

# Creative Living Bible Study

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# SECRETS *of Unshakeable Faith*

*Studies from the Book of 1 Peter*

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## Before you begin . . .

Opposition to Christian faith and precepts is on the rise in societies around the world. Not only this, but we all face hardship and suffering in our lives that threaten to weaken or destroy our faith. How do we face persecution and suffering in a way that our faith in Christ stays strong and grows stronger? And how can we be the most effective witness for Christ in times of persecution or hardship?

These are questions the letter of 1 Peter answers best. The apostle is writing to beleaguered Christians who have fled deadly persecution in Jerusalem only to find the same and even worse in other Roman provinces. In addition, they endured suffering caused by displacement and refugee living. Peter's letter of encouragement and exhortation instructs believers of all times in how to think and act so as to be victorious in faith and a strong witness for Christ as we experience persecution and hardship.

In this study, we will look at five *secrets of unshakeable faith*. It is my prayer that the pages of these lessons will give you abounding hope and fresh insights into facing adversity with an assurance of God's unfailing love that draws others to Him.

Diana Schick  
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# LESSON 1

## INTRODUCTION

The first epistle of Peter was written by the apostle from Rome around A.D. 63, immediately before severe persecution began under the Roman Emperor Nero.<sup>1</sup> The letter was written to Christians in Asia Minor, especially Jewish believers, who were already suffering for their Christian faith. Peter writes to encourage these embattled believers, but his letter shows all believers how to stand firm in their faith amidst persecution as well as suffering of all kinds.

Perhaps nothing can shake our faith like seeing and experiencing suffering, whether from persecution or other hardships of life in a deeply fallen world. Peter was one of the closest to Jesus of the twelve disciples and later became an apostle and leader in the early church. Certainly he experienced both tremendous elation as well as deep anguish as he followed Christ. As a disciple, Peter had the amazing experience of traveling with Jesus. He saw the Lord heal the sick and give sight to the blind, walk on a stormy sea and actually stop a raging storm with a word. He watched Jesus raise the dead and supernaturally

feed thousands from a few loaves and fishes. Along with James and John, Peter witnessed the glory of Christ on the Mount of Transfiguration and heard God the Father declare, “This is my Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased. Listen to him!” (Matthew 17:5). He heard Christ’s profound teaching and watched Jesus live the perfect life—always loving God with all His heart, mind, soul and strength and always putting others before Himself.

Then the unimaginable happened, as the Lord had predicted. Peter watched helplessly as Jesus was arrested, given a mock trial and finally nailed to a cross to die a torturous death. It is hard to imagine Peter’s anguish, which was only made worse by the fact that he denied even knowing Jesus three times within earshot of the Lord as He awaited His trial and death.

But on the third day, as Jesus had promised, He rose from the dead, and Peter was among those to see and interact with Him over the 40 days before He ascended into heaven (Acts 1:1-2, 9). The apostle would never for a moment doubt Jesus was indeed the Son of God, the promised Christ and Lord of all. So much so that on Pentecost, just 50 days after Christ’s resurrection, Peter delivered a sermon in Jerusalem that led 3,000 Jews from all over the world to be baptized as believers (Acts 2:14-41). Many of these new Jewish believers were from provinces across the Roman Empire, and they took the gospel of Jesus Christ home with them. At the same time, the number of Jerusalem believers continued to grow. It was an amazing and joyful time for Peter and all those in the early church.

Sadly, it wasn’t long before persecution from non-believing Jews began, and guileless, godly men like Stephen and the apostle James were martyred. Many Jewish believers fled the city and became refugees in the provinces of Asia Minor. However, there they eventually met persecution from both unbelieving Jews and the Roman Empire, which ordered all to bow and worship Caesar as god. Peter’s letter was addressed to all believers, but it was especially written to encourage and instruct these suffering Jewish believers.

Shortly after the writing of his epistle, the severe persecution of Christians under Nero led to Peter’s own martyrdom around 67 A.D.<sup>1</sup> Yet, Peter had an unshakeable faith to the end—absolutely sure that the

gift of knowing Christ surpasses anything the world offers, and Jesus' promise of eternal life in His glorious presence assures all of us that the best is yet to come. Peter also emphasizes that Christ is our ultimate example of patience and faithful endurance in suffering. His life proves how God uses suffering to refine our character and bring the deepest blessings to our lives as His people.

Persecution and times of suffering can indeed challenge our faith. But in this letter, penned by Peter but inspired by the Holy Spirit, we will discover the secrets of unshakeable faith amidst any affliction.

## *OUR GLORIOUS SALVATION*

### **1 Peter 1:1-21**

Peter is writing to displaced believers, many of whom have fled persecution in Jerusalem only to experience it again on unfamiliar soil. They were weary from the difficulties and drawn toward hopelessness and abandoning their faith in Christ.

So how does Peter begin his letter of encouragement to these beleaguered Christians? Not with a pep talk, but instead by gently coming alongside them in their experience to turn their attention heavenward and to the believer's inheritance there. Peter opens his letter reminding believers that we are God's dearly loved children, citizens of His eternal kingdom and therefore strangers in this world. We are destined for the unimaginable joy of heaven, an inheritance "that can never perish, spoil or fade" (1:4).

Therefore, Peter says, we must remember we have been redeemed "with the precious blood of Christ...from the empty way of life handed down to us..." (1:18-19), and see suffering as a means to grow in faith as we keep our hope in God alone.

**Read 1 Peter 1:1-12.**

1. What phrases did Peter use to describe believers here (1:1-2)? (Notice how the Father, Son and Spirit are all involved.)

**Note:** *strangers* refers to all believers, temporarily living on earth until they go to their eternal home in heaven. *Sanctify* means to set apart for holiness.

**References:** Note 2, *chosen, foreknowledge*, Note 3, *redeemed...by the precious blood*, p. 17, and Note 5, *The Trinity*, p. 39.

2. What does God desire to give us, especially in the midst of persecution and difficulties (1:2c)? (Note: “c” refers to the very end of the verse.)

3. On what other eternal blessings does Peter encourage his readers to focus (1:3-5)?

**Note:** *hope* biblically is not wishful thinking but rather a certainty that God will fulfill His promises; a “know so,” not a “hope so.” Christ’s *resurrection* gives the believer certainty that he will be resurrected as Jesus was.

4. According to 1 Peter 1:6-7, how can trials and hardships benefit us deeply?

**Reference:** Note 4, *faith, of greater worth than gold*, p. 18.

5. What does God promise to reward (1:8-9)?

6. Old Testament prophets, like Isaiah, did not understand the prophecy God gave them about Christ's death and resurrection (1:10-11; cf. Isaiah 53:4-12). What did the prophets finally realize (1:12)?

**Read 1 Peter 1:13-25.**

7. What six things does Peter exhort his readers to do in the midst of the hardships of a society turned against their faith (1:13-17)?

**Note:** "reverent fear" does not mean terror, but rather wholesome reverence and respect for God.

8. a. What do these verses reveal about God's love for us (1:18-19)?

**Note:** *redemption* means "to buy out" or "to free by the payment of a price (ransom)" and refers to a slave being purchased out of slavery. See also Note 3, *redeemed...with the precious blood of Christ*, p. 17.

b. How did God prove Jesus Christ was from God and the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies about a Redeemer (1:21)?

## *BUILDING ON THE BASICS*

### FOCUSING ON ETERNAL BLESSINGS

At the top of the list of Peter's secrets to unshakeable faith in the midst of persecution or suffering is a focus on the promise of heaven. For God's children, this earth is not our home, and the best is yet to come. Peter declares that this inheritance, purchased "by the precious blood of Christ" is kept for us by God Himself and cannot be touched by anything that happens to us in this life.

It is this eternal perspective that has sustained the unshakeable faith of not only the martyrs, but of all God's people through the centuries. Almost all last stanzas of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century hymns declare the hope of heaven.

So, the first secret of keeping the faith in the midst of life's hardships is to focus on God's promise of a living hope...an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade kept in heaven for you. In this lesson, we will look at what the Bible says about this secret of unshakeable faith.

1. What are reasons suffering can cause our faith to falter?

2. a. What does the Bible promise about God's unchanging goodness, faithfulness and love amidst suffering?

Lamentations 3:33

Romans 8:31b-32, 34

Romans 8:37-39

b. The greatest demonstration of God's love is in the price He paid to give us eternal life—the life, death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ (John 3:16; Romans 5:8; John 1:12). What does God want those who have placed their faith in His Son to *know*?

1 John 5:11-13

3. A focus on the hope of heaven can give us great strength as we endure the temporal sufferings of this life.

a. What do these passages reveal about heaven?

Isaiah 33:17

1 Corinthians 2:9

b. The Bible tells us that God will make a new heaven and earth (2 Peter 3:10, 13; Hebrews 1:10, 12; Revelation 21:1), and the whole created world will be redeemed and set free from decay and struggle. How do the following verses describe this redemption?

Romans 8:19-21

Isaiah 11:6-9

4. a. What does Jesus promise regarding everlasting life?

John 11:25-26

John 14:1-3

b. What does Philippians 3:20-21 add to this promise?

5. Jesus' resurrection body gives us a picture of what our eternal bodies might be like—strong, perfect bodies not subject to decay or sickness but made to live eternally. What do you observe about His resurrection body in the following passages?

Luke 24:15-17 (on road to Emmaus)

Luke 24:36-43, 51 (with disciples)

6. What does the following passage promise about heaven?

Revelation 21:3-4

7. Review *Reflections on heaven*, p. 15. What do you see as the overall blessings in relationship to ourselves, others and God?

8. What are we told to continually meditate upon to keep our faith strong in times of affliction?

1 Peter 1:3-4; 1:13b

**Note:** The biblical word for *hope* means certainty, not just wishful optimism.

2 Corinthians 4:16-17

2 Corinthians 4:18

## S U M M A R Y

9. What does 1 Peter 1 emphasize about God's unchanging love and commitment to His children, even though we may experience persecution or suffering in this world?

10. What are ways to respond to such love? (Review 1 Peter 1:13-21.)

11. How would you describe heaven to someone who asked? What characteristics of heaven stand out to you from this lesson?

12. Why is the certainty of heaven a secret of unshakeable faith amidst the ups and downs of your life?

### ***A Final Note***

Are you certain that you will go to heaven? God wants each believer to *know* he/she has eternal life (1 John 5:13).

The New Testament explains that a personal relationship with God as a loving heavenly Father and the promise of eternal life comes through faith in His Son, Jesus Christ (John 1:12; Galatians 3:26). In Revelation 3:20, Jesus states His desire to come into our lives: "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me." If your desire is to place your faith in Jesus by receiving Him into your life, the following prayer can help you express this desire to Him:

*Lord Jesus, I want to know you personally. Thank you for dying on the cross for my sins. I open the door of my life and receive you as my Savior and Lord. Thank you for forgiving me of my sins and giving me eternal life. Take control of my life. Make me the kind of person you want me to be. Amen.*

**References:** Romans 3:23-26; 6:23; Colossians 2:13-14.

**If you prayed this prayer to express your faith, Jesus promises:**

*"...I will come in..." Revelations 3:20*

*"Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." Hebrews 13:5b*

*"And this is the testimony; God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life." 1 John 5:11-13*

## ***Reflections on Heaven***

Phillip Keller, *A Layman Looks at the Lord's Prayer*, pp. 33-42.

### ***Fourteen things we will be freed of in heaven:***

1. Freedom from assaults of Satan—subtle insinuations and dark deceptions, temptations and deceitful tactics. No more doubt or temptation.
2. Freedom from the strain of separation from loved ones. We will have quiet contentment, no more restless spirits; at home with God.
3. Free from tears of anguish, despair, frustration, no more painful anguishing moments.
4. No more death because of what Christ accomplished on the cross—His death was the doorway to His home. Free from foreboding thoughts about when and how we will die.
5. Freedom from regrets and remorse over errors, wrong attitudes, unkind words, selfish motives, wrong actions. Fully forgiven, free from folly, sorrow, regret over misdeeds. Instead, deep delight.
6. No more search for truth, having come home to find our Father there waiting to welcome us.
7. Deliverance from pain—physically and emotionally and spiritually. No more watching others endure agony.
8. When God's new heaven, new earth and New Jerusalem are unveiled, there will be no church buildings or doctrinal divisions, only warmth and love and understanding produced among God's people by God's presence.
9. No sun or moon—time will be no more. We will not be limited by the time/space conditions of life on earth. No more meeting deadlines, schedules, organizing our lives around the clock and calendar. No more sense that time is running out on our lives. No urgency—instead peace, quiet, unhurried life free from the fret and strain of earth's on-rushing pace.
10. No night there. Our new spiritual bodies will not need sleep and restoration as our physical bodies have.
11. No more misunderstanding between ourselves and others or God. Total and complete enlightenment—we will know as we are known—no more fears, doubts, misjudgments, animosities, despair from misunderstanding.

12. Nothing there to contaminate our thoughts or moral life. Nothing there will draw us away from devotion to God. No more dominated by struggle to earn a living—deliverance from the strain and stresses of our unpredictable earthly sojourn. The world can't pull us down.

13. No more tension of looking good for others; no more masks or false fronts to cover flaws. No more deceit, lying, dishonesty, duplicity. We will just be ourselves before God and others.

14. Free from sin and the pull of evil, freely walking in paths of righteousness. No longer burdened with sin—exult with lighthearted abandon.

***Seven Benefits of heaven God's presence will make possible.***

1. Satisfaction and tranquility, contentment and repose, complete satisfaction continually.

2. Abundant quality of life—absolute love, honesty, good will and righteousness.

3. Absolute justice and fairness.

4. Service to God. All our work will have significance and deep meaning for it will be divine—a series of delightful enterprises in which men and God are active co-workers.

5. Exquisite fellowship—see our heavenly Father face to face. Tremendous joy in knowing Him will bind everyone together in a loving family.

6. Complete revelation of God and every aspect of life—all bright and right. No fear or foreboding.

7. Victory, rest at last as we reign forever and ever with Christ.

## **LESSON 1 NOTES**

**1** *Authorship, date and place of 1 Peter writing.* Tradition attributes authorship, as the letter states, to the Apostle Peter with the help of Silas (1:1; 5:12). It was probably written around 63-64 A.D. toward the end of Peter's life, just before Peter was arrested and tried during the outbreak of persecution by Nero, who died in 68 A.D. Some think 2 Peter was written as Peter awaited his execution (cf. 2 Peter: 1:13-21).

1 Peter 5:13 states that the letter was written in Babylon, but it is not certain whether this was a symbolic name for Rome or Jerusalem or one of several real locations by that name.

2 *chosen* (1:2), *predestined* (1:1), *foreknowledge* (1:1) *elect, election, called* (1 Peter 1:2; cf. Romans 8:29). “In the Old Testament God chose numerous people to serve Him: Abraham, Moses, Aaron, the Levites, Saul, David and the people of Israel in general. This continued in the New Testament with the election of Jesus to bear our cross and to be nailed with our punishment, and the election of the disciples, Paul, the church and individual Christians to a great task—the task of proclaiming the message of reconciliation. The *elect* are chosen not only for a task, but also to be saved. Some emphasize that God did His choosing from all eternity solely out of His love, while others see election as God knowing beforehand who would believe in Christ. God has chosen us in order to demonstrate His grace to us as sinners, to make us a part of a whole new creation brought about by Christ's death and resurrection, and to enable us to praise Him with good works as we witness to others of His love. Many are troubled by this teaching, because only some are chosen while others are passed by, but God's intention is to strengthen our faith and give us assurance, for we know that our salvation is based on God's power, not on human works. In the end, we must remain convinced that God works out His plan in perfect justice and love.” *The NIV Topical Study Bible*, p. 775.

The Scriptures promise that everyone who seeks God will find Him (Jeremiah 29:13-14a; John 6:37; Romans 10:23; 2 Peter 3:9b; Revelation 22:17). Every person may not only accept Christ as Savior but is urged and invited to do so based on Jesus' work on the cross (Hebrews 2:9; John 3:16). After the individual exercises personal faith in Christ and enters the portals of salvation, he discovers emblazoned on the inside of the doorway “Chosen in Him before the foundation of the world” (Ephesians 1:4). Foreordination and human free will are humanly irreconcilable, but have their solution in God. *Unger's Bible Handbook*, p. 672.

3 *redeemed...with the precious blood of Christ* (1:18-19). “How does Jesus' blood purify us from every sin? In Old Testament times, believers symbolically transferred their sins to an animal which they then sacrificed. The animal died in their place to pay for their sin and to allow them to continue living in God's favor. God graciously forgave them because of their faith in Him, and anticipated the day

when Christ would completely remove sin. Real cleansing from sin came with Jesus, the ‘Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world’ (John 1:29). Sin by its very nature brings death—that is a fact as certain as the law of gravity. Jesus did not die for His own sins; He had none. Instead by a transaction that we may never fully understand, He died for the sins of the world. When we commit our lives to Christ and thus identify ourselves with Him, His death becomes ours. He has paid the penalty for our sins, and His blood has purified us. Just as Christ rose from the grave, we rise to a new life of fellowship with Him (Romans 6:4).” *The Life Application Bible, NIV*, p. 2275. See also, *Redemption*, p. 27.

**4 faith—of greater worth than gold** (1:7). “Peter mentions trials and suffering several times in this letter: 1:6, 7; 3:13-17; 4:12-19; 5:9. All believers face such trials when they let their light shine into the darkness. We must accept trials as part of the refining process that burns away impurities and prepares us to meet Christ. As gold is heated, impurities float to the top, and can be skimmed off. Likewise, our trials, struggles, and persecution refine and strengthen our faith, making us useful to God. Instead of asking, “Why me?” we should respond to suffering with a new set of responses: (1) *Confidence* that God knows, plans, and directs our lives for the good. It’s hard to calculate sometimes, but God always provides His love and strength for us. God leads us toward a better future. (2) *Perseverance* when facing grief, anger, sorrow, and pain. We express our grief, but we don’t give in to bitterness and despair. (3) *Courage* because with Jesus as Brother and Savior, we need not be afraid. He who suffered for us will not abandon us. Jesus carries us through everything.” *The NIV Life Application Bible*, p. 2098.

**5 you have been born again** (1:23). This refers to becoming a child in God’s eternal kingdom when we personally receive Christ (John 1:12-13) through the direct action of the Holy Spirit (John 3:5-8; Titus 3:5) and by the “living and enduring words of God” (1 Peter 1:23). The Spirit uses God’s word to present the gospel to the sinner and calls on him to repent and believe in Christ (1 Peter 3:18; 2 Corinthians 5:21). See also *A Final Note*, p. 14.