

# 04

## SESSION FOUR

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# The Gospel Calls for a New Identity

### SESSION SUMMARY

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We are each part of the body of Christ. As those who are chosen by God and receivers of great mercy, believers have been given a new identity and all we do flows out of this new identity. We've also been given a new purpose and calling to be set apart for the working and glory of God, with Christ as our foundation and example.

### SCRIPTURE

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1 Peter 2:1-17

# THE POINT

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**The church's identity as God's people causes them to live differently than the world.**

## INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

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### Option 1

No matter what highway or interstate you travel throughout the US, you will eventually come across some sort of sign indicating a marker of a major historical event in that state's history. These historical markers and monuments can range anywhere from colonial America to historic state capitals to the national parks that have been preserved for personal enjoyment. It's one thing to hear about historic sites, but it's quite another to see and experience them. Each monument declares the honor and significance of the people, event, and/or treasure each location holds. The areas of preservation help us to see the beauty of the land untouched by human development.

- **What state or national parks have you been to and what impressed you most at each one?**

As Christians, our lives are similar to these monuments and areas of preservation. Unlike the lifeless physical stones which fill our national parks, we are living, breathing statues for the glory of our Savior. We exist to declare to those around us the honor and significance of our God.

Just as people pour out much effort and care to maintain our national parks, we must also intentionally live out the purpose for which we've been called. God has a great purpose for our each of our lives. We've not only been saved *from* our sin, we've been saved *to* live out a mission. Standing firm in the foundation of righteousness Christ provided for us and remembering our new identity and true home, we get to live out this mission. We get to be set apart for the work of the gospel and the glory of God.

### Option 2

While exercise and eating right are key to staying healthy, professional football players take their workouts to another level. They must train in speed, agility, strength, and power.<sup>1</sup> It's not even unusual for NFL (National Football League) players to be at their team's facility from 6 am until 7 pm. Not only do they have these intense workouts, but they also spend hours watching film, participating in team meetings, and attending community or charity events.<sup>2</sup> These athletes live their lives differently—with strict diets, workouts, and team requirements—because of their identity as football players.

- **Did any of this information surprise you? Why or why not?**

Because of our identity as Christ-followers, believers should also look different from the world, especially in the way we train for our future. We should constantly be training in righteousness through the reading of God's Word, in order to do His work (2 Tim. 3:16). We look different from the world because we live out of our identity as God's people.

- **What are some habits you need to break or create to look different to the rest of the world?**

# HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

## THE POINT

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**The church's identity as God's people causes them to live differently than the world.**

## CHARACTERS

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- **Peter:** one of the original twelve disciples; became an apostle and one of the key leaders of the first-century church

## PLOT

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What is the church? Is it merely a place where Christians gather together a couple of times of week? Or is it something more than a location? According to the apostle Peter, the church is indeed far more than a physical building. By use of metaphors and analogies, the apostle Peter helps us see the beauty and complexity of what God has designed in the creation of the church.

## TIMELINE

**A NEW IDENTITY**  
*Peter reminds God's people of their identity in Christ.*

*\*Bonus Session*  
**THE RESURRECTION IS ESSENTIAL**  
*Christianity stands or falls with the resurrection.*

**LOVE IN ACTION**  
*Love for God and others is the fruit of Christian living.*

## THE CHURCH AS LIVING STONES

God has provided a solid foundation for us to experience His goodness for eternity. Through Christ's obedient life, sinless sacrifice, and powerful resurrection, by faith we can stand firm on the foundation so abundantly provided us. The Book of 1 Peter is filled with several foundational truths. One of the truths Peter presented is this: we are on this earth to be stones of grateful testimony who declare the salvation of our glorious Lord to all who will hear.

**<sup>1</sup> So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander. <sup>2</sup> Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation—<sup>3</sup> if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good. <sup>4</sup> As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, <sup>5</sup> you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. <sup>6</sup> For it stands in Scripture: "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame." <sup>7</sup> So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone," <sup>8</sup> and "A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense." They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do. (1 Pet. 2:1-8)**

The first thing Peter said was for us to aggressively and urgently fight our sinful flesh. Yet all too often we find ourselves complacent, even comfortable, with our sinful patterns. Instead of waking up to the shock and terror of sin's presence, we cozy up to it and allow it to take over. Anger, selfishness, pride, and the list goes on.

Though we have been given right-standing with God through Jesus' sacrifice, we still have much work to do as we wait on the completion of God's work in us. We all have sin that clings closely to us, and Scripture continually commands us to take it down (Heb. 12:1). We have a race to run. A battle to fight. A lifetime of learning to live out the internal realities Christ provided us.

- **How can we better see the battle over sin as a moment-by-moment, urgent war rather than an occasional activity?** (*p. 28, PSG*)

Next, notice the main command Peter issued in the first two verses and the metaphor Peter used to make his point. Peter encouraged the church to desire the Word in order to grow into Christian maturity. The expectation of a true Christ follower is steady maturity, which comes primarily through a healthy diet of the Bible. And a desire for the Bible stems from a deep need to be closer to God,

because God's Word is the primary way we can learn more about Him. If we've truly tasted and experienced God's goodness, we will naturally want more and more of Him.

Finally, did you notice what Peter proclaimed is true of every believer? We are living stones; chosen and honored by God. We are a spiritual house for the presence of God who is building each of us into a holy priesthood. All of this is through the bedrock of Christ—the Living Stone—through whom our sinful, spiritually dead hearts of stone were removed and replaced with the gift of living hearts. And those of us who have placed our trust in Christ alone will not be put to shame—He will do what He promises. We have a sure hope.

## THE CHURCH AS A CHOSEN PEOPLE

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Peter continued his use of metaphors in the following verses:

**<sup>9</sup> But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. <sup>10</sup> Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. (1 Pet. 2:9-10)**

Peter described us in four ways. First, we are a chosen race, or nation, a description linked to God forming a new nation through Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3). The children of Israel were a people of common descent from Abraham, who had been chosen by God and set apart for His purposes. In the same way, the church is a people of common descent from Jesus Christ who has given us new life and made us new creatures (2 Cor. 5:17), and we have also been set apart for a purpose. Being a chosen race also affirms that our primary identity rests in who we are in Christ, not our ethnicity, nationality, or culture. Jesus' intention is that we be a people completely unified in Him (John 17:20-23). There is beauty when God's people who are full of diversity are truly one in Christ.

Peter drew from Exodus 19:6 for the next two descriptions of the church—we are a royal priesthood and a holy nation. Being a royal priesthood reminds us of our function to be intercessors to the unbelieving world around us. God formed a nation through Abraham not so they would be the sole recipients of His blessings, but so that they would be the manner through which His blessings might be shared with the world. This is at the core of being a priest—one who intercedes on the behalf of others and brings them to God.

As a holy nation, we are a people set apart from the world, but not disengaged from it. We are not to be holy through our lack of presence in the world, but through our different way of living in the world. As new creatures who are guided by the Holy Spirit, our speech and conduct should be remarkably different from others around us.

Peter's final description—a people for his possession—reminds us of whom we belong to, the price that was paid to purchase us, and the future hope we have in Christ. Our possession came at a great cost—Jesus' suffering and death—but that purchase price also has future implications. Just as Christ rose from the dead, we too have been promised future resurrection (1 Cor. 15:20; Rev. 1:5). We belong to God. When we look back on how we became His, we are filled with gratitude. When we look forward to what awaits us, we are filled with hope.

## THE CHURCH AS A HEAVENLY PEOPLE

We've talked a lot about the foundational truths about who we are because of the work of Christ, and this passage adds one more key element to the conversation. Along with our new identity, we are given a new citizenship. This world is no longer our home. Peter went on to address how we should live in light of our new identity:

**<sup>11</sup> Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. <sup>12</sup> Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation. <sup>13</sup> Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, <sup>14</sup> or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. <sup>15</sup> For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. <sup>16</sup> Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. <sup>17</sup> Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor. (1 Pet. 2:11-17)**

One key to living out our new identity and purpose is to fully understand our new citizenship. We cannot live out the call to be holy with one foot in the conduct of the world and another in the lifestyle of Christianity. It is a false reality, because they are different from one another.

Each of the four preceding descriptions of the church—a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, and a people for God's possession—remind us that we are fundamentally different from the world. We are, as Peter puts it, strangers and exiles. This is our new identity in Christ and our changed behavior should flow from this identity. Who we are should always be the root of our behavior.

The first way we live as strangers in the world is by avoiding sinful desires. The idea here is that we should live in an unexpected way. In other words, we do not give in to the sinful patterns of the culture around us. The visible nature of this counter-cultural lifestyle is critical. We are to live honorably so that when the world attempts to lie about us and say we are evildoers, our faithful lifestyles refute every accusation. The world will have no choice but to admit that the slanderous charges cannot be supported; instead our good works will draw them toward God.

## TIMELINE

### LETTERS TO YOUNG PASTORS

*Paul instructs Timothy and Titus.*

### CO-HEIRS WITH CHRIST

*Benefits of being adopted through Christ*

### FELLOWSHIP WITH BELIEVERS

*Believers love one another as God has loved us.*

The second way we live differently is through our submission to authority. We are to willfully and respectfully place ourselves under the authority God has placed over us and in doing so, once again we will silence any foolish accusation made against through our good citizenship.

The third way we live as strangers and exiles is through our honor for everyone, our love for our fellow believers, and our fear of God. Peter seems to present these in a crescendo of importance. It is important that we honor everyone but even more important that we love the church, and ultimately most important that we fear God. In order to avoid confusion about our submission to governmental authority and our submission to God, Peter stepped back down and instructed us to honor leaders in government. When God's Word and our nation's laws collide, the gospel wins out (Acts 4:13-22).

- **Which of the three ways Peter taught us to live is most challenging for you?** (p. 30, PSG)

## 99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

### People of God (p. 29, PSG)

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*Scripture describes the church as the people of God (2 Cor. 6:16). The church is created by God through the atoning death of Christ and is made up of both Jews and Gentiles. The term church is used in two senses. Church refers to individual local churches composed of people who have united together under the lordship of Christ and the universal church composed of all believers in Christ in all times. As the people of God, the church seeks to live under God's ruling care while He protects and cares for us.*

## CHRIST CONNECTION

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The early Christians faced persecution and experienced suffering for their faith in Christ. Peter reminded them of their identity as God's people—formed by Christ and sent out on His mission. United to Christ—the One who suffered for us on the cross—Christians can expect God to use suffering to make us into the image of His Son.

# YOUR STORY

10-15 MINUTES

## GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **How would you describe your desire for God and His Word? How might focusing on God's goodness increase your affections for His Word?** *If we are truly convinced God is not only good, but He also loves us, cares for us, and desires our very best, then we will be more likely to seek after Him in His Word.*
- **How do you best draw near to God when you are alone? With others?** *Answers will vary.*
- **Which of Peter's descriptions of a Christian is most challenging for you to grasp? Why? Which connects with you most deeply? Why?** *Answers will vary.*
- **In what ways can we live differently in the world without giving an appearance of superiority?** *One way is by not withdrawing from the world completely. In other words, we can be different from our surrounding culture and the world in general without retreating from it. If our response was only to retreat, then others could interpret that as an act of superiority. However, if we live differently while also engaging culture with the love and message of Christ, then it is unlikely we will be charged with superiority.*

### HIS STORY

*God's Story of Redemption, through His Son, Jesus Christ.*

### YOUR STORY

*Where your story meets His.*

# YOUR MISSION

10-15 MINUTES



## HEAD

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It is important to notice that each of Peter's descriptions of our identity is plural. We can often focus on our personal relationship with Christ—and there is nothing wrong with that—but there is a corporate aspect to our salvation as well that we can't miss. Both matter. We are saved as individuals, but we are not saved to live as individuals.

- **Why do you think God designed it that we should be stronger together rather than apart?** *Like a body that has many parts and different functions, God has designed His church to rely on one another so that no one person can brag and for us to grow in humility as we encourage one another to good works.*
- **What are some examples of when you have been strengthened in your faith as a result of being surrounded by God's people?** *Answers will vary.*



## HEART

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In the "hall of faith" given to us in Hebrews 11, the author commended many people as those who lived "by faith." By faith, Enoch. By faith, Sarah. By faith, Abraham. These faith-filled souls recognized that their true home was in heaven. Their real citizenship was in heaven. Their only allegiance was to King Jesus—and it is from this identity they obeyed. They understood that the way we live matters, but not for the status we'll receive on this earth. Our holiness sets us apart from this watching world, not so we can puff ourselves up, but so we can point to our holy God.

- **How might greater effort focusing on eternity change our attitudes and actions each day?** *Focusing on eternity will mean we aren't merely living for the moment. Instead, it reminds us that our lives are a part of something much bigger than ourselves.*
- **What difference will it make in our attitudes and actions if we love our place in the world more than we love our citizenship in God's kingdom?** *If our ultimate allegiance is to the world and what the world has to offer, then our actions will surely follow.*



## HANDS

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The truths that we are chosen, adopted into royalty, and set apart by God are crucial for us to internalize, believe, and live out. But these truths were not meant to merely give us a healthy self-esteem. The end-goal of our rescue is for His name to be honored. God's rescue plan, Christ's provision on the cross, and the continual work of the Spirit within us ought to point to His glory. We are His possession for this: to proclaim His praises. Just as the Bible echoes the melody of our Savior's glory, so should the actions and attitudes of our days sing His praises.

- **How does reflecting on your identity in Christ motivate and fuel you to proclaim Him to those around you?** *Answers will vary.*
- **What are some ways you can glorify God in your actions and words to those around you this week?** *Answers will vary.*

## ► ADDITIONAL INFO

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### LEADER PACK

For this session, refer students to pack item #6, which contains an informational poster on the Book of 1 Peter.

### SOURCES

1. Joe DeFranco, "The Football Body Workout," *Men's Fitness*, September 8 2016, <http://www.mensfitness.com/sports/football/football-body-workout>.
2. Jack Bechta, "5 surprising things about NFL players," *National Football Post*, October 29, 2014, <http://www.nationalfootballpost.com/5-surprising-things-about-nfl-players-9129/>.

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to [lifeway.com/TGPSPR18Letters](http://lifeway.com/TGPSPR18Letters))**
- **Circular Timeline Poster**
- **App (for both leader and student)**



Additional suggestions for specific groups are available at  
**[GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources](http://GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources)**

And for **free online training** on how to lead a group visit  
**[MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject](http://MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject)**