage us to be holy (v 17)?*
- ❓ *How does being children of God affect our attitude to holiness (v 18-19)?*

▼ Apply

- ❓ *In what particular area of life do you need to grow in holiness?*
- ❓ *Which motivation for holiness most spurs you on right now:*
 - *Christ's future coming (v 13, 17)*
 - *Your present status as God's child (v 14-16) or,*
 - *God's past grace in Christ (v 18-19)?*

▲ Pray

Ask God to help you make progress towards holiness.

Pray that the motivations that Peter gives us would spur you on.




The power of the Word

Our new birth is all God's work (1:3) but what part do we play in our faith and growth?

Purified

Peter now turns his attention to the stunning effects of believing the gospel he has just explored in v 18-21 on our character.



Read 1 Peter 1:22

-  *How have we been purified?*
-  *What was the result?*
-  *What should we do now? Why?*

We often think of holiness as mainly about personal purity. We are growing in holiness if we can point to ways in which we have become more disciplined in our Bible reading or prayer or fighting specific sins. However, the *first* application Peter makes after speaking about holiness is about how we treat our brothers and sisters. In fact he says that love for our brothers and sisters in the church is a specific result of faith in Christ.

Empowered

Read 1 Peter 1:23

-  *What does God use to effect change in our lives?*
-  *How does it compare to the effects of natural seeds?*



Peter gives us an incredible motivation to keep making progress in holiness. Just like a seed is transformed into a flower, we are transformed by God's word. The difference is that our change is not temporary, destined to wilt and die, but permanent.

TIME OUT

Peter quotes from Isaiah 40:6-8 to make his point that God's incredible power dwarfs the impotence of human effort. A similar contrast is made in the New Testament in 1 Corinthians 15:50-54. We also see the power of God's word spelt out in Deuteronomy 31:9-13, and Hebrews 4:12.




Growing

Read 1 Peter 2:1-3

-  *What are we to get rid of?*
-  *What are we to get more of?*

Newborn babies are often desperate for a mother's milk. They instinctively know that it will do them good. Is that your experience?

Apply

-  *What attitude should we have to God's word in light of these verses?*
-  *What vice do you feel most in danger of falling into at the moment?*
-  *How does this passage change our attitude to God's word?*

Pray

Give thanks for the privilege of having God's word at work in our lives.

Ask God's Spirit through his word to keep doing his transforming work.



Following Christ

To follow the teachings of scripture is to follow Christ. Jesus said "a servant is not greater than his master". Following him always brings privilege as well as persecution.

The life of Christ

As Peter encourages his readers to follow Christ he reminds them of the experience of their saviour when he was on earth.

Read 1 Peter 2:4

- ❓ *Who is the living stone?*
- ❓ *How is he treated by humans?*
- ❓ *How is he treated by God?*
- ❓ *In what way is our experience similar to his? (See also 1:1.)*

texts in verses 6-8 (Isaiah 28:16; Psalm 118:22; Isaiah 8:14) to describe how people 'stumble' over Christ, the most important 'stone,' and so face judgement, because they refuse to believe and obey him. They are responsible for this and yet God had also planned it. We see this same pattern at the cross (Acts 2:23). Evil men carried out their own evil desires and yet God stood behind the flow of history as well. Although logically difficult to understand it is comforting when we experience suffering to know that God remains in ultimate control.

The life of the church

Having reminded them of how precious Christ is to his father, Peter points out how precious the church in Christ is to him too.

Read 1 Peter 2:5-6

- ❓ *What are we being built into?*
- ❓ *What task have we been given?*

In the past, if you wanted to meet with God you had to go to God's house, the temple. It could be far away, and God did not dwell there permanently. Now we all have access to God through Christ, wherever we are!

Likewise only a select few (the Levites) were allowed to work as priests in the temple bringing sacrifices to God. But now the whole church has the privilege of speaking and living for him in a special way.

... **TIME OUT**

Peter quotes from various Old Testament

Apply

- ❓ *How does remembering the life of Jesus spur us on when we face persecution?*
- ❓ *How does knowing that God is with us help in the midst of persecution?*
- ❓ *Do we spend as much time thinking about our status before God as we do our status in society?*

Pray

Pray with thanks for the privileges of having God's presence permanently with us and the responsibility of speaking for him as his priests.

Ask God to help us to remember the privilege of following in the footsteps of Christ when we face persecution for our faith.