

HOPE AGAIN: When Life Hurts and Dreams Fade

STUDY SEVENTEEN

Hope Beyond Misery: Lasting Lessons

1 Peter 1–5

This letter is a masterful presentation of the truth that your suffering is not the end. It's a means to the end. And God's end for us is maturity. It is growth. It is a reason for living and going on. And this book will help you know how to do it.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

LET your mind wander back in time . . .

My orders arrived. I hunted him. I arrested him. And I'll never forget the day I killed him.

As a Roman soldier, I loved my empire. I embraced the vision: Roman rule, imperial benevolence, global “peace.” So I pledged my allegiance to Caesar—and only Caesar. After all, I believed that he was my only hope to provide true serenity and to secure eternal honor.

Eventually, I learned about this group of radicals who bent the knee to a different king. They claimed a Jewish commoner named Jesus resurrected from the dead. They regarded him as the highest king and the true Son of God. Quickly, I realized these “Christians” and their treasonous beliefs threatened to unravel everything my king had worked to accomplish . . . and I hated them for that.

So I dedicated my service to combatting this cult of Christ and defending the glory of Rome. Every time I spilled the blood of a Christian, the self-satisfying feeling of vengeance pumped through my veins . . . and I loved it. That is, until I met the Galilean fisherman named Peter.

Peter had helped spark the spread of Christianity in Rome, and my fellow soldiers and I celebrated the day our orders came in to arrest him. If we can get Peter, we thought, we will finally be



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Hope Beyond Misery: Lasting Lessons

1 Peter 1–5

able to extinguish this deplorable religion for good. *But we didn't have to look for long. His Jewish kinsmen seized him and turned him over to us. We prepared a cross. Either he would renounce his faith, or we would nail him to a tree to die just as his Lord had died.*

"No," he said as I led him to the cross, "I won't do it." I raised my eyebrows. Was the threat of a gruesome crucifixion going to cause this great apostle to desert Jesus? I had heard about his countless beatings and imprisonments. So I assumed he just couldn't handle any more pain. I grinned. Rome wins again.

As I reached over to loose his chains, Peter spoke up, "Hold on." I paused. "I refuse to die in the same manner as my Lord. I don't deserve that honor. If you must kill me, crucify me . . . upside down. I will endure the pain. I know I will be reunited with Jesus soon."

I trembled and thought, How can I kill a man like this—a man of such courage and poise? But a good soldier marches on. So I willed my shaky hands to turn the cross over. Then, I pounded the spikes into Peter's hands and feet and slipped the head beam into the ground. As I waited for the final breath to leave his body, I found myself fighting to breathe as well.

In that moment, everything changed. I looked at Peter's pale and lifeless face, and I saw a man who had lived an abundant life. The peace of his heavenly kingdom was truer than the so-called "peace" of Rome. His hope in his Lord shone far brighter than the dim confidence I had in Caesar. I needed to learn more about Peter.

More importantly, I needed to know more about his Lord.

So secretly I searched Rome for a Christian willing to share Peter's writings with me. When I finally got a copy of the letter called 1 Peter, I learned the truth about Jesus Christ and how he offers a suffering world true peace. When I finished reading the letter, I made my choice. No more false gods. No more worldly rulers. No more reviling. A new King. An everlasting peace. A living hope.¹



PREPARE YOUR HEART

The apostle Peter was able to see past his immediate suffering because of his eternal hope in Christ. As you prepare to open God's Word today, express your own confidence in Christ and His promises to you.

Father, I trust that You can carry me through my greatest seasons of suffering. Give me the strength to follow Peter's example so that I can stand strong for You when the pain is sharpest. Equip me to do so through my time in Your Word today. In Jesus' name, amen.



Hope Beyond Misery: Lasting Lessons

1 Peter 1–5



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

The message of 1 Peter still resonates in the hearts of Christians today, even though Peter wrote the words nearly 2,000 years ago. Although Peter’s original audience faced a unique set of challenges, Peter offered timeless principles that will encourage any Christian. Peter’s letter focuses on two central themes: (1) living a holy life in a hostile world and (2) finding hope amid suffering. You can see how Peter developed these themes in Pastor Chuck Swindoll’s chart below.

FIRST PETER

	Salutation (1:1–2)	Our Living Hope and Holy Life “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1:3) . . . for the hope we claim (1:3–12) . . . by our walk of holiness (1:13–25) . . . for our new identity in Christ (2:1–12) CHAPTERS 1:3–2:12	Our Submission and God’s Honor “Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake” (2:13) . . . to the government (2:13–17) . . . at work (2:18–20) . . . like Christ (2:21–25) . . . in the home (3:1–7)	Our Suffering and Christ’s Suffering “Since Christ has suffered” (4:1) Keep a good conscience (3:16) Share the sufferings and rejoice (4:13) Commit yourselves to God (4:19) Be humble (5:6) Cast your anxiety on God (5:7)	Conclusion (5:12–14)
Emphasis		Informing	Exhorting	Encouraging	
Grace		. . . to go on	. . . to live faithfully	. . . to stand firm	
Hope		A <i>living</i> hope through Christ’s resurrection (1:3)	A <i>righteous</i> hope through personal submission (2:15)	A <i>trusting</i> hope through faith (4:19)	
Theme	Holy living in a hostile world; hope in the midst of suffering				
Key Verses	1:3–5, 13–16; 2:21; 4:12–13, 19; 5:10–11				
Christ in 1 Peter	Jesus is the living stone rejected by men, who has become the Cornerstone of the church and the Shepherd of our souls (2:4–10, 25).				

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As long as there’s hatred of Christ and suffering, 1 Peter will remain an essential companion to Christians. Let’s review what Peter has to say about a believer’s holiness and hope.



Hope Beyond Misery: Lasting Lessons

1 Peter 1–5



Observation: Holiness and Hope

As you peruse Pastor Chuck’s chart, you’ll notice how Peter weaved together the themes of suffering, faith, and hope. Peter anchored his discussion of these topics at two key transition points: [1 Peter 2:11](#) and [4:12](#). Observe how he begins each major section of the letters by addressing his “dear friends.”²

Claiming the Living Hope—1 Peter 1:3–2:10

In [1 Peter 1:6](#), the apostle exhorted his readers to “be truly glad” even though he knew that they would soon “endure many trials.” According to [1:7](#), how can believers rejoice even during their trials? What is the relationship between faith and trials?

In [1:6–7](#), Peter described the *mindset* of the faithful suffering Christian, and in [1:13–16](#), he addresses the *behavior* of the faithful suffering Christian. According to [1:13](#), what is the central hope of believers of Jesus Christ? According to [1:14–16](#), how should believers act in light of this hope?



Hope Beyond Misery: Lasting Lessons

1 Peter 1–5

Walking the Pilgrimage of Faith—1 Peter 2:11–4:11

In the next section, Peter instructed his readers on what it looks like for believers to live “as temporary residents and foreigners” in this fallen world (*1 Peter 2:11*). His instruction in this section all flows from the source of one principal command. According to *2:13*, what is this central command?

This command may feel counterintuitive—as if it would only result in *more* suffering. Yet Peter saw this kind of behavior as essential for living a Christlike life (see *2:21–25*). According to *3:13–18*, what kind of results await those who maintain this Christlike posture?

Enduring the Fiery Trial—1 Peter 4:12–5:11

As Peter reached the final section of his letter, he reiterated some of the key themes he already discussed. Specifically, believers should not “be surprised” when they face trials (*1 Peter 4:12*). Instead, they should “be very glad—for these trials make you partners with Christ in his suffering” (*4:13*).



Hope Beyond Misery: Lasting Lessons

1 Peter 1–5

First Peter 4:19 reviews several of the major themes of the letter. Summarize this verse in your own words.

According to *5:5–7*, what kind of character trait must a believer maintain in order to properly heed the instruction Peter presented throughout the letter?

Do you struggle with enduring fiery trials? Call to mind the sovereignty of God. Nothing touches you that hasn't come through the willing plan of God. It must all pass through His fingers before it reaches you. He is in control. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Finding Hope in Suffering

Throughout this series on 1 Peter, several key themes and ideas have stood as pillars upon which we have built the interpretation of Peter's words and the application of his message. These pillars are so essential to the structure of the letter that they are visible from the vantage point of nearly every single paragraph.

Take time to reflectively read *the entire letter*. As you do so, gradually fill in each of the spaces below, noting what Peter says about the topics of suffering, faith, and hope. After you finish reading the letter and filling in the spaces, write one timeless truth that summarizes what 1 Peter teaches about each theme.



Hope Beyond Misery: Lasting Lessons

1 Peter 1–5

Suffering

Faith

Hope



Hope Beyond Misery: Lasting Lessons

1 Peter 1–5

Based on your reading of 1 Peter, how do the elements of suffering, faith, and hope work together in the life of the Christian?

If you want to know how to claim the living hope that God offers, it will require faith in the living Lord. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Peter's Example

These lessons from Peter's letter weren't just nice ideas that Peter thought up one day. No, his teaching was based on personal experience. All throughout Peter's Christian life, he endured fiery trials that put his faith to the test. And each time, he emerged from the flames with stronger faith—all because of his iron-clad hope in Christ.

The book of Acts records several instances in which Peter's fellow Jews arrested him for preaching about Jesus. And in [Acts 5:29–32](#), Peter explains why he acted contrary to the wishes of his kin.

According to Peter's words in [5:29](#), why did he continue to preach about Jesus even though the Jewish leaders forbade it? What does this verse reveal about the strength of his faith?



Hope Beyond Misery: Lasting Lessons

1 Peter 1–5

In what ways did Peter's eternal hope dictate the way he handled his temporary suffering?

Peter's faith may seem extraordinary, but any ordinary believer can follow his example. Peter simply held fast to his hope in Jesus Christ and his trust in a few key timeless truths.



Application: Lasting Lessons

Peter's first letter is rich both theologically and practically, and Pastor Chuck shares five lasting lessons that emerge from this brief yet powerful work.

1. *When our faith is weak, joy strengthens us.*
2. *When our good is mistreated, endurance stabilizes us.*
3. *When our confidence is shaken, love supports us.*
4. *When our adversary attacks us, resistance shields us.*
5. *When our departure is forced, grace strengthens us.*

Which of these five lessons speaks most directly to your circumstances right now? How does this lesson simultaneously encourage and challenge you in your walk with Jesus Christ?



Hope Beyond Misery: Lasting Lessons

1 Peter 1–5

How have you seen yourself grow through this study of 1 Peter? What practical steps can you take as you move forward to remember Peter's lessons and to maintain this pattern of growth?

There is no foundation stronger than Jesus Christ. Peter held fast to the Savior until his dying breath, and his life is a testimony of the truth that *any* follower of Jesus Christ can remain faithful amid suffering. The seasons of suffering will come, but they will *never* shake Christ and His promises. Take heart in that truth today.



A FINAL PRAYER

As you conclude your study of 1 Peter, write your own prayer in the space below. Praise God for His faithfulness. Ask Him to remind you of your hope in Him. Remember that He's using that fiery trial you're enduring *right now* to strengthen your faith in Him.

ENDNOTES

1. This fictional testimony is based on the church tradition that Peter chose to be crucified upside down because he did not feel worthy to die in the same way that Jesus Christ did. Peter's words and the soldier's response are improvised and illustrative in purpose.
2. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself.](#)"

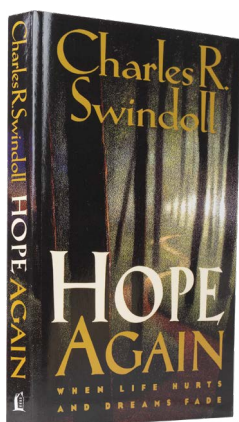


Hope Beyond Misery: Lasting Lessons

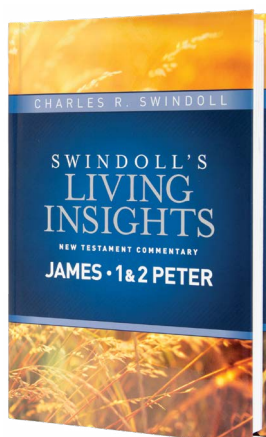
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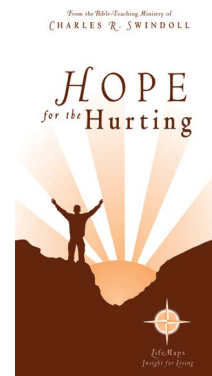
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For the 2023 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Brad Smith, writer, *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.



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