

1 PETER

FOLLOWING JESUS

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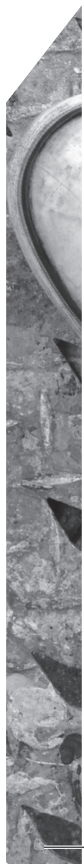
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10Publishing, a division of 10ofthose.com

Unit C, Tomlinson Road, Leyland, PR25 2DY, England

Email: info@10ofthose.com

Website: www.10ofthose.com





J. Marsden

**48 UNDATED DEVOTIONS
THROUGH THE BOOK OF 1 PETER**



How do you find living as a Christian at the moment? There is much that is wonderful about being a Christian, but there is much that is hard too.

Everyone experiences difficulties in life, but becoming a Christian can add a whole set of extra ones. At times we may wonder if we will be able to keep going at following Christ. Will it all be worth it?

The letter we are going to read was written by Peter, one of Jesus' first followers. Peter's own Christian life had had its problems and pressures – and failures too. Peter knew first-hand that all of us need God's grace and help to keep going in following Jesus.

Peter's readers were Christians living in the first-century Middle East. They were facing all kinds of difficulties as well. It wasn't just one thing that was troubling them; Peter says that they 'have had to suffer grief in *all kinds of trials*' (1:6, my italics). Some of these trials were happening to them just because they were Christians.

Have a look at these snapshots from different parts of Peter's letter. How many of these difficulties can you identify with?

- These Christians were being insulted because of the name of Christ (4:14).
- People were speaking maliciously against them (3:16).
- They were being falsely accused of doing wrong (2:12).

- People thought the way they lived was strange (4:4).

Some of these Christians also had close family members who did 'not believe the word', with all the heartache and tensions that can bring (3:1). Peter's readers faced opposition in the spiritual realm too. Their enemy, the devil, was prowling around 'like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour' (5:8).

And these Christians still had 'sinful desires' raging in their own hearts – waging war against their souls (see 2:11). Even their fellow Christians brought them grief at times. Why else would Peter need to urge his friends to 'love *each other* deeply, because love covers over *a multitude of sins*' (4:8, my italics)?

These believers were certainly experiencing *all kinds* of trials. Would they keep going as Christians? Peter writes to help them to do just that. Peter's words can help us too.

PRAY

Talk to God about your own trials and griefs, especially those that have come your way because you are a Christian. Ask God to help you keep going in following Christ.

Before we start reading Peter's letter from the beginning, we are going to look at one verse right at its end. Here Peter tells these stressed and suffering Christians what he hopes his letter will do for them. This verse tells us what this letter can do for us too. Peter writes:

With the help of Silas, whom I regard as a faithful brother, I have written to you briefly, encouraging you and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand fast in it (1 Pet. 5:12).

- **Peter says he has been doing two things in his letter. What are they?**

When we are finding things tough, we need someone to come alongside us and encourage us. Peter wants to spur these believers on to keep going. He has also been telling them why it is so important that they do.

'Testifying' sounds like something you might do in a law court under oath. It means declaring something is really true, whatever anyone else may say. Peter has been writing about Jesus and about following him. He wants to reassure his friends and convince them all over again. This gospel about Jesus really is the only way to experience God's grace.

- **What does Peter also call on his Christian friends to do?**

Embracing this gospel will bring suffering as well as joy now, but these believers mustn't be thrown off course. They *are* on the right track. There are always counterfeit 'gospels' around that offer an easier path through life. But these counterfeits will not bring us God's grace. As rebellious sinners deserving God's judgment, we need God's grace so much.

Peter's readers had already received 'the true grace of God'. The gospel about Jesus' death and resurrection had been preached to them. They had been born again spiritually as they came to believe in Jesus. We will read all about that in chapter 2.

So they have begun as Christians. These believers have taken their stand on the great truths of the gospel of Jesus. But they must also 'stand fast' in 'the true grace of God' as the pressures mount. It is the only way they, and we, will stay safe in eternity.

PRAY

Pray that this letter would encourage you and reassure you that the gospel is 'the true grace of God' so that you do 'stand fast in it'.

Who do you listen to? We are surrounded by people who want our attention: people in our families; people in politics; people in the media. How do you choose which voices you will pay attention to and trust?

Why should we listen to Peter, a man who lived so long ago and far away? The answer is in the very first few words of his letter: Peter is 'an apostle of Jesus Christ'.

An 'apostle' is a person who has been sent by another to speak and act for them. Peter had been given authority by the Lord Jesus and sent out to speak for him. So the words of this letter are what Jesus himself wants to say to his followers. We need to listen up!

- ***The way Peter describes his readers is also very significant. What is the first thing Peter says about these Christians (v. 1)?***

'Elect' is another word for chosen. In an election you choose the person you want. To be a Christian is to be one of God's chosen ones. That is a very great privilege.

- ***But how else does Peter describe these believers here?***

These believers are wanted by God. They often feel unwanted though by the unbelievers they live amongst. It is hard to feel at home amongst people who reject Jesus. As Christians we can often feel like outsiders. You probably know something of how that feels.

Peter's readers aren't even all together as one people. At the moment they are scattered all over the ancient near east. But these believers are exiles or strangers in this world *because* they belong somewhere else. They feel the pain of being a scattered minority now *because* one day God will gather all his people together into one community. That day is coming.

For now, though, to be a Christian is to be an exile, a stranger in the world. How will they, and we, cope with the stress that can bring? When we feel rejected by those around us, we need to hold on to the fact that God himself has chosen us. There is great strength and great reassurance in knowing that. Keep it in your mind today.

PRAY

Ask God to help you to remember that he has chosen you to belong to him, especially when you feel like an exile, a stranger in the world.