

The Testimony of Our Hope

GETTING STARTED

DISCUSS: When have you bought something based on a friend’s recommendation?

RECAP (PAGE 23): “If God loved me, He would not have treated me this way.” Charlotte Elliott often said this because poor health had rendered her disabled.

When Dr. César Malan, a Swiss minister, visited her family home in 1922, he spoke with Charlotte about her condition. The minister’s genuine concern for her, coupled with his own confident faith, led to a breakthrough. He reportedly said, “Give yourself to God just as you are now, with your fightings and fears, hates and loves, pride and shame.”

Charlotte turned to God and experienced new life in Christ that very day. As she grew in her walk with the Lord, she studied His Word and began to write hymns, the most famous of which detailed that most pivotal day in her life: “Just as I am without one plea, But that Thy blood was shed for me, And that Thou bidst me come to Thee, O Lamb of God, I come! I come!”²

Dr. Malan’s hope pointed Charlotte to the Living Hope, and our hope can point others to Christ, too. A life lived in Christ is a great recommendation to others to come to Him.

GUIDE: Direct attention to **The Point** on page 24. Invite group members to fill in the blanks.

THE POINT: Our HOPE in Christ points OTHERS to Him.

STUDY THE BIBLE

GIVE BIBLICAL CONTEXT: Peter began his letter by describing the priceless blessing his readers had received through their faith in Jesus (1 Peter 1:1-12). He called them to respond to these blessings by living pure and holy lives (vv. 13-25), citing as motivations God’s judgment and Jesus’ sacrifice. Peter then expanded on both topics—the believers’ new status and the importance of their conduct as they endured persecution for the sake of the gospel.

RECAP (PAGE 24): Disappointment. Humiliation. Shame. At some point, we’ve all felt these emotions because something or someone we depended on failed us. The good news is that God, in whom we put our faith through Jesus Christ, will never fail us. Penned by the apostle Peter, 1 Peter was written to Christians in Asia Minor who were facing persecution. Peter began this section of his letter by calling on his readers to continue to grow spiritually.

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud 1 Peter 2:4-6 on page 24.

GUIDE: Direct your group’s attention to the following heading on page 24: **When we hope in Christ, we are NEVER put to shame.**

RECAP (PAGE 24): The Jewish people called out to God as their rock and salvation (Psalm 18:2; 62:2), and now Jesus was identified as the chief cornerstone. Jesus is the foundation of the church, who provides its stability, security, and strength. The cornerstone was crucial to a building’s overall structure. It was the main foundation stone in ancient buildings and tied everything together as the place where walls would meet, or it served as the keystone in the center of an arch. There is stability because Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

Because the church’s foundation is rock solid, believers will never be disappointed or put to shame. We have no regret or remorse after making the decision to follow Christ. D. J. Kenyon wrote, “One who centers his life in Christ will never have reason to regret his choice.”³

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): Bring and display a standard surface level that’s used by carpenters to determine whether a surface is level. (A laser level would also work.) Demonstrate the use of a level by placing it on a flat surface, making sure group members can see the bubble centered in the glass. **Ask:** “What issues might occur if a house isn’t built on a level foundation?” Allow time for discussion. Affirm that similar issues arise when our lives aren’t built upon Christ, our cornerstone. Emphasize that our hope as Christ-followers is rooted in the rock-solid stability of Christ.

DISCUSS: Why is the image of “living stones” a good picture for those of us in the church? *[ALTERNATE: What assurances do you experience from the words of Peter in these verses?]*

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud 1 Peter 2:7-10 on page 24.

GUIDE: Direct your group’s attention to the following heading on page 25: **Others may reject Christ, but we STAND confidently because of who we are in Christ.**

RECAP (PAGE 25): Peter gave some pretty incredible descriptions of the people of God:

- ▶ **A Chosen Race.** God chose Israel not on the basis of their size or merit, but out of His great love (Deuteronomy 7:7-9). He also has chosen us (John 15:16; Ephesians 2:8-10).
- ▶ **A Royal Priesthood.** Those who are in Christ have been redeemed by the blood of Christ, who is both our faithful High Priest (Hebrews 2:17) and King of kings (Revelation 19:16).
- ▶ **A Holy Nation.** We are called to holiness because God is holy (1 Peter 1:16).
- ▶ **A People for His Possession.** We have a personal relationship with Christ. We are His, and no one can take us from Him (John 10:27-30; Romans 8:31-39).

DISCUSS: How do people stumble over Jesus today? *[ALTERNATE: What emotions do you experience when you read Peter’s description of the church in verses 9-10? Why?]*

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud 1 Peter 2:11-15 on page 25.

GUIDE: Direct your group’s attention to the following heading on page 25: **Our lives can lead others to GLORIFY God.**

RECAP (PAGE 25): God has linked His reputation in this world to our behavior. As Christians, we give a face to faith, a credible witness to a cynical world. Our lives of honor and integrity shouldn’t be a point of controversy or contention, and our reputations never should stand in the way of the gospel. We are different—Christians living in a non-Christian world—and we are responsible to live in such a way as to silence any accusations and cause others to stop and consider the goodness and glory of our God.

DISCUSS: What do these verses teach us about our responsibilities as Christ-followers? *[ALTERNATE: Why are our actions as Christ-followers so important to our witness?]*

DISCUSS: What opportunities do we have to express our hope to those who need to hear about it?

DO: Instruct group members to complete the activity, **My Living Hope**, on page 25, on their own. If time allows, invite volunteers to share their responses.

My Living Hope: In which of the following areas have you sensed an opportunity to point someone to Christ? Circle your response. Then, list one way you’ll allow God to use you this week.

<i>Family</i>	<i>My neighborhood</i>	<i>At work/In my job</i>
<i>Friendships</i>	<i>In my church</i>	<i>Other: _____</i>

LIVE IT OUT

SAY: “How will you live out your hope to a watching world?”

GUIDE: Direct group members to review the three bulleted statements under **Live It Out** on page 26. Call on volunteers to share (1) which of these statements is something they want to pursue further, or (2) ways this study will transform their prayer lives this week.

- ▶ **Be honorable.** Start your day by asking the Lord to make you mindful of ways you can honor Him as you go through your day, no matter how simple or insignificant you may think the task is. Small steps of obedience lead to a long path of godliness.
- ▶ **Be submissive.** Is there a person or agency of authority that you’ve not lovingly submitted yourself to as unto the Lord? Confess this to the Lord, and seek to make it right with that person as soon as possible.
- ▶ **Be outspoken.** Someone in your circle of influence needs to know of your hope in Christ. Think of a tangible good that you can do for someone who may be ignorant or critical toward the gospel. Show the love of Christ to them with no strings attached!

GUIDE: Invite each person to gather with two or three Christ-followers of the same gender this

week for a deeper discussion, using **Talk It Out** (page 26) to guide their discussion. Encourage group members to spend time each day in God’s Word with the devotions found in the **Daily Study** section (pages 27–30).

PRAY: Close your Bible study time with prayer.

DIG DEEPER

Use the commentary below as you prepare to lead the session.

[VERSE 4]: Like Jesus, believers are “living stones” (v. 5). Because of their faith, they are eternally alive through the power of the Holy Spirit and have become God’s temple, in which the Holy Spirit dwells (1 Corinthians 3:16). Peter called believers “a spiritual house” and said they are “being built to be a holy priesthood.” Most religions have priests or religious leaders of some kind. The uniqueness of Christianity is that every Christian is a priest. Each living stone that God adds to the church, not the building but the “spiritual house,” immediately becomes his or her own priest. Peter wrote that all Christians, every one of them a priest, are “to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” The spiritual sacrifices Christians are to offer include offering ourselves as “a living sacrifice” (Romans 12:1), committing ourselves completely to God.

[VERSE 6]: Peter resumed his focus on Jesus by quoting from Isaiah 28:16. In the original context the prophet was warning the people of Judah of their false sense of trust in foreign alliances. In the Isaiah passage, God referred to Himself as “a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation” for His people. The people should have looked to God for safety and security, not to foreign alliances. God assured His people that those who trusted in Him would be secure.

Peter pointed to Jesus as this cornerstone, as Paul did in Ephesians 2:20. Jesus is not merely a stone but “a chosen and honored cornerstone” (1 Peter 2:6). In a building the entire structure depends on the strength and position of the cornerstone; the other stones are placed beside and over it. The foundation for God’s spiritual house is the cornerstone of Jesus, God’s chosen Messiah.

[VERSES 7-9]: Peter contrasted the Christians who believe with those people who reject the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Just as God considers Jesus worthy of honor (vv. 4,6), He also places high honor on those who believe in Him. However, those who reject God’s offer of salvation through Jesus will themselves be rejected. Peter alluded to Psalm 118:22 in verse 4 when he stated that Jesus, “a living stone,” had been rejected. Now Peter referenced the entire verse to stress how the Jewish religious leaders had rejected Jesus and had Him crucified. However, God has given Jesus the highest honor, making Him “the cornerstone,” by raising Him from the dead and glorifying Him.

[VERSE 10]: Peter pointed out the vast difference between these believers in their present state and their lives before they put their faith in Jesus. Before Christ, they were lost in darkness, excluded from God’s people and without hope (Ephesians 2:11-12). But because of God’s love and mercy in Christ, as believers they were now “God’s people.” Before they came to Jesus they had not experienced God’s love and mercy, but now through Christ they had experienced both God’s love and mercy.

[VERSES 11-12]: Addressing his audience as “dear friends,” Peter urged his readers to “abstain from sinful desires.” The apostle John wrote that believers were not to love the world (in the sense of the world system that is opposed to God and is controlled by Satan and his allies) or the things in the world (1 John 2:15). These and all sinful desires “wage war against” the believer’s soul.

[VERSES 13-14]: One of the primary ways Christians can demonstrate good works to nonbelievers around them is by being good citizens (see Romans 13:1-7; Titus 3:1). Peter allowed no exceptions (“every human authority ... whether to the emperor ... or to governors”) in terms of picking or choosing which leaders to obey. While the emperor was “the supreme authority” in the Roman Empire, Peter’s audience would have been under the authority of the governors of the Roman provinces in which they lived (1 Peter 1:1). These governors were appointed by the Roman emperor and ruled in his name and with his authority.

However, both Jesus and Peter set limits on the believer’s obedience to human authorities. When the choice is between obeying God’s commands and a human authority’s commands, the believer is to obey God (Matthew 10:28; John 19:8-11; Acts 4:18-20).

[VERSE 15]: While some believers may have thought the best way to silence their opponents was through successful debate, Peter said that “God’s will” was that Christians do so through their good works. The word for “ignorance” suggests more a lack of spiritual understanding or non-belief than a mere lack of knowledge.

**GROUPS
MATTER.**

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