

A *Discover Together*
BIBLE STUDY

by Sue Edwards

I Peter

*Discovering Encouragement
in Troubling Times*



LEADER'S GUIDE

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1 Peter: Discovering Encouragement in Troubling Times
Leader's Guide
©2013 Sue Edwards

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Before You Begin . . .

WHY I LOVE 1 PETER

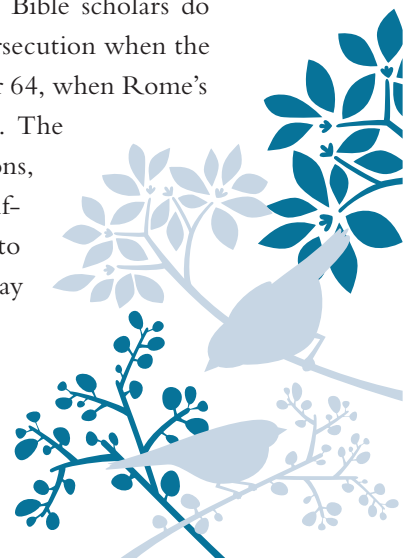
The apostle Peter is one of the most winsome and dearly loved of Christ’s followers, at least he is to me. He’s real. He tries hard but messes up. He misunderstands but keeps on seeking. I suppose I can identify with his passion, misguided fervor, and foolishness at times. He blew it but Jesus forgave him and called him to significant ministry despite his shortcomings. Again, I relate. Knowing Peter from the pages of the Gospels, I never expected him to write a letter like 1 Peter—divine literature that is strong, beautiful, challenging, and incredibly helpful in the real world today. Every believer should study this letter, and I’m delighted that you have chosen to unearth its riches. Although you may use this study guide for personal devotions, consider inviting other women to join you to add depth to your quest.

If you invite other women to join you, familiarize yourself with this overview. Then, as you work your way through the study, read the week-by-week leader’s guide. I have included discussion topics particular to that lesson, troubleshooting tips, activity ideas, and other pertinent information and counsel to aid in a productive group experience.

If you are new at leading a small group, be sure to digest the “Training Guide for Small-Group Leaders” before your first gathering. Even if you have led groups before, consider reviewing the instructions and tips in the Training Guide. Skilled leaders enhance the likelihood that a group will bond and thrive, but a poor leader usually stifles healthy interaction. If you encounter particular challenges in your group, refer back to the Training Guide for help.

GOAL OF THE STUDY

The goal of this study, consistent with Peter’s purpose, is to prepare Christians to thrive in difficult circumstances, whatever they might be. Most Bible scholars do not think that Peter’s original audience was undergoing severe persecution when the letter was written. They date Peter’s first letter at around A.D. 63 or 64, when Rome’s severe persecution of Christians under Nero was just beginning. The original readers probably faced challenges including false accusations, ridicule, social ostracism, and increasing suspicion, making life difficult for Christians in Asia Minor. But most were not thrown to lions or burned in Nero’s horrific fires. That came later. Peter may



have written this letter to prepare believers for what he suspected might lie ahead, and indeed his suspicions were realized in future years.

Many Christians today feel like Peter’s audience. American culture seems more and more hostile to people of faith. The future seems shaky, not only nationally but globally. It should be easy for women to identify with Peter’s original audience, making the lessons interesting and the insight applicable. This study should draw women who realize they need to prepare themselves and generations that follow for “such a time as this” (Esther 4:14).

A SERIOUS STUDY

Every book of the Bible has its own ethos, an atmosphere or tone. First Peter is serious, and a bit dark. The study should foster deep discussions that develop true disciples ready for the real world. Some women may find it difficult to study and discuss topics like suffering and persecution. They may struggle to read stories of women stuck in prison or being treated cruelly. They prefer to deny these realities, wishing only for sunny days of fun. Certainly God loves to give gifts of joy and laughter, but problems of various kinds are also on life’s menu, and no one can pass through this life without a serving of some suffering and heartache. Learning how to live in a fallen world is a great blessing. If some of the participants struggle with the serious nature of the study, remind them that the ultimate end of the letter is to enable them to thrive in trials, finding joy, peace, and a way to make Jesus look good whatever occurs. When a woman knows what to do in the midst of struggles, her heart can rest in both good times and bad. God has prepared her for anything. And that’s a great feeling!

A SAFE PLACE

Making the group an open, protected place will be especially important as you discuss these serious issues. We need a place where we can be brutally honest about our doubts and fears. We need a place where no questions are off-limits. Your role as a leader is to create a safe place to process and share. Safe places destroy roadblocks to faith and bring down strongholds, resulting in spiritual, emotional, and mental health. As you guide the group with skill and a caring heart, women may actually change the way they think, feel, and act when faced with troubling circumstances. What a privilege!

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

Each lesson walks you, verse by verse, through Peter’s letter. Observation, interpretation, application, correlation, opinion, and share questions flow, guiding you through the text to help you grasp God’s intended meaning and apply it to life today. This

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methodical approach is based on sound interpretive principles designed to reduce error and speculation. Occasionally women will be asked to place themselves into the setting or the shoes of participants; this exercise, although somewhat speculative, helps the passage come alive in the mind’s eye of contemporary readers. Opinion and share questions aid in application to current and personal issues.

The goal is more than head knowledge—it’s life change. Authentic growth includes new convictions and attitudes. The lessons are designed to move the student’s learning from head to heart to hand. Although each lesson is grounded in 1 Peter, occasionally you will study other related passages.

I will provide short commentaries on unclear or perplexing passages. My goal in this Leader’s Guide is not to overwhelm you with massive amounts of information but instead to give you concise answers that will help you guide your group through any rough spots. It also provides additional quality resources for further study on your own.

You’ll want to acquaint yourself and your students with the resources available to enhance your study experience:

- *Videos.* Supplemental teaching videos of various lengths are available for individual or group use at www.discovertogetherseries.com. For quick access with your smart phone or other handheld device, QR codes within each lesson correspond to these videos. These videos contain personal testimonies, related stories, and historical background. The introductory video can be used in your initial gathering to excite and inform your students as they embark on this adventure together.
- *Digging Deeper.* Some women will want to work the optional Digging Deeper questions located in the margins of the study guide. Determine with your group how you want to use these study prompts. You may want to include them in your discussion, use them at the end if time allows, or simply suggest that women who want to spend more time in deeper study work on these on their own. If a particular woman shows an aptitude for Scripture study, you may want to ask her to tackle a particular Digging Deeper question and report her findings in the next session. Then ask if any other women also worked on that particular Digging Deeper, widening the discussion if possible.
- *Quotes, Background Info, and Extras.* Soak up the inspiring sidebars that relate to particular parts of each lesson. If any especially resonates with you, use it as a springboard for discussion or personal application.

In addition, there is a “Training Guide for Small-Group Leaders” available at www.discovertogetherseries.com.

WILL YOU END WITH A WRAP-UP MESSAGE?

Leading small groups and teaching are different skills. When you wear your small-group leader’s hat, you do not lecture! But you may want to end your time by putting on a teacher’s hat. Participants often enjoy hearing a message to crystallize biblical truth.

Your wrap-up might be a ten-minute informal presentation, allowing for interaction and questions, or a forty-five minute formal lecture, more like a pastor’s Sunday message. If your study consists of several small groups, you may prefer a formal lecture. If you’re meeting in a home, your group may prefer a more interactive format. Use what works for you and your group.

If you believe that God may want you to teach the Bible, step out and try. Women love to hear their own leaders teach them rather than hear virtual teachers on DVD. Resources to sharpen your teaching skills are listed below. At first, your skills may not be as honed as more experienced teachers, but in time and with practice you should improve. And you have advantages over a virtual teacher. Women need models they can watch, hug, and talk to. And when one of their own steps out and is used by God, it inspires everyone to step forward and use their gifts too. So, if something in you says, “teach!”—then go for it!

INTRODUCTORY IDEAS

If you plan to include lecture in your format, you may want to begin with introductory comments about the apostle Peter. What do the women in your group know about his life and personality? Or do they need insight into the first-century culture? Do they need to get to know you as their teacher or have an opportunity to learn more about each other? Do they need time to interact, building trust and comfort in the group? Ask the Holy Spirit to direct you as you consider how to prepare your group for the study.

ENLIST WOMEN TO TEACH WITH YOU

Other women have something to say that would benefit the group. Listen attentively when they tell how God works in their lives. Identify women who inspire others. Who holds a high view of the Bible and has spent time studying? Who walks close to Jesus? Who lives wisely? Who is articulate? Passionate? Growing? Mature? Organized in her thinking?

If you add a teaching element to your Bible study format, consider asking one of

these women to share a short testimony or deliver the message for the entire group that week. She will need a cooperative attitude. When you give a woman the platform, you give her influence. I’ve worked with a few women who took advantage of this opportunity. They spoke twice as long as time allotted. Or they refused to prepare, wandering aimlessly. Or they became so emotional that they broke down, upsetting women in the study.

To alleviate these problems, set a time limit and ask women to write out what they will say. Insist they review their message with you. Stress that if they’re a “time hog,” group time will be shorter, irritating group participants. Use wisdom as you select women presenters, but consider how much women will benefit by hearing a variety of voices.

RESOURCES TO HELP YOU TEACH WITH ACCURACY AND SKILL

- Mathews, Alice P. *Preaching That Speaks to Women*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003.
- Robinson, Haddon. *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001. (See also www.christiancourses.com for an online course.)
- Stanley, Andy, and Lane Jones. *Communicating for a Change*. Colorado Springs: Multnomah, 2006.
- Stott, John. *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982.
- Willhite, Keith, and Scott Gibson, eds. *The Big Idea of Biblical Preaching: Connecting the Bible to People*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998.

RESOURCES TO HELP YOU STUDY 1 PETER

- Cedar, Paul A. *The Preacher’s Commentary*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1984.
- Clowney, Edmund. *The Message of First Peter*. Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1988.
- Jensen, Irving. *1 & 2 Peter: A Self-Study Guide*. Chicago: Moody, 1971.
- Jobers, Karen H. *1 Peter*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009.
- Miller, Donald G. *On This Rock: A Commentary on First Peter*. Allison Park, PA: Pickwick, 1993.
- Walvoord, John, and Roy Zuck. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary, New Testament Edition*. Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1983.
- Wiersbe, Warren W. *Be Hopeful: How to Make the Best of Times Out of Your Worst of Times*. Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1982.

LESSON 1

Revel in Your Resources

GET ACQUAINTED

Open with prayer. Should you pray or invite one of the participants to do so? Be sensitive to the women. If they're comfortable praying out loud, give them opportunity. If not, you, as the leader, pray. Then spend some time getting to know one another. You might, for example, ask each woman to introduce herself by telling something about family, hobbies, what she likes to do on a Saturday night, a pet peeve, or what she hopes to gain from the study. If time allows, spend your first meeting connecting with questions or ice breaker games.

For an extended community builder, locate a set of Lego building blocks, or a similar children's building set. Dump the blocks out on a flat surface and ask the women to collaborate on building a strong structure. Encourage creativity and fun. Once the structure has taken form, explain that 1 Peter 2 (lesson 3) says that each one of them is a building block of God's house. Peter labels each believer a "living stone," a crucial part of the overall strength of God's work in the world. Mention that each lesson will conclude with a "Living Stone Story"—a story of a real woman who has faced trials and triumphed through her faith in God. Relate the story and exercise to the upcoming study where the group will learn how to overcome challenges in their own lives. Remind them that they will need one another, as well as God, to succeed. You may want to pray for one another as you close.

GET FOCUSED

Look over the study guide with your group and express your excitement about the topic. Create and discuss ground rules. If women join later, remember to orient them. Stress the importance of confidentiality.

Some women come to Bible study for the sole purpose of studying Scripture. Others come for community, to find friends. Regardless of your own bent, honor both desires. We all need a relationship with God through serious Bible study *and* we all need relationships through connecting in authentic community. Be sure the schedule reflects time for both.



DISCUSS LESSON 1

Did you ask the women to come prepared to discuss the first lesson? If so, dive in. Paraphrase parts of the introductory section and ask the first question. This is an observation question and I suggest that you don’t spend too much time on these kinds of questions. You may want to simply focus on the second part of the question, *What do you think he means?* To focus on the second part of the question, the leader says something like, “Peter says we are strangers in the world. What do you think he means?”

Spend more time on the share and opinion questions, but don’t skip observation (What does the text say?) and interpretation questions (What does the text mean?). If you do, you will interrupt the flow of the discussion, as many questions are based on previous questions. If you don’t want to spend time discussing the observation question, you may summarize the answer yourself and then move into other kinds of questions.

If you run out of time, cut questions that do not hinder the logical flow of the lesson. If you don’t have enough time to cover all the questions well, you may simply want to discuss one part of the lesson thoroughly and not address every section. Make the questions work for you and your group.

Point out that the lesson is peppered with notes to help with difficult passages and to give helpful background. Tell them to look for the quotes in the sidebars and not to miss the Living Stone Story at the end of each lesson. These added elements should bring the truths of the lesson alive and you may even want to discuss them.

LESSON CONTENT

Lesson 1 helps students understand the original audience and how to relate to the trials and tribulations they encountered. Although we live in a different era, we continue to face problems and suffering today no matter how hard we attempt to avoid them.

Peter wants his audience (including us) to see that our citizenship is in heaven and not in this world. He will help us bathe our minds in eternal truths, resulting in a biblical “big-picture” worldview needed to weather difficulties. The passage is packed with divine resources available to help us through these tough times. He also shows us the purpose of these trials.

TROUBLESHOOTING

The digging deeper question on page 12 addresses the controversial topic of election, free will, and God’s sovereignty. Don’t get bogged down in these issues, especially if women disagree. Either ignore the question or simply agree to disagree respectfully

and move on. Don't miss the main points Peter emphasizes as preparation for what is next in the letter.

Question 21 focuses on 1:9: *for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls*. The verb is present continuous tense, which shows us that there is more than one aspect of salvation. Past salvation occurs when one puts faith in Jesus. Future salvation, or glorification, will occur when Jesus returns and we receive our new bodies and live with him eternally. And there is a sense in which salvation continues to occur, a process called sanctification. In this process believers grow in their faith, becoming more like Christ. The present and future aspects of salvation do not override the reality that we have assurance of heaven as a result of our past salvation. If the women are confused by the verb tense, explain these three aspects of salvation.

Question 22 is designed to help women see the transitory nature of world events. In comparison, salvation lasts forever and is therefore infinitely more valuable. The prophets of old and the angels longed to know what we know about God's plans to redeem mankind and the universe. Help the women value the privilege of living during an era when we know so much about what God is up to.

CREATIVE ARTS IDEAS

- The 1 Peter lessons include quotes and stories of men and women who model faith when persecuted. Encourage the women to look for similar stories or poems on the lesson topic to share with the group. If you don't have time to read these stories or poems in the group, ask the women to make copies or e-mail them for participants to read outside group time. Consider choosing the best and reading them during a final wrap-up week, as a review of what you learned.
- Ask each woman to write down a particular struggle that she would like to commit to God and learn to overcome during the 1 Peter study. One way to provide confidentiality is to furnish black ink and black paper. Then pray over the struggles and place them where they can be seen each week. Or you may want to bury them, or plant them under some flowers. Find some way to creatively express your commitment and faith that God is working as you grow through the study. The women in the group can also suggest ideas.

LESSON 2

Respond like a Bone-Dry Babe

LESSON CONTENT

First Peter is no exception to the typical New Testament pattern: first the author reveals what God has done for us; then the author tells us how to respond through the resources God provides.

In lesson 2, Peter emphasizes the mind, discipline, holiness, and love. He ends the passage encouraging believers to crave God’s Word the way a baby craves milk.

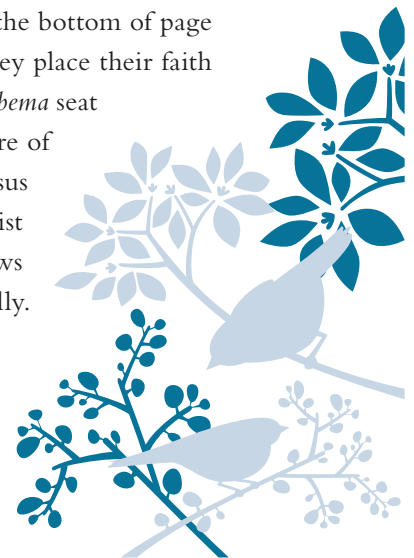
TROUBLESHOOTING

Peter begins with instructions on strengthening the mind. In my experience as a professor, I have observed that many women do not feel smart, and this inhibits them from learning the Bible and acting on its principles in the power of the Holy Spirit. You can help women feel smart by explaining that spiritual wisdom is not the same thing as worldly intellectualism, although they will need to “work” their minds to attain a biblical worldview.

The concepts in this lesson—the mind, discipline, holiness, and love—are not difficult to understand, but they are difficult to live. Focus on application, but be careful not to burden the women with a long to-do list. These heart attitudes and resulting actions are all the fruit of the Spirit and not the result of self-effort.

The concept of holiness is particularly difficult because it smacks of perfection, an impossible task for any of us. Yet, we are called to holiness. Draw out the idea that we are all on a journey toward holiness that will not be completed until our future salvation is realized.

Verse 17 refers to a judgment for believers. This reality may startle women in the group who felt that their salvation meant they would never be judged for their attitudes and actions. My note on the *bema* seat (in the sidebar at the bottom of page 32) addresses this issue. Help the women understand that once they place their faith in Christ they are eternally secure, but they will stand before the *bema* seat to receive rewards in the kingdom. Scholars disagree on the nature of these rewards. Some say that Christians will rule and reign with Jesus in different capacities aligned with their good works. Others insist that believers will lay their rewards at the feet of Jesus. No one knows for sure. If the women discuss rewards, ask them to do so respectfully.



CREATIVE ARTS IDEAS

- If your group includes mothers, ask them to bring pictures of their babies and recount stories of the way their babies demanded and savored milk, but be sensitive to women dealing with infertility or single women who grieve that they may never be biological mothers. If you request that mothers bring pictures, ask them to compare their babies' desires to our desire for God's Word.
- Decorate with pictures or posters of babies.
- Consider adopting a project as a group to express love to others. You might want to work at a homeless shelter, visit a nursing home, or volunteer for a project. Working together will bond your group in ways that simply talking together cannot.

LESSON 3

Rejoice That You Rock

Often women need affirmation that they matter to God, that they bring valuable gifts and ideas to the table, and that they have a significant contribution to make to God's work. In this lesson, Peter paints a picture of God's house using the analogy of a stone structure. This spiritual house is, in a sense, like the temple in the Old Testament, a place where the priests offered sacrifices to God. In the New Testament, all believers are priests. The role is no longer limited just to men from the tribe of Levi, women are included! As women see themselves as "living stones" and "a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession" (2:5, 9), they should hold their heads higher in God-confidence and step forward to minister. This picture does not do away with the old temple and the prophecies concerning it in the Bible, but it does add a new dimension to God's work.

This picture also shows believers bonded together in a single unit, implying that we cannot fulfill our individual purposes apart from the community of brothers and sisters. Authentic relationships are high priorities if God's work and will are to be accomplished.

Christ's preeminence is also clear. He is the cornerstone, the foundational stone on which all others are measured and built. In stone buildings, the cornerstone was the first stone to be put into place and the angle of the walls and the level of the other stones needed to align with it.

CREATIVE ARTS IDEA

- Make a bookmark or a plaque for each participant reminding her that she is a living stone, a chosen person, a royal priesthood, part of a holy nation belonging to God. When she is feeling discouraged, ask her to use the bookmark or plaque to remind her of who she is in Christ.
- Gather smooth stones and write all or part of a verse from the lesson on it with a fine-tip permanent marker, or let the women write on the stones themselves as a fun project to do together. The stones can be further personalized by inserting each woman's name in the verse on her stone, if appropriate, or by adding the date to the bottom or back of the stone. The stones will be a permanent reminder of who they are in Christ.



LESSON 4

Shadow the Servant

LESSON CONTENT

Most people naturally resist submitting to others. Thus they refuse God’s message of love and forgiveness out of fear of submitting to God. They don’t want anyone else in charge of their lives—not even a benevolent Creator. They fear they will be mistreated if they are not in control. No one else will take care of them if they don’t take care of themselves and stand up for their rights. These inclinations are true today and they were true for Peter’s audience. Nevertheless, Peter comes with a different message: submit to authority, do not mistreat others even if they mistreat you, when insulted don’t talk back—all from a position of strength and not weakness. Christ will be Peter’s finest example.

Expect that women in your group will struggle with this message. If you sense this resistance, don’t squelch it. Let them express their true feelings without shaming them. But also make sure that women who agree with Peter’s message have opportunity to speak. Let the group wrestle with these concepts as they talk about real situations and experiences. This theme will resurface throughout the letter, as Peter reiterates this concept in many different scenarios.

TROUBLESHOOTING

The first section of the lesson refers to submitting to government authorities, even unjust ones. These questions could lead to a discussion on political views. Don’t allow this rabbit trail, both for the sake of time and because this kind of talk tends to splinter a group. If you think your group may wander into this kind of rhetoric, address it before you discuss the lesson together. Lay the ground rule that politics is off-limits and if women forget during the discussion, remind them again.

Question 6 asks the students to define the word *submission*. Look for a healthy definition, possibly something like: submission is voluntarily choosing to go along with the wishes of another person when it is in the other person’s best interest and for a possible long-range benefit, from a position of strength and not of weakness. Submission does not mean being a doormat. God is not pleased when one group of people mistreats or lords it over others. However, sometimes responding with unexpected compassion, love, and self-control in the face of mistreatment can cause the one who offends to rethink the way they are acting. This wisdom



is displayed in Romans 12:20 where Paul quotes Proverbs 25:21–22: “If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.” Paul goes on to write, “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (Romans 12:21). You may reach the offender by shaming him with good behavior, showing him a different way, and pricking his conscience. There are no guarantees, but sometimes this strategy unsettles the offender, causing him (or her) to rethink what they have done or said. But this strategy requires tremendous love on the part of the one who chooses to submit rather than enjoy their own preferences. Everything within screams, *No, I will not let them treat me this way.* But Jesus responded differently and he asks his followers to shadow him.

Peter’s advice to slaves discussed under “Counsel to Slaves” (page 58) may also cause unrest. Be careful in applying these verses to the worker–boss relationship because that relationship is quite different from the master–slave relationship. For example, the slave had no choice but the worker can find another job. Also note that just because the Bible talks about these social relationships does not mean God condones them. Polygamy is also seen in the Scriptures but God clearly desires marriage to be between one man and one woman. He sometimes addresses realities without giving social comment on the justice of the matter. Don’t allow the issue of slavery, abhorrent to God, to sidetrack the conversation.

The issue of abuse may surface in the discussion and is addressed in question 17. This issue will also come up in the next lesson on marriage. Malachi 2:16 was written in the context of marriage and makes clear that God never expects a woman, or anyone else, to stay in a physically abusive situation.

CREATIVE ARTS IDEAS

- Read Tertullian’s poem on page 59 and discuss ways that Christ showed amazing patience. Ask how the women might apply one of these lessons to their own life.
- Watch a film together that depicts submission from a position of strength rather than weakness (e.g., *The Passion of the Christ*; *Bonhoeffer: Agent of Grace*; *Tale of Two Cities*; *Gandhi*; *The Last of the Mohicans*). Choose carefully as tastes in film differ. After watching the film, discuss how sacrifice influences and empowers.

LESSON 5

Strengthen the Sacred Mix

LESSON CONTENT

Peter continues his teaching on submission in this passage, this time focusing on wives and husbands. The context hints that he is speaking to women who are caught up in difficult situations: they have come to faith and their husbands have not. See the lesson's introductory text (page 63) for more explanation. Through the centuries we observe that women tend to respond to the gospel more quickly than men. In America the ratio in most churches is about 60 percent women and 40 percent men.¹ In other countries, the ratio is often much further out of balance. When I ministered in Russia and Africa, the church population was as much as 80 percent female. Various reasons are given but no one knows why for sure.

Although Peter may have been addressing women who came to faith without their husbands, his advice is helpful in all marriages, and generally in relationships between men and women. Again, your group may struggle with Peter's counsel, fearing they will be taken advantage of or mistreated. Help the women understand that Peter is not talking about submitting to physical abuse but about working wisely to win the cooperation of their husbands.

Also, we must consider that in Peter's time, many women were treated as property rather than as partners. It is irresponsible not to consider these cultural differences. We consider them when we study other passages. Nevertheless, the principles still apply. Talking too much, nagging, and using indirect passive-aggressive strategies to get your way were not helpful then and they are not helpful now. Too much emphasis on body image while neglecting the inner woman was not wise then and it is not wise now. Help the group focus on these parallels rather than fighting against Peter's advice.

TROUBLESHOOTING

Are any of the women in your group single? If so, consider this lesson from her perspective and help her find a broader application. Don't tell her this will help her when she one day finds a husband. Marriage may not be God's desire for her, and acting like it is makes some single women feel marginalized and misunderstood. Help her see that she may glean wisdom from the lesson, as she learns how to partner with men, for example, in the workplace or in ministry.



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Question 16 asks women to consider the meaning of the phrase “a gentle and quiet spirit,” sometimes misunderstood as meaning women should be seen and not heard. Don’t allow the discussion to disintegrate into this kind of talk. Jesus honored women, treated them with respect and dignity, taught them, and took up their cause. Jesus showed Peter and the other disciples how to treat women well. Peter is advising women to be gracious rather than abrasive. He is not muzzling them.

“Another Model” (pages 71–73) delves into the relationship of Sarah and Abraham. The Bible shows this couple as real people, flesh and blood, warts and flaws. They wrangled over decisions and both made mistakes in their marriage. Yet Sarah is lauded for the overall way in which she respected her husband and the way they worked together for mutual benefit and in the best interest of their future family. Help the women see that all wives, husbands, and marriages face challenges, but just like Sarah they too can be remembered as a woman who did “what is right” and did “not give way to fear” (3:6).

“Counsel to Men” (page 74) contains questions about husbands. In question 26, help women see that Peter is not saying women are “less” intellectually, emotionally, or spiritually, but that they are weaker physically. Peter instructs men to treat women with the utmost care and respect, and the consequences of mistreating them are extremely serious. Married women should not become sidetracked about their husbands’ attitudes and behaviors but should instead focus on their own.

CREATIVE ARTS IDEAS

- Show a clip of a positive or negative example of marriage from a film or television program. Discuss what you observe.
- Play a song that illustrates principles from the lesson or shows what happens when they are ignored.
- Ask the women in the group to participate in an impromptu role play of the relationship of Sarah and Abraham. Discuss how they felt and what they learned.

LESSON 6

Pursue Peace with Doves and Dragons

This lesson moves into topics of submission, harmony, and peacemaking in the church. The title of the lesson refers to the different kinds of people we find in churches today—some delight in peace while others use conflict and friction to get their way and enhance their personal agendas. Mature believers who stand for Jesus in hostile times must be skilled peacemakers. The purpose of the lesson is to aid women in understanding the importance of peacemaking and to hone their skills in this area, especially in hard times when the enemy loves to use conflict to disrupt and destroy.

The lesson includes a detailed section on Matthew 18:15–17, where Jesus gives us explicit instructions on what to do in a conflict. The lesson concludes with a case study. You may want to spend time discussing the case study as well as the lesson, or you could devote two sessions to this topic, if you sense it is needed.

A helpful resource might be the book I have coauthored with Kelley Mathews, entitled *Leading Women Who Wound* (Chicago: Moody, 2009). Although the book targets leaders working with women, the principles, stories, and research will help women in all kinds of relationships where conflict is likely to occur—which is *all* relationships of any depth or length. Women do conflict differently from men and we all need help in understanding ourselves and others when disputes erupt. In the book, as well as in the video clip “Peacemaking” (see the QR code on page 88), I share my own journey through a horrific personal attack by another woman in the church and what God taught me over the years in regard to conflict and peacemaking.

“The Third Quality of the Ideal Church” (page 84) and “The Fourth Quality of the Ideal Church” (page 85) center on “loving” each other in the church as family, as brothers and sisters, or “sacred siblings.” (This term comes from my book *Mixed Ministry: Working Together as Brothers and Sisters in an Oversexed Society*, coauthored with Kelley Mathews and Henry J. Rogers [Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2008]. We tackle the thorny issue of what it means to work in healthy mixed-gender partnerships. If you want more insight into these two question sets, or decide to teach on this aspect of the lesson, this book will be extremely helpful.)

TROUBLESHOOTING

This lesson contains questions that may raise strong emotional responses, particularly from women who have been wounded by others. Create an ethos where they are free to express their pain, but don’t allow them to bash particular people. Steer the conversation



in a positive direction as appropriate. Highlight “Biblical Harmony” (pages 79–83), which walks students through the Matthew 18 peacemaking process. Chapter 7 (“Steps to Making Peace with a Sister”) in *Leading Women Who Wound* will be extremely helpful as you prepare to lead the discussion or teach a follow-up message. This chapter wrings out the Matthew text, particularly as it relates to women.

In questions 5–9, emphasize the need to contain the conflict to the people directly involved as well as the necessity of addressing the conflict directly rather than ignoring it. In questions 10 and 11, remind the women that a “witness” can be someone who observed the incident or a wise person whom both parties agree to include. Jesus allows for more than one so each can choose someone if they cannot agree on the same witness. When you move to the final steps (questions 12 and 13), emphasize that individual churches determine what this step looks like and godly people submit to the guidance of their leaders.

CREATIVE ARTS IDEAS

- Ask for volunteers to write down a conflict that they have observed or were involved in. Be sure they change up the details to protect others. Then use these situations as case studies and analyze how Jesus would counsel them to respond.
- Play a video showing what can happen when conflict erupts and damages relationships and God’s reputation (for example, *Doubt* [Miramax, 2009]). Again, review the film before showing it to the group, as tastes in film differ. Discuss.
- Ask the women to design a piece of art that reflects their understanding of Matthew 18:15–17 or Psalm 34:12–16. Display their art and talk about the meaning of each piece.

LESSON 7

Stand Strong When Wronged

LESSON CONTENT

The first question, like the passage, begins by asking, “*Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good?*” The answer is that normally others will treat you well if you treat them well. However, Peter continues, sometimes you may suffer even when you do right. A natural response when that occurs is fear. But Peter encourages his early readers, and us, not to be overcome with fear. Instead, use these situations to share your faith. Others watch mistreated people, often taking up their cause out of a sense of fairness. Thus suffering presents a platform for the gospel. Lesson 7 centers on understanding this opportunity and learning to be an effective witness.

TROUBLESHOOTING

Witnessing for Christ scares many women, particularly in countries where “tolerance” is highly valued, and any suggestion that there is only one way to God is politically incorrect. Cold-call or in-your-face evangelism is ineffective with many unbelievers today, although not all. Witnessing requires a discerning spirit and often great time and patience. As the women work their way through “Effective Witnessing” (pages 93–96) help them find ways to make their witnessing a natural part of their lifestyle as they talk with others about the part God plays in their lives.

Studying the Bible together and articulating answers in the group is excellent preparation for witnessing to nonbelievers. Attempt to discuss this topic without guilt, as many of the women probably know they should be witnessing for Jesus but find it extremely intimidating and difficult. Encourage them as you discuss practical ways to woo nonbelievers.

First Peter 3:17–22 is one of the most difficult passages in Scripture to interpret and has been used by cults and false teachers to make outrageous claims that the Bible never makes. A long note on page 96–97 attempts to explain these verses. You may want to simply skip this section in the discussion or refer to it briefly.

CREATIVE ARTS IDEAS

- Is there a writer in your group? If so, ask her to create several witnessing scenarios of conversations between a believer and nonbeliever. Or you may want to ask several of the women to



1 PETER: *Discovering Encouragement in Troubling Times*—Leader's Guide

write down a typical real conversation they have experienced. Then let group members role-play what they might say or do in the scenario. Discuss how they felt, and discuss good responses as well as poor ones. Use these role plays as teaching tools to sharpen their witnessing skills.

- Practice what you are learning. Visit a nursing home or an inner-city shelter as a group. Fan out and talk to residents, weaving your love for Jesus into the conversation. Present the gospel as the Spirit leads.
- Check out opportunities to engage in prison ministry together with groups like Champions for Life (www.billglasscfl.org) or Chuck Colson's ministry (www.prisonfellowship.org). Some of these ministries offer evangelism training before unleashing teams of Christians into prisons to share the gospel.

LESSON 8

Persevere with the End in Mind

LESSON CONTENT

This lesson covers a variety of important topics to consider when crisis erupts: the brevity of life, facing death, prayer, reaching out to others through a hospitable attitude, and serving others when you want to focus on your own needs. Peter concludes this section with a mandate to continue “doing good” in light of the judgment that will begin with Christians, another reference to the *bema* seat of rewards.

TROUBLESHOOTING

Question 1 should surface the reality that Peter’s time on earth was limited and ours is too. Unless Jesus returns first, we all face certain physical death. Question 2 asks students to dissect Ecclesiastes 7:1–4 where Solomon insists, “It is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting, for death is the destiny of everyone; the living should take this to heart” (v. 2). Guide the group into the realization that although death may be an uncomfortable topic to think about or discuss, doing so will strengthen our faith and help us prepare to live well in this fallen world. Question 3 follows up with a share question on the same topic. This question block is foundational to the rest of the lesson.

“Serve with the End in Mind” (pages 106–8) delves into the issue of spiritual gifts. In question 13, I have included three passages that contain lists of spiritual gifts, including sign gifts, which some scholars insist are no longer operative today while other scholars disagree. I suggest you not allow the conversation to be sidetracked by this controversial issue. If it comes up, simply comment that scholars disagree and ask everyone to be respectful of others’ viewpoints. Then move on. The lesson contains too many practical subjects to be derailed here.

Students may be confused by several verses in this passage but I have included notes for clarification.

CREATIVE ARTS IDEAS

- Plan a half day in prayer for your group. Find a quiet place. If you like, decorate with candles and lower the lights. Create an idea sheet to hand out with passages to ponder and suggestions



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for prayer. Include time alone and time together. Pepper your time together with group prayer time, worship readings, and singing.

- As a group, create and implement a hospitality plan without food. What could you do to welcome others into your space and exhibit care, love, and concern without focusing on food? (There is nothing wrong with treating others to tasty cuisine but hospitality can become more about entertaining than embracing others. Through this exercise, encourage women to develop other creative hospitality methods besides food.)

LESSON 9

Strengthen Your Sacred Kin

LESSON CONTENT

Often women students skip over parts of 1 Peter 5, believing it is reserved for male elders and young men in the church. See my introductory note to the lesson. I believe the chapter contains valuable lessons for all Christians, especially as we interact with other generations in the church and community. This broader application should help students use what they learn in their own lives. Intergenerational ministry is lacking in some churches, a losing situation for all. In this lesson we discover the actions and attitudes that please God when older and younger people enjoy and learn from one another. We also see that each generation benefits, especially in tough times. Also, this lesson will be extremely valuable for women with leadership gifts and younger people who tend to discount older folk.

TROUBLESHOOTING

Will any of the women in your group be confused and unsettled by the issue of “age” in the lesson? Do they know whether they are “older” or “younger”? What baggage goes with these labels? If you think the issue will make some participants uncomfortable, you might want to make light of the issue of age and encourage them to decide where they fit for themselves.

If the older women resist thinking of themselves as “elders” or “leaders,” help them understand that we are all responsible to train up the next generation. Older women have much to contribute in light of their life experience. Young women have much to teach older women about new ideas and contemporary issues.

CREATIVE ARTS IDEAS

- How might your group foster relationships between generations? Consider hosting a gathering of older and younger women. Ask members of different generations to pair up as meal partners and get to know one another. Ask a pair who have enjoyed a healthy mentoring relationship to speak about their experience. Brainstorm other ways to naturally connect women of different generations.
- Gather into two groups, older and younger. In separate places, brainstorm ways to show the other group how much you value



them and their perspectives. Then implement your plans and evaluate the results together.

WILL YOU SAY GOOD-BYE OR GO ON TOGETHER?

Is this a short-term group, or do you, as the leader, want to continue meeting? The first decision is yours. Count the cost. Is the group thriving? Bonding? Committed? Worth the effort you are investing? Answer these questions honestly. Every group has a beginning and an end. Is this the time for your group to disband? If so, tell the group your reasons, kindly but emphatically. Don’t be pressured into continuing against your better judgment.

If you determine you’re excited about leading the group through another study, you may want to poll the group to learn their desires. If so, plan a date to meet for a brainstorming session on what to study and what changes might be in order, if any. (Check out www.discovertogetherseries.com for additional study options.)

Either way, use this last gathering of *1 Peter: Finding Encouragement in Troubling Times* to reflect, review, and celebrate what has been accomplished. Plan a time that fosters a sense of closure, possibly festive food, a potluck brunch or luncheon, or some other special activity. For example, you might talk about how God has helped you through difficult circumstances. You might reread and discuss the Living Stone stories or favorite quotes in the lessons. You could list benefits you enjoyed as a result of the study. You might talk about changes you observed in the members as a result of sharing this study. In some way, celebrate this final chapter in your group experience. Praise and thank God for what he has done in your lives individually and as a worshipping community. If any of the participants are leaving the group, be sure to say good-bye and pray for them.

NOTES

1. “Women Are the Backbone of the Christian Congregations in America,” March 6, 2000, www.barna.org.