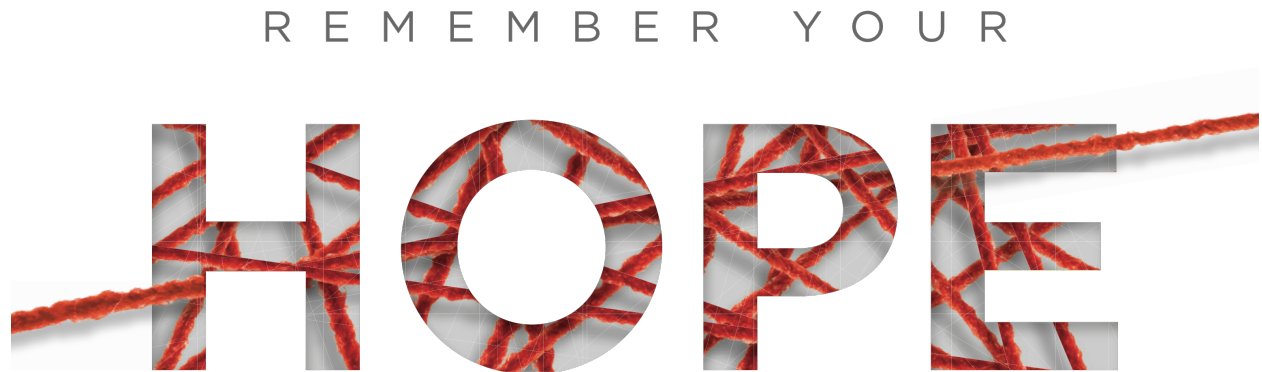


## Lesson 1: 1 Peter 1:1–12

### Hook



**Main Point: Our sure hope is our imperishable inheritance in heaven.**

When you buy milk, do you pull it from the back of the cooler at the grocery store, hoping for the longest possible shelf life? If you're like most Americans, you throw away an average of one pound of expired food a day.<sup>1</sup> Break into small groups and arrange the following foods in order of shortest to longest shelf-life.

1. Winter squash
2. Beef jerky
3. Dark chocolate
4. Honey
5. Peanuts
6. Potatoes
7. Tea

Answers: 6. (2–5 weeks), 5. (1–2 months), 1. (1–3 months), 7. (6–12 months), 2. (1–2 years), 3. (2–5 years), 4. (indefinite)

**Q: Do you find yourself frequently ridding your pantry of expired food? What food expires most frequently in your house?**

**Q: Moving on from food, what item in your home has lasted the longest (example: a cast iron skillet, a tool set, a piece of furniture)? To what do you attribute its longevity?**

**Q: How has your perception of the brevity of circumstances and life in general changed over the years? How has that changed the way you live?**

**Transition:** Today we will discuss the brevity of this life and the imperishable inheritance that awaits us in heaven.

## Book

**Main Point: Our sure hope is our imperishable inheritance in heaven.**

**Text Summary:** Peter wrote to encourage the believers in Asia Minor who were suffering persecution. He reminded them that their hope was not in this world but in heaven, where an imperishable inheritance awaited them. Their suffering on this earth was temporary, only a short time compared to the eternity of heaven.

### 1 Peter 1:1–2 [Read]

**Talking Point 1:** We are God’s chosen people, exiles on this earth.

**Q: In this greeting, how does Peter connect Christians to God’s people in the Old Testament?**

**Q: How would belief in God’s foreknowledge make these Christians feel better about their situation?**

Peter used a very simple description of himself, “an apostle of Jesus Christ” (v. 1) and a very simple greeting, “May grace and peace be multiplied to you” (v. 2). But his description of the recipients of his letter is much more detailed and richer.

He calls them “exiles” and the “elect” (or chosen ones) of God (v. 1). Christians are God’s chosen people, His royal priesthood, His holy nation, a people of God’s own possession (1 Peter 2:9). But they are living “in exile” on this earth, while their true citizenship is in heaven (Philippians 3:20).

Peter went into greater detail on the “elect” by saying they were chosen “according to the foreknowledge of God” (v. 2). In using this language, Peter reminded these suffering believers that God is in control. That God is sovereign. That God has known from before they were even born what they would go through, and He is holding them in the palm of His hand.<sup>ii</sup>

Peter also encouraged them with the rest of his description. They were sanctified by the Spirit and the sprinkling of His blood (v.2). These are connections to the Old Testament. When sacrifices were made at the tabernacle/temple, the priests sprinkled the blood of the animal on the altar or the curtain or the ark to purify them. When priests or kings or prophets were set apart for service to the Lord, they were anointed with oil as a symbol of the anointing of the Holy Spirit. Peter reassured them that they been chosen by God—sanctified, set apart—not only for their own salvation but for a mission. For obedience to Christ, which included perseverance through suffering, by which they would be a light to the world. They were God’s chosen nation and royal priesthood, Christ’s ambassadors to the world.

It is easy for us reading a letter such as this to skim the opening part, but Peter intentionally used rich language to encourage these believers and describe their role in the kingdom. This description also points toward Peter's primary theological point in the passage, that there was an inheritance waiting for them in heaven. Thinking of ourselves primarily as God's "elect exiles" completely changes our perspective on everything we go through on this earth, including suffering. We don't belong here; we are just passing through. And while we're here, we're on mission as ambassadors of God's kingdom, to share the Gospel and bring as many people as possible to His kingdom with us. Our suffering is temporary, and it has a greater purpose—both to shape us into the likeness of Christ and to bear His image to the world.

**Q: Are you living your life as an "exile" on this earth? Why or why not?**

**Q: What would it look like for you to center your life on the mission of God? What changes would you need to make to live 100-percent as an ambassador for Christ?**

**Q: Not all of us are being persecuted for our faith, but we all have struggles. How are you suffering, and how can thinking of yourself an "elect exile" give you a different perspective on your struggles?**

**1 Peter 1:3–5 [Read]**

**Talking Point 2:** An eternal inheritance is kept for us in heaven.

**Q: What exactly is our inheritance in heaven?**

**Q: How could focusing on their inheritance in heaven help these suffering Christians persevere?**

Keeping Peter's audience in mind helps us understand his focus on their hope in the inheritance in heaven (v. 3–4). These people were suffering for Christ, being persecuted for the sake of the Gospel, with little hope that it would get any better. They might very well die as martyrs. Peter's answer was that their hope wasn't found in this life, in this world. Their hope was in heaven. Peter didn't sugarcoat their situation. He didn't make false promises of blessing in this world. He pointed forward to heaven.

Paul wrote something similar in Romans. "The sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us" (Romans 8:18). Paul wrote that because he focused on this future inheritance; he could persevere through anything life threw his way (Philippians 4:13). So, what is this inheritance that is being kept for us? The Bible uses several different terms for it:

- The resurrection from the dead (Philippians 3:11)

- The crown of life (James 1:12)
- The crown of righteousness (2 Timothy 4:8)
- The unfading crown of glory (1 Peter 5:4)
- Eternal life (Matthew 19:29)

Our inheritance is really heaven itself—the kingdom of God. This connects Christian believers to the Old Testament saints again. In the old covenant, the inheritance was the Promised Land, of which each tribe was given an allotment (Exodus 6:8; Joshua 13–21). But, though the Holy Land was a beautiful place, a land flowing with milk and honey, even greater was the blessing of the presence of God in their midst, that God would live among them and be their God (Exodus 6:7; Ezekiel 34:23).<sup>iii</sup>

The promise of the new covenant is eternal rest in the kingdom of God (Hebrews 4). Each of us will be given an allotment in the kingdom, a place in our Father’s house (John 14:1–6). As in the old covenant, the greatest gift of the inheritance is not the land itself, but the presence of God. What makes heaven so great isn’t the streets of gold or the jewels in the gates, it’s that God is there. Like the Levites and the priests in the old covenant, our inheritance is God Himself (Deuteronomy 18:1–2; Psalm 16:5–6).

Although we may not know every detail about what heaven will be like, we can know that the kingdom of God is *where God is*. Because God’s presence is there, there will be no sorrow, evil or pain—He will wipe every tear from our eyes (Revelation 21:4). These are two themes that recur throughout all of covenant history—that God will  *dwell* with humankind, and He will  *comfort* them. With the presence of God come comfort and peace. The Holy Spirit is called the Comforter. Jesus is the Prince of Peace.

Children don’t call a place home because it has cool video games, their own room, or pizza. “Home” is where their parents are. We don’t want to go to heaven because of the massive banquet or streets of gold, but because God is there. That’s what makes it good and perfect. The “stuff” there, whatever it is, pales in comparison. It will be perfect, because God is perfect. In verse 4, Peter describes our inheritance in heaven as:

- Imperishable—Everything on earth is in the process of decaying, but our treasure in heaven is unaffected by the law of entropy (Matthew 6:19–20).
- undefiled—Everything in this world is broken, marred by sin, but in the kingdom of God there is no evil, nothing impure (Revelation 21:27).
- Unfading—This world will one day fade away, but the kingdom of God will last forever in brilliance and glory (1 John 2:17).

Our inheritance is eternal.<sup>iv</sup> What we have waiting for us in heaven is secure. No one can snatch us from His hand (John 10:28–29). As God’s children, adopted into His family, we have an

assurance of this inheritance (Romans 8:17). It's a promise we can take to the bank. When we understand the surpassing value of the kingdom that is to come, we can endure whatever life throws our way. Even if we aren't really suffering or being persecuted in this world, we can take this message to heart. Do not put your hope in this world that is fading away. Put your hope in heaven. So, let us fix our eyes on what is unseen, not on this world. "For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that our unseen are eternal" (2 Corinthians 4:18).

**Q: In what ways can you fix your eyes on what is unseen rather than on the world?**

**Q: How can you get excited about heaven when you can't see it, and it seems so far in the future?**

**1 Peter 1:6–12 [Read]**

**Talking Point 3:** Our suffering is only for a little while.

**Q: How does suffering test the genuineness of our faith?**

**Q: How can sufferings result in praise of Jesus instead of anger or resentment or blame toward Him?**

Peter here said plainly what he has alluded to before. You can persevere through whatever suffering the world throws your way because in comparison to an eternity in heaven, it's only for "a little while" (v. 6). If we think about our lives—at most around 100 years—in comparison to the eternity of heaven, this life is just a blip on a radar. James says your life is like a vapor, a puff of smoke (James 4:14). The psalmist wrote that our lives are as short as a few handbreadths (about four inches, the breadth of a hand), as nothing before God (Psalms 39:5–6; 62:9; 89:47; 144:4). As the classic hymn, "Amazing Grace," says, "When we've been there ten thousand years." Ten thousand years! Can we really imagine that? Because we are mortal and we are still in the middle of it, this life can feel like all there is. But if heaven is for real (and it is!), then this life is nothing.

**Q: When you've been in heaven 10,000 years, what do you think you will say about this life, looking back on it?**

From a secular perspective, you may say, "Life is short. Live it up while you can!" But from a Christian perspective, we say, "Life is short, so you better prepare for eternity." Or if you're suffering in this life, "Life is short, so just hold on. Eternity is coming!" But this is more than just a "grin and bear it" kind of attitude, because Peter said God will use our suffering to refine us as fire refines gold (Psalm 66:10; Proverbs 17:3; Isaiah 48:10; Malachi 3:3). Refining is a delicate process. The smith melts the metal multiple times to burn out all the impurities, but if it's left in

the flames too long, it will be destroyed. So, he watches it the whole time. He knows it is finally ready when it starts to shine with a mirror-like quality, when he can see his reflection purely in it.<sup>v</sup>

God's purpose is to create for Himself a people who will reflect His image to the world (Titus 2:14). God allows us to go through the fire, but He never leaves us alone. He is always with us, watching us closely, making sure we are tested but not destroyed (2 Corinthians 4:8–9). God uses that suffering for good, to refine us, to make us more like Jesus. Each time God refines us, He sees His image in us more clearly. Peter says it's "for a little while," meaning just while we are on earth, before our eternity in heaven. Though refining makes us more and more like Jesus, we will not be made *perfect* until we are made new creations in heaven (1 Corinthians 15). So, this refining—sanctification—is never finished in this life.<sup>vi</sup>

**Q: What fiery trials have you gone through? Looking back, in what ways do you see that God used them to refine you?**

**Q: In what ways has God refined you over time? How are you more like Jesus now that you were when you first believed?**

**Q: How can it comfort us to know God is always watching us closely as we go through the fire?**

Peter describes the outcome of this refining as "the salvation of your souls" (v. 9). This salvation is a further description of the inheritance in which we hope.<sup>vii</sup> This salvation is what the prophets prophesied about, what the whole Old Testament pointed toward (v. 10–11). It is so incredibly amazing that the angels long to fully understand it (v. 12). Even though we cannot see Jesus or His kingdom now, we believe in Him, love Him, and rejoice with an inexpressible joy (v. 8). The blessing of our inheritance is not only that we can look forward to heaven with hope, but that we can live this life with abundant joy (John 10:10), trusting in the assurance of our salvation and fixing our eyes on the things that are not seen. No matter what our circumstances—in chains or in freedom, in plenty or in want—we can rejoice at all times (Philippians 4:4–13). It may sound trite to someone who doesn't know Christ, but it is truly a joy and a peace that passes all understanding (4:6–7). It is not something anyone can understand until the eyes of their hearts have been opened (Ephesians 1:18). But as we grow closer to Jesus, as we are refined through fire, as we are conformed to the image of Christ, we grow in joy in this life and hope for the next.

**Q: Do you live your life with this kind of abundant joy? If not, what needs to change?**

**Q: How can we encourage one another in times of suffering without sounding trite or unsympathetic?**

**Q: What part can you play in using your times of suffering to draw nearer to Jesus?**



## Took

**Main Point: Our sure hope is our imperishable inheritance in heaven.**

Paul writes that suffering produces not just character, but *proven* character—character that has been forged through difficulty. That has proven itself to be true (Romans 5:3–4). In her autobiography, Helen Keller wrote, “Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experience of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, ambition inspired, and success achieved.”<sup>viii</sup> Just as you’ll never become a star athlete by sitting on the couch and eating chips, you’ll never develop proven character without going through hard times. It’s our sufferings and struggle that build character. It is through those fiery trials that God is making us into who He wants us to be.

**Q: What Christ-like character traits have been developed in your life through sufferings and struggle?**

**Q: How does an eternal perspective impact the way in which you walk through suffering?**

**Q: What are ways in which you can encourage other believers during their times of suffering?**

### CHALLENGES:

**THINK: *How can I live with an eternal perspective?*** How can I keep my mind focused on what is unseen, even while I still have to live in this world? What things might I need to let go of to focus on Jesus? In what ways do I need to change in order to live on mission for Jesus?

**PRAY: *For strength to persevere through suffering.*** And not just to persevere but to grow in faith! Ask God for the wisdom to see how He is using this suffering to refine you. Also pray for those you know who are enduring great suffering. Pray through how you might encourage them, walk alongside them, and be a source of light and strength.

**ACT: *Encourage someone who is enduring great suffering.*** Write them a note, pray with them, meet them for coffee, take them dinner, give them money if they need it, or just sit with them and be there to listen. Think of a tangible way you can be a support for them in their time of suffering.

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.msn.com/en-us/health/nutrition/heres-how-long-you-can-eat-food-after-the-expiration-date/ar-AAC6j6l>

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<sup>ii</sup> Wayne A. Grudem, *1 Peter, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 54.

<sup>iii</sup> J. Ramsey Michaels, *1 Peter, Word Biblical Commentary, Vol. 49* (Waco, TX: Word, Inc, 1988), 21.

<sup>iv</sup> Wayne A. Grudem, *1 Peter, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 58.

<sup>v</sup> Henry Barnard, *Barnard's American Journal of Education, Vol. 9* (London, UK: F.C. Brownell, 1860), 475–7.

<sup>vi</sup> Karen H. Jobes, *1 Peter, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005), 93–95.

<sup>vii</sup> *ESV Study Bible*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008).

<sup>viii</sup> Helen Keller, *The Story of My Life* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1903).