

Declaring His Excellencies

*CELL GROUP JOURNAL
MARCH 6 – APRIL 9, 2023*

*BY
DANIEL BARTA*



HOW TO USE THE STUDY

EACH WEEK CONTAINS A SET OF DEVOTIONS MEANT TO BE DONE INDIVIDUALLY ON DIFFERENT DAYS THROUGHOUT THE WEEK. WE ENCOURAGE THOSE WHO COMPLETE THE WEEKLY STUDY TO GATHER WITH OTHERS TO SHARE WHAT THEY HAVE SEEN ABOUT GOD AND THEMSELVES.

AT CHRIST FELLOWSHIP NORTHWEST WE CALL THE GATHERINGS CELL GROUPS (CG).

WEEKLY STEPS

For each devotion follow these steps...

Step One | Read the text. The text is given in the top right-hand corner of the first page of each devotion.

Step Two | Read the devotion. The devotion was written to help you grasp the main point of the text.

Step Three | Answer the “Stop & Think” questions. These questions are crucial for life transformation. Take a minute to reflect. This part is crucial.

Step Four | Respond to God through prayer by “Praise & Thanks,” “Confession,” and “Requests.” God’s Word initiates our response. Use your answers to the “Stop & Think” questions to help you pray. Write out your prayer or use bullet points.

Step Five | Fill out the “CG Conversation” section and discuss with someone else who is also going through the study.

TIPS FROM THE AUTHOR

1) Complete the devotions on different days.

2) Write your answers to the questions and responses in prayer, either in the book or in your own journal.

3) Read one of the following books as we study the church’s identity and purpose as those created to declare his excellencies.

Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God
by J. I. Packer

The Pleasures of God
by John Piper

God’s Love Compels Us
by D. A. Carson

TABLE OF CONTENTS

WEEK ONE | GOD'S IDENTITY, PURPOSE, AND WORK

- Devotion #1 | Who is God?
- Devotion #2 | What is God's End?
- Devotion #3 | What is God Doing?
- CG Conversation

WEEK TWO | WE ARE GOD'S PEOPLE

- Devotion #1 | We Are Chosen
- Devotion #2 | We Are Living Stones
- Devotion #3 | We are Sojourners and Exiles
- CG Conversation

WEEK THREE | WE EXIST TO DECLARE HIS EXCELLENCIES

- Devotion #1 | To Make God Known
- Devotion #2 | To Glorify God
- Devotion #3 | To Declare
- CG Conversation

WEEK FOUR | WE DECLARE HIS EXCELLENCIES BY DOING GOOD DEEDS

- Devotion #1 | By Preaching the Word
- Devotion #2 | By Delighting in Worship
- Devotion #3 | By Enduring in Suffering
- CG Conversation

WHO IS
GOD

John Calvin once wrote, "[Man] can never know who he is unless he has first looked upon God's face and then descends from contemplating Him to scrutinizing himself."¹

To know our identity, purpose, and proper conduct, we must focus our attention on God with the aim of knowing who he is, what he seeks to accomplish, and what he is doing to accomplish it.

To learn who we are, why we exist, and what we should do, we turn to Isaiah 43.

Read Isaiah 43:1-15

Who does Isaiah (the prophet and writer) identify as the one speaking? (v. 1)

You may have noticed that this name for God is spelled with all capital letters, LORD. The particular spelling tells us that we have come across God's self-revealed name, YAHWEH.

To understand the significance and meaning of God's name, we can look at how God further identifies Himself.

What four works did the LORD perform toward Jacob? (v. 1 – Note: Jacob and Israel are interchangeable names that refer to the same person and nation.)

ISAIAH 43:1-15

"I, I am the LORD, and besides me there is no savior."

ISAIAH 43:11

The LORD created and formed; He redeemed and He called. These actions sum up the identity of YAHWEH, the LORD. He exists as the Creator, the source of all things. He alone stands as the Creator; everything else exists as creation. In addition to being Creator, He redeems and calls. Isaiah attributes these actions to the LORD by calling Him Savior.

"For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior."

ISAIAH 43:3

"I, I am the LORD, and besides me there is no savior."

ISAIAH 43:11

What assurances does the LORD give to Jacob, the people of Israel? (v. 2)

Nothing will bring Israel to ruin for the LORD "will be with [them]." This stands as an amazing promise. In every situation the Israelites found themselves accompanied by the all-powerful, sovereign, Creator and ruler of the universe. If they went through flames of trial, the LORD walked with them. If they needed to cross rivers with swift currents, the LORD went with them. He, who possesses all power and might, entered with them into every challenge, every difficult season, and every dark night.

His "with them" refers not only to His mere presence, but also to His being pro-Israel. He stood on their side. He worked for their good. He would not allow flames to consume them, nor the dangerous rushing waters to sweep them away to death. He would act on their behalf to preserve and protect them for He, the Creator, was also their Savior.

GOD IS...

LORD AND SAVIOR

The combination of Creator and Savior provides an amazing foundation on which Jacob could stand with great confidence. As Creator, the LORD possesses the absolute power and authority to do all that pleases Him, and it pleased Him to save Israel.

What does the LORD say about the possibility of other saviors? (v. 11)

What three actions did the LORD perform? (v. 12)

What did the LORD claim about His work?

Apart from the LORD, no Savior exists, and what makes the LORD uniquely able to save is his sovereign power to act. His ability to act with full success can be seen in this fact: He declared He would save, then He saved, and He published the work of His salvation for the world!

Who is like the LORD? Who can declare the end of all things from the beginning? Only YAHWEH possesses the freedom to say what will happen before it happens. Only the LORD possesses the capacity to make plans and then bring every detail of His plan into reality. He alone can declare what He will do and then actually do it (Isaiah 46:9-11).

The LORD possesses authoritative power over all things in heaven and earth. He turns the hearts and hands of men whichever way He pleases. He commands

all of creation. The winds, the stars, the birds, the giant whales, the worms, the flowers, and the rains all obey Him. Kings operate as His servants. He creates light and darkness; He brings about well-being and calamity. To Him, Satan and his demons report; they have no freedom apart from the granted permission issued from YAHWEH's throne.

The greatness of the LORD's power and might alone is sufficient cause for the strongest among men to collapse in fearful trembling. If the LORD only revealed Himself as the most powerful being, men would only have reason for fear and insecurity before Him. If the Almighty proved self-serving, unloving, and cruel, the reality of His sovereign power would be impressive but also terrifying.

Thankfully, alongside His sovereign might stands His love and goodness. Unlike so many mighty men who wield their power to oppress and control for their own selfish ends, YAHWEH wields His power to save the enslaved, to rescue the oppressed, and to free the captured. He is the Creator and Savior.

No clearer revelation of God as sovereign LORD and loving Savior has been made than that coming to us through the life, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. At the cross, He saved His people by making a sacrifice for their sins, and in His resurrection, He proved His authority over sin, Satan, kingdoms, and even death. Jesus, our LORD and Savior, has used His power to rescue sinners and save the damned. This is who God is.

DO NOT TRUST IN IDOLS

God revealed Himself as LORD and Savior so that He might persuade his people away from idolatry and into trust of Him.

"Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other.

ISAIAH 45:22

When put into proper perspective, idolatry appears as it truly is - foolish. Why do we turn in faith to trust powerless gods crafted by our own hands rather than trust in the LORD by whose hand we were crafted? Why do we prefer to trust our own creation over our Creator? The God of the universe who possesses all power and authority calls to us, "Turn to me and be saved." Let us hear the call of the LORD and set down our stupid idols. Let us stop crafting idols in attempts to save ourselves. Instead, let us turn to Him who has the power and willingness to save.

PRAISE AND THANKS

Stop and Think

- *What truth about God has stood out to you most from the text & devotion?*

- *How have you seen God demonstrate this truth in your own life?*

CONFESSION

Stop and Think

- *How has the text and devotion instructed you to act or think?*

- *In what ways have you failed to act in line with these instructions?*

REQUESTS

Stop and Think

- *What changes do you need God to make in your mind and heart so that you might obey more consistently moving forward?*

¹Quoted in Alistair Begg, *The Hand of God* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1999), 119, Kindle Edition.

The Lord brings the counsel of the nations to nothing; he frustrates the plans of the peoples. The counsel of the Lord stands forever, the plans of his heart to all generations. Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, the people whom he has chosen as his heritage!

PSALM 33:10-12

Responding in Prayer

WHAT IS
GOD'S
END

In the Scriptures, God reveals Himself as the one and only all-powerful, all-knowing, all-present, sovereign Creator of all things who chooses to act in the world as a Savior for His people. This revelation of God by God raises several significant questions: *Who does God save? How does He save? From whom or what does He save? How did He create? What did He create?*

The inquiring mind could add many more questions to this catalogue of investigative inquiries but none would carry more significance than our next question: *Why does God act?*

We could rephrase the question as, "*Why does God do what He does? What is God's purpose? What goal does God strive to achieve? What is God's end game?*"

Thankfully, the Scripture clearly and repeatedly gives us God's aim and purpose in what He does in the world.

Read Isaiah 43:1-21

For what did God create the nation of Israel? (v. 7)

For what did God form Israel? (v. 21)

The message of Isaiah 43 came to a nation that had sinned against God. They rebelled against Him. They did not keep His commands and

ISAIAH 43:1-21

"Fear not I am with you... everyone... whom I created for my glory..."

ISAIAH 43:5 & 7

obey His law. Even when they did obey the "letter of the law" their hearts held no love and regard for God Himself.

God had fulfilled his promise to Abraham (Gen. 12 & 15). He multiplied Abraham's descendents. He brought them to a land flowing with milk and honey, and He made them into a prosperous city and nation. But, the people forgot the LORD. The more God blessed them, the more they treasured the gifts from God rather than the giver of those gifts. Rather than trusting the one who made them and blessed them, they turned to others such as the strong nations of Egypt and Syria to preserve them.

In response, God spoke through Isaiah a message of judgment. Because of their sin, God in His just anger would send a powerful and wicked king to bring their city and nation to ruin. He would strip them of all their possessions and land. He would scatter them as refugees and captives into other nations. He would break down their walls, and rip them from their homes.

This message of judgment came with a word of hope for salvation, and that message of hope came in our text. Here God spoke to those headed into a dark season in which they would be tempted to think God had exiled them forever, that He would not forgive, and that He would not save.

God through Isaiah announced that these thoughts of God's abandonment of them were incorrect. He would not leave them, He would indeed save them. And, He tells us why. He reveals for us the reason He will use his might and power to provide salvation. He would do so for His glory - for His sake.

GOD ACTS FOR...
THE SAKE OF HIS GLORY

Week 1 | Devotion 2

Isaiah makes clear that God created and saved Israel for his own sake and glory, but these acts of God are not unique in their purpose.

Why did God raise up Pharaoh? (Ex 9:16)

Why did God lead and guide the psalmist? (Ps 31:3)

Why will God not forsake His people? (I Sa 12:22)

Why did God withhold his hand from pouring out His wrath on Israel? (Ez 20:22)

Why did God vindicate His holiness? (Ez 36:22-23)

Why was the blind man born without sight? (Jn 9:1-3)

Why did God send Jesus to earth? (Jn 17:4)

Why did God visit with the Gentiles? (Ac 15:14)

Why does God forgive sins? (I Jn 2:12)

Why has God endured with "vessels" of wrath? (Rom 9:22-23)

In each of these passages, God reveals to us why He performed certain acts. The phraseology need not confuse us. The phrases *for His sake*, *for His Name's sake*, and *for His glory* all speak of the same end and purpose. God acted in all of these instances to make the truth about Himself known. He acted to show Himself clearly and truthfully to humanity. The church has most frequently spoken of God's purpose as "for His glory." In every act, God works all things to the praise of His glory (Ep 1:11-12). His glory stands as His ultimate end.

Defining glory can be challenging. Thankfully, we can find help from others. Thomas Schreiner defined glory as "the beauty, majesty, and greatness of who [God] is."¹ J. I. Packer referred to God's glory as "deity in manifestation."² John Piper said, "The glory of God is the manifest beauty of [God's] holiness. It is the going public of His holiness."³

These definitions capture well the revealed ultimate purpose of God in all His works. He works to make known who He is. He acts to show His beauty, holiness, majesty, and greatness. God acts to be known rightly. He acts for His glory.

DO NOT DESPAIR

The message in Isaiah 43 served as a source of encouragement for God's people. They deserved to be cursed, exiled, and brought to ruin. They had no reason to think that God would save, rescue, and remain with them. God spoke gently to them. He reminded them that He had made a promise to them, and He would be true to that promise. He would be faithful not because the people were deserving. He would be faithful because He desired to show the world that He had the power to do what He said He would. The concern for His name and reputation, the desire for the knowledge of His glory motivated Him to act for Israel.

This truth should comfort all who believe God even now. We too prove undeserving. We have no argument for God to work on our behalf. We have but one hope, that God would glorify Himself through us anyway. Thankfully this hope is not the equivalent of wishful thinking. Instead, we possess a certain expectation that God will indeed glorify Himself by keeping His Word. Why? Because God will not let His Word fail. He will prove Himself to all the world that He alone is God and there is no one like Him. He will not give His glory to another. Instead, He will save in such a way that no one will be mistaken.

One day the truth about God will shine forth in undeniable brightness. On that day, Jesus will return, every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

PRAISE AND THANKS

Stop and Think

- *What truth about God has stood out to you most from the text & devotion?*

- *How have you seen God demonstrate this truth in your own life?*

CONFESSION

Stop and Think

- *How has the text and devotion instructed you to act or think?*

- *In what ways have you failed to act in line with these instructions?*

REQUESTS

Stop and Think

- *What changes do you need God to make in your mind and heart so that you might obey more consistently moving forward?*

¹Sam Storms, *For the Fame of God's Name* (Wheaton: IL: Crossway, 2010), 216.

²J. R. W. Stott, *Guard the truth: The Message of 1 Timothy & Titus* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 55.

³John Piper, "What Is God's Glory," *Desiring God*, accessed February 28, 2023, <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/what-is-gods-glory--2>.

The Lord brings the counsel of the nations to nothing; he frustrates the plans of the peoples. The counsel of the Lord stands forever, the plans of his heart to all generations. Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, the people whom he has chosen as his heritage!

PSALM 33:10-12

Responding in Prayer

WHAT IS
GOD
DOING

ISAIAH 44:1-5

So far, Isaiah 43 has answered our first two questions. "Who is God?" *God is both a sovereign LORD and a loving Savior.* "What is God's end?" *God's end is His glory. He works to make His glory known.*

Our third question, "What is God doing to achieve His end?" can be answered in the next chapter, Isaiah 44.

Before answering the question - *What is God doing?* - we must acknowledge that the question could be answered in a couple of ways. We could answer by giving a long list of works that God has performed or is performing at any given time. Or we could answer the question with a description of the final product of all His work.

To understand the distinction, consider a painter. If we were to ask, *What is the painter doing?* We might answer, "He is prepping his canvas," or "He is selecting His brush," or "He is lightly stroking the canvas with His brush." All of these answers would be true at a given time. However, another way to answer the question would be to describe what the finished picture will be. We could answer, "He is painting a man and dog walking down an old dirt road cutting through a field of wild daisies on a sunny day."

This final picture is the painter's work. All the actions he takes find their meaning and purpose in the masterpiece. His work is the sum of all His actions.

It is in this second way I hope to answer the question, "What is God doing to accomplish His purpose? What is God doing to make His glory known?"

Read Isaiah 43:5-7

"I will pour out my Spirit on your offspring..."

ISAIAH 44:3

What promise did God give to the nation of Israel as they went into exile? (v. 5-7)

God promised Israel that He would not leave them in exile. Instead, He would go with them into exile, and in His time, He would gather all of the sons and daughters from exile into a new nation. How God will do this comes in Isaiah 44:1-5.

Read Isaiah 44:1-5

What did the LORD say He would pour out on the offspring (sons and daughters) of Jacob/Israel? (v. 3b)

What did the LORD say will happen when He poured out His Spirit on the descendents of Jacob? (v. 5)

God would raise up a new nation from the descendants of Jacob by pouring His Spirit on them. His Spirit would cause them to spring up like flowers from the ground after a fresh rain. These sons and daughters would step forward to identify with the LORD and with the LORD's people. A further description of this work to raise up a new nation comes in Isaiah 48 where once again Isaiah speaks of the day God will send His Spirit (v. 16).

In the past, Israel did not pay "attention to God's commands" (v. 18); if they had they would have been a righteous, prosperous nation who never knew being "cut off" from God

and sent into exile (v.19). Their disobedience led to exile. But God would not leave them there. He would send His Spirit to bring them out from captivity.

GOD SEEKS HIS GLORY BY... CREATING A PEOPLE WHO KNOW & ENJOY HIM

Several observations can be made concerning this work of God to raise up a new nation.

From where did God call Israel out? (v. 20)

First, God will bring them back to His dwelling place. He will call them out of Babylon and Chaldea. He calls them from the ends of the earth to return to Jerusalem. In Jerusalem, the LORD dwells with His people. There they know His presence and fellowship.

What did God instruct Israel to declare? (v. 20)

Second, God would restore them by redeeming them. He would reclaim them from the other nations and make them His own.

With what emotions should the announcement be made? (v. 20)

Third, His work would cause great joy (v. 20). Those who declare God's redemption do so with "a shout of joy."

*And the ransomed of the Lord shall return
and come to Zion with singing;
everlasting joy shall be upon their heads;
they shall obtain gladness and joy,
and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.*

ISAIAH 35:10

What would God do for those journeying back to their homes in Jerusalem? (v. 21)

Fourth, the LORD would make provision for them to return. Just as the LORD sustained Israel in their journey through the wilderness after He brought them out of Egypt, so the LORD would sustain them. He would provide for them, nourish them, and protect them. By His hand not their own would salvation and restoration come.

Who should pay attention to God's redeeming Israel? (49:1)

Amazingly, God calls out to the "peoples from afar" and invites them to pay attention to Israel, the work of God's hands, His chosen servant. He intended not to save only the biological descendants of Israel but also many others. He even boasts that saving Israel alone would have been too easy (49:6). Instead, He intended to use the restored nation of Israel as a light to reach the nations (49:6).

Do you see how God intends to seek His glory? Do you see how He works to make His beauty, goodness, and holiness known in the world? He does so by redeeming a people who know Him with joy! They know Him through His works of creating, redeeming, sustaining, and securing them. They know Him through His bringing them near to Him even after they rejected Him. Through them, the glory of God shines out into the world. Others see the glory and participate in the joy.

BE AMAZED WITH JOY

While Isaiah spoke of the day when God's Spirit would come, the writer of Acts recorded the account of the Spirit's actual coming. God indeed sent His Spirit (Ac 2). Since that day, the gospel of redemption has gone out into the world, and men from all over the world have been called out of darkness and brought into the kingdom of God. The new people are being formed just as God said they would.

One day, the full number of God's people will know redemption, and together the church will join around God's throne to sing with joy for all eternity. This work of God deserves our amazement and provides for all who believe sufficient reason to rejoice with joy now and forever.

PRAISE AND THANKS

Stop and Think

- *What truth about God has stood out to you most from the text & devotion?*

- *How have you seen God demonstrate this truth in your own life?*

CONFESSION

Stop and Think

- *How has the text and devotion instructed you to act or think?*

- *In what ways have you failed to act in line with these instructions?*

REQUESTS

Stop and Think

- *What changes do you need God to make in your mind and heart so that you might obey more consistently moving forward?*

Responding in Prayer

Sing, O heavens, for the Lord has done it; shout, O depths of the earth; break forth into singing, O mountains, O forest, and every tree in it! For the Lord has redeemed Jacob, and will be glorified in Israel.

ISAIAH 44:23



PREPARING FOR & ENGAGING IN GOOD CONVERSATION

KNOW THE TRUTH

Study

Know the text, listen to the sermon, and invest time in the provided resource.

Write

Jot down a few thoughts of reflection. Try identifying each of the following:

- A truth that stood out to you and why.
- A question you are still wrestling with.
- An action step you need to take.

SPEAK THE TRUTH

Read Together

Look at the Scriptures together. Read a portion of the other resource that stood out to you in a significant way.

Discuss Together

Compare the takeaways you jotted down. Wrestle with the questions you have. Encourage one another in the actions you identified and ask follow-up questions.

Pray Together

How can your CG pray for one another based on what each one shared? Take notes and pray.

Wait Together

Fruitful growth from your investment of time and effort will come slowly. You need to remember that people are not changed in one CG conversation or one study, but those who apply themselves to know the word and to discuss it will see progress.

CELL GROUP CONVERSATIONS

WHAT TRUTH OR STATEMENT DID YOU FIND MOST HELPFUL OR BENEFICIAL FROM THIS WEEK'S STUDY?

WHAT QUESTION(S) DO YOU HAVE AFTER STUDYING THE TEXTS THIS WEEK?

WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE ABOUT YOUR ATTITUDE? YOUR THINKING? AND, YOUR ACTIONS?

HOW MIGHT THIS WEEK'S STUDY ENCOURAGE, CHALLENGE, OR INSTRUCT THOSE IN YOUR CELL GROUP, MISSIONAL COMMUNITY OR FAMILY?

CHOSEN

Now that we have identified God as the sovereign LORD and loving Savior who seeks to make His glory known in the world by creating a people who know and love Him, we turn to the question, "Who are you?" To answer this question along with the questions, "Why do you exist" and "What should you do," we will look to the first epistle written by the apostle Peter.

Read I Peter 1:1-2

How does Peter identify himself? (v. 1a)

To whom did Peter write? (v. 1b)

In what places were the "elect exiles" scattered? (v. 1c)

Peter wrote as an "apostle of Jesus Christ." He knew Christ. He witnessed Christ's resurrected body. He learned directly from Christ, and with Christ's authority, he spoke. This Christ proved to be the servant Isaiah spoke of so many years earlier. He, Jesus Christ, came as the promised King who would redeem God's people and gather them once again into His kingdom.

At the time of Peter's writing, Jesus had already come. By His death, He conquered evil and secured the redemption of all who belong to Him. He had risen from the dead, and after appearing to men, He returned to the Father in heaven where he sat down on His throne.

I Peter 1:1-2

"To the elect exiles of the Dispersion... according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit.

I PETER 1:1-2

From His throne He poured out His Spirit in fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy (Is 44:3). Those who received God's Spirit scattered into the nations proclaiming the good news of redemption (Ac 8:4). Wherever this Gospel went, people responded in faith and repentance. Both biological descendants of Israel (Jews) and foreigners (Gentiles) received the Spirit and together they became a new people (Ep 2:11-22) just as in Isaiah's prophecy (Is 49:6).

Those who heard the good news and responded with faith and repentance exited the kingdom of darkness and entered into the kingdom of light. Although they remained scattered among the nations, they awaited the complete fulfillment of God's promise to bring them into the new Jerusalem where God would once again dwell forever with them and they with Him. These were the people to whom Peter wrote, and it is with these "elect exiles" all who live today with faith in Jesus share an identity as God's people.

If you have heard the gospel of Jesus and responded to it in faith and repentance, you too have been redeemed. You are numbered among God's elect, and with the rest of the church, you await the complete fulfillment of our blessed hope - that Jesus will indeed come again to dwell with His gathered people here on earth.

God's People Are...**FREELY CHOSEN BY HIM**

The Scriptures often identify God's people as the elect or the chosen. This designation can be found repeatedly both in the Old and New Testaments (2 Sa 21:6; I Ch 16:13; Ps 105:53; 106:5; Is 65:9, 22; Mt 24:24; Mk 13:27; Luk 18:7; Ro 8:33; II Ti 2:10). God's people are God's elected ones. If you will know who you are, you must know first that as a child of God you

Week 2 | Devotion 1

have been elected. You are a chosen one. The meaning and significance of this identity can be found in v. 2 of 1 Peter 1.

According to what were the people of God elect exiles? (v. 2a)

In what were they elect exiles? (v. 2b)

For what were they elected? (v. 2c)

In these three phrases, Peter provides three important descriptions concerning what it means to be "elect."

First, Peter made sure his readers knew that their election came about "*according to God's foreknowledge.*" God's foreknowledge refers to His knowing beforehand, His preknowledge, and His foreknowledge cannot be separated from His sovereignty.

God knows beforehand because God wills and plans and then powerfully accomplishes His plan without fail. By attributing their chosenness to God's foreknowledge, Peter attributes their inclusion in the people of God to God's power and grace alone.

As the elect of God, they stood distinct from the non-elect or those who do not belong to the people of God. However, the people of God must not conclude that the distinction can be attributed to anything in them. They were not better than others in any way. Instead, God elected them freely apart from any defining or distinguishing mark within themselves. He did so by His free, sovereign grace which He willed to grant them before the world began. Their experience of redemption came to them by way of God's free election.

Second, the elect became the distinct people of God by way of "*sanctification of the Spirit.*"

As the Word went out to the nations the Holy Spirit accompanied it with power (I Th 1:3-10). The Spirit cannot be seen nor commanded. He, like the wind, cannot be summoned nor directed, but His work can be seen and noted. When He works, men and women who hear the gospel experience a new birth. They undergo regeneration. They are "born again to a living hope" (I Pet 1:3; see Jn 3:1-8).

At one time the elect walked just as the world in darkness, under the wrath of God, and enslaved to their fleshly passions (I Pe 1:14-16) They did so until God's Spirit came on them with power and resurrected them from spiritual deadness. Their life of faith, hope, and love came about through the work of the Spirit who called them out of darkness and into light (I Pet 2:9).

Third, their election was "*for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with blood.*" With these phrases, Peter spoke of the outcome of their election, namely purification, and Christlikeness. The transformation into Christlikeness undergone by the elect comes about not by their effort and might but according to the power of God. God did not only will their salvation. He did not only save them from darkness and included them in the number of His fold of sheep. He also predestined that they would be conformed to the image of Christ (Ro 8:29-30). Those separated by the Spirit from the world will experience the change from one degree of glory to another (2 Co 3:17-18), for if God begins a work He will complete it (Ph 2:6).

Who are you? If you belong to God, you are an elect exile. You are chosen by God, called by God, set apart by God, and transformed by God. You are the work of God. Your inclusion and transformation with the people of God can be attributed to God and God alone. You are His "workmanship" (Ep 2:10).

EXAMINE YOURSELF

Are you a child of God? God is doing a work of redeeming Himself a people. His word has gone out. Have you heard this gospel? Has the Spirit of God regenerated your heart? Have you experienced the new birth? Have you and are you undergoing a transformation? Do you look more like Jesus? Are you walking in righteousness? Do you see evidence of the Spirit's power in your life?

The doctrine of election implies that not all people belong to God. Right now God's children live scattered as exiles. Do you belong to the kingdom of this world, or have you been born into the family of God? If you have not experienced this rebirth, call out to Him. Ask Him to save you, and He will. He will not reject a single person who turns to Him to be saved (Is 45:22).

PRAISE AND THANKS

Stop and Think

- *What truth about God has stood out to you most from the text & devotion?*

- *How have you seen God demonstrate this truth in your own life?*

CONFESSION

Stop and Think

- *How has the text and devotion instructed you to act or think?*

- *In what ways have you failed to act in line with these instructions?*

REQUESTS

Stop and Think

- *What changes do you need God to make in your mind and heart so that you might obey more consistently moving forward?*

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace,

EPHESIANS 1:3-7

Responding in Prayer



LIVING STONES

I Peter 2:1-8

Faithful to His promise and in alignment with His strategy for making His glory known, God has elected from humanity men and women from every nation, tribe, and tongue. He has called them out of the world and to Himself. They are elect exiles, but that is not all they are.

Read I Peter 2:1-8

What did Peter instruct the elect exiles to "long for"? (v. 2a).

What effect would the "spiritual milk" (a.k.a. God's Word) have on those who "drink" it? (v. 2b)

Peter expressed his concern and desire that those who experience the new birth would also grow into maturity. He did not want them to stay as infants. He wanted them to find nourishment in God's Word and grow.

How did Peter describe Jesus? (v. 4)

To what did Jesus liken the believers? (v. 5)

Peter desired the spiritual growth of God's people, but this growth was not about individuals but the collective whole. God did not save individuals and leave them scattered about in the sea of humanity to live the

"You yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house..."

I PETER 2:5

Christian life on a spiritual island. Instead, he called them out of the world so that he might assemble them into a new whole. Like an assortment of bricks might be gathered and placed one upon the other so that a beautiful building might be erected. God has gathered his materials (i.e. believers from all over the world) and with His infinite wisdom, he assembles them into a new structure.

Peter used multiple images borrowed from the Old Testament to teach what it means to be a member of God's people.

What type of structure did Peter say the "living stones" were being built up as? (v. 5)

God by His Spirit and Word gathers "stones" from all over the world and He assembles them into a "spiritual house." This spiritual house has replaced the physical temple - the house for God erected by King Solomon according to the plans of his father, King David. Rather than dwelling within the walls of the Jerusalem temple, God now dwells in the spiritual house, namely the people of God.

And we are his house if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope.

HEBREWS 3:6

The prophet Isaiah spoke of the erection of this spiritual house when he wrote of the coming Christ as the stone placed in Zion (Is 28:16). He, Christ the Messiah, would serve as the foundational stone on which God would build a new city, a new people, and new house in which He would dwell with them.

**God's People are
THE HOUSE IN WHICH HE DWELLS**

How do many respond to the Cornerstone, Jesus? (v. 4, 7)

What will be true of those who put their trust in the chosen and precious cornerstone? (v. 6)

Why do so many stumble over the cornerstone - Jesus? (v. 8)

Peter makes clear that Christians belong to a new people, a people in which God dwells. This people exist on the foundation of Christ for the glory of Christ. Christ serves as both the beginning and end of this people. They exist because of Him and they exist for Him.

Entrance into this community requires coming to Him in faith. Everyone who hears the word, the gospel, must come to Jesus as He is, the LORD and Savior, or they must reject Him.

Those attempting to construct their own works, their own cities, and their own kingdoms apart from the foundation of Jesus will indeed find ruin.

Many stumble over Christ in their efforts to seek glory. They do so because, in Christ, the servant, glory is veiled. Rather than coming as a king robed in majesty, splendor, and power, Jesus came as a servant. He took upon Himself not a crown of gold and jewels but of thorns. He did not come as a handsome prince but as one with "no beauty that [men] should desire him" (Is 53:3). He did not come and overthrow the oppressors, but He died by their hands. Jesus came as the cornerstone of a new city to which He invites men and women from all over the earth, but many look upon Him with contempt. They see His humble state and long-suffering and from there they despise him and esteem Him not (Is 53:3).

For those who belong to this spiritual house in which God continues to build on Christ, several notes about our identity can be, and should be, made.

First, each member of the people of God finds their purpose and function within the whole. As a brick in the house of God, my purpose finds itself swallowed up by the purpose of the whole building. I exist for the same reason the whole structure exists. Yes, I might be shaped a little bit differently. I might be placed in a different location than the other bricks, but each one of us shares the same purpose, for we all have a shared identity as a member of the house of God.

Second, to achieve the purpose for which we have been assembled, each member needs the others. Each brick stands with the others. The brick gives and receives. Each member of God's house is both needy and needed. To be a living stone in the house of God means that participation is a must for the fulfillment of my purpose and the purpose of the whole community for they are one.

Third, if we become one with Christ our cornerstone, we too should expect the suffering and rejection that He experienced. To identify with Christ is to identify with Him in His humility and suffering. The certainty that with Christ we too will know resurrection life after death, gives us the strength to share His suffering in the present life. Those who refuse to share in His suffering will not share with Him in His resurrection. Those brought into the people of God do not escape suffering but willingly endure it for the sake of Christ.

Fourth, we belong to God. He bought us. He redeemed us. We are His creation. We are his possession. God has rights over the members of His house. He has authority over them. To identify with the people of God is to identify as a servant of Jesus Christ. He has the right to do with us as He wills. By extension, we belong to His people. We do not possess self-autonomy. We do not get to govern ourselves. Instead, we must fulfill our obligations to Him and His people for we belong to Him.

DIE TO SELF

When Jesus called those listening to follow Him, He said, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Mt 16:24). Entrance into God's house, God's city and kingdom come through death to self. We must die to our personal agenda and goals. We must have to lay down the good life we have imagined in our hearts and chased after with our lives. We must lay down our purpose and take up the purpose of our king and kingdom - the glory of God.

PRAISE AND THANKS

Stop and Think

- *What truth about God has stood out to you most from the text & devotion?*

- *How have you seen God demonstrate this truth in your own life?*

CONFESSION

Stop and Think

- *How has the text and devotion instructed you to act or think?*

- *In what ways have you failed to act in line with these instructions?*

REQUESTS

Stop and Think

- *What changes do you need God to make in your mind and heart so that you might obey more consistently moving forward?*

This is the gate of the LORD; the righteous shall enter through it. I thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation.

The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. This is the LORD's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes.

This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.

PSALM 118:20 - 24

Responding in Prayer

SOJOURNERS
& EXILES

I Peter 2:9-12

Read I Peter 2:9-12

What four things does Peter say the people of God are? (v. 9)

Verses 9-12 serve as a summary statement of what Peter has said in 1:1-2:8. He summarized who they are as 1) a chosen race 2) a royal priesthood 3) a holy nation and 4) a people for God's own possession. Each one of these descriptions possesses significant meaning and finds their roots in God's relationship with the Israelite people of the OT.

By attributing the identity of the Israelites in the OT to the believers in His day, Peter made a bold assertion. God's people are not the biological Jews who find their identity in Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; rather, His people are those who by faith are in Jesus.

For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring...This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring.

ROMANS 9:6-8

As the people of God, they possessed the promised inheritance, the resurrection life,

"Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles..."

1 PETER 2:11

the fellowship with the Father and Son. All that had been promised to Abraham has come through Christ to the new people consisting of both Jews and Gentiles, the free and the slave, the woman and the man, the rich and the poor. These called by God and believing in the Son now belong to God and each other. They are God's people. The reason for their election and gathering can be found in the second half of the verse.

Why did God make this people His chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, and His possession? (v. 9b)

Peter once again draws from Isaiah 43 to identify the purpose of God in choosing and redeeming His people. He set them apart so that they might "declare the excellencies of Him who called them" (v. 9). Notice the very similar language used by Isaiah, "The people whom I [God] formed for myself that they might declare my praise" (Is 43:21).

What did Peter instruct the people of God to do? (v. 12)

For what reason should the Christians "keep their conduct honorable?" (v. 12)

Among whom was the church supposed to live? (v. 12)

A glimpse into the meaning of "declare His excellencies" comes to us in the phrase, "that... they [the world] may see your good deeds and glorify God..." (v. 12). With this restatement of God's intended purpose in the saving of His people, Peter connects our God-given purpose with one more aspect of our identity.

How does Peter identify Christians living in this world? (v. 11, see also 1:1)

God saved His people, set them apart, and now puts them on display before the watching world. He does not remove them from the world; He leaves them in it. Just as one would not put a lamp under a basket so God does not put His people out of view. Instead, he makes them a city on a hill. He intends for their light to shine out for men to see and know God. As a result, God's people now live as "sojourners and exiles."

God People are... SOJOURNERS AND EXILES.

Peter's opening address identified God's people as exiles (1:1), and as he transitioned to instructing their conduct in this world, Peter once again reminded them of their identity as "sojourners and exiles" (2:11). While the next couple weeks will be spent looking at our purpose as exiles and what we are doing as exiles, it will be helpful here to simply draw our attention to a few implications of our being exiles in this world.

What did Peter tell the church not to be? (1:14)

First, Christians must not conform to this world. As exiles, Christians will know the constant struggle between the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of the world. The world and its desires of the flesh will rage war with the kingdom of heaven and its desires generated by the Spirit (Gal. 5). The world at times will

offer pleasures and pursuits that appeal to our flesh, but Christians have come to know something better than worldly treasures. The works of the flesh come from ignorance, a lack of knowledge concerning Christ. As exiles, Christians must keep watch so that they might not be conformed by a love and desire for this world. If they give in to such passions, they may indeed gain the world, but their souls will be lost.

How must the community of exiles relate to each other? (1:22-23)

Second, Christians must constantly love fellow exiles with "sincere brotherly love." How might Christians remain faithful without getting entangled in worldly affairs? They will do so in a loving community with each other. The journey through this life might be long and difficult. Those who participate in the loving community of the saints will safely navigate these foreign lands and arrive at their forever home. However, those who forsake the coming together of the church in love run the risk of losing hope and wavering.

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

HEBREWS 10:23-25

SET YOUR MIND ON THINGS OF HEAVEN

Often a member of the armed forces may keep in his pocket a photo of his beloved wife. Another may keep a piece of jewelry around her neck which reminds her of the cherished people and places of home for which she awaits to return. These reminders do not remove them from their difficult mission, but they can provide the strength to endure.

Similarly, Peter calls our attention to their beloved, Jesus, whom we await. He reminds us of our certain hope that He will return, and with Him will come our eternal glory and full joy. In the difficult days, we can lose sight of what we will inherit. Only with our minds fixed on Jesus and our eternal life with Him will we be able to reject the pleasures of this world and faithfully give ourselves to the loving service of our fellow exiles so that together we all may lay hold of the glory that awaits us.

PRAISE AND THANKS

Stop and Think

- *What truth about God has stood out to you most from the text & devotion?*

- *How have you seen God demonstrate this truth in your own life?*

CONFESSION

Stop and Think

- *How has the text and devotion instructed you to act or think?*

- *In what ways have you failed to act in line with these instructions?*

REQUESTS

Stop and Think

- *What changes do you need God to make in your mind and heart so that you might obey more consistently moving forward?*

These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.

HEBREWS 11:13-16

Responding in Prayer



PREPARING FOR & ENGAGING IN GOOD CONVERSATION

KNOW THE TRUTH

Study

Know the text, listen to the sermon, and invest time in the provided resource.

Write

Jot down a few thoughts of reflection. Try identifying each of the following:

- A truth that stood out to you and why.
- A question you are still wrestling with.
- An action step you need to take.

SPEAK THE TRUTH

Read Together

Look at the Scriptures together. Read a portion of the other resource that stood out to you in a significant way.

Discuss Together

Compare the takeaways you jotted down. Wrestle with the questions you have. Encourage one another in the actions you identified and ask follow-up questions.

Pray Together

How can your CG pray for one another based on what each one shared? Take notes and pray.

Wait Together

Fruitful growth from your investment of time and effort will come slowly. You need to remember that people are not changed in one CG conversation or one study, but those who apply themselves to know the word and to discuss it will see progress.

CELL GROUP CONVERSATIONS

WHAT TRUTH OR STATEMENT DID YOU FIND MOST HELPFUL OR BENEFICIAL FROM THIS WEEK'S STUDY?

WHAT QUESTION(S) DO YOU HAVE AFTER STUDYING THE TEXTS THIS WEEK?

WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE ABOUT YOUR ATTITUDE? YOUR THINKING? AND, YOUR ACTIONS?

HOW MIGHT THIS WEEK'S STUDY ENCOURAGE, CHALLENGE, OR INSTRUCT THOSE IN YOUR CELL GROUP, MISSIONAL COMMUNITY OR FAMILY?

TO MAKE
GOD
KNOWN

I Peter 2:9-12

In the last set of devotions, Peter taught us about the identity of God's people. They are the people chosen by God among whom God dwells, as they live as foreigners before the watching world in hope that one day they will finally enter into their forever home. This people possessed by God as His residence exists for the purpose of "declar[ing] the excellencies of Him..." (2:9).

The phrase, "Declaring His excellencies," feels like a "churchy" thing to say. Outside of the religious context and even within the religious world, we do not use this phrase. No one says, "I am going to 'declare the excellencies of her who married me!'" Nor does one say, "Let us take a few moments to 'declare the excellencies of him who led his team to the Super Bowl win.'" For some, the strangeness of the phrase may blur its meaning and tempt us to move on too quickly without doing the hard labor of coming to an understanding. For others, we might simply assign an assumed meaning that remains incomplete or all-together wrong.

Since, this phrase - "declaring His excellencies" - sums up our purpose, the purpose for which God chose and called us, the importance of gaining an understanding of its meaning cannot be overstated. It is the understanding of the phrase as the God-assigned purpose of God's people that this set of three devotions will explore.

Read I Peter 2:9-12

Why should God's people keep their conduct among the Gentiles honorable? (v. 12)

"That they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation."

I PETER 2:12

Whom did Peter say would end up glorifying God? (v. 12)

On what day would the Gentiles glorify God? (v. 12)

What did the Gentiles say and think about the people of God before they glorified Him? (v. 12)

At the end of v. 12, Peter reveals what will occur when God's people fulfill their purpose. "Declaring His excellencies" will result in others "glorifying God." This same connection between God's people fulfilling their purpose and the nations coming to know and worship God can be found in the words of Isaiah the prophet.

Read Isaiah 60:1-22

What did God call the nation of Israel to do? (v. 1)

What did the LORD say would be seen upon Israel? (v. 2)

What will happen when the LORD's glory will be seen in His people? (v. 3)

What reason did the LORD give for the new hope placed in the LORD by the coastlands? (v. 9)

What names were given to the walls and the gates of God's new people? (v. 18)

Isaiah 60 describes the age in which we now live. The LORD right now sets up His people as a light to the nations so that they might see Him, know Him, love Him, hope in Him, and rejoice in Him. The light that has shone on Israel is none other than Jesus Christ. He is the light comes into the world (Jn 1:9) so that the invisible God might be made visible (Jn 1:14). This dawning of the light shines into the hearts of men so that in Christ they might know the glory of God.

For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

2 CORINTHIANS 4:6

It is through the light of glory shining brightly in Christ that the church comes into existence, and it is this same light shining through the church that brings the nations into salvation and the full experience of joy in Jesus.

God's People Exist... TO MAKE HIM KNOWN AND GLORIFIED

The term "glorify" means to praise, honor, and exalt. A husband glorifies his wife when after seeing her all dressed up for date night, he declares, "Wow, you are beautiful!" Guests at a restaurant glorify the chef when they taste the delicious entre and together exclaim, "That is amazing! The chef knows his food!" The fan glorifies the athlete when after watching the game he goes to social media to announce the all-time greatness of one player's performance.

Understanding the term "glorify" makes the claims of Isaiah and Peter quite astounding. The Gentiles of all people will through the faithful work of the church come to praise God - the same God that they despised, rejected and hated. Those who described God as overbearing, cruel, unjust, unloving, foolish, nonexistent, and weak may through the "declaring of His excellencies" come to see God as He truly is. As a result, the lips that once cursed God will worship Him. The hearts that once repudiated God will take joy in Him.

If then, the church exists to display God so that others know and enjoy Him, several other implications can be noted.

First, the church strives not to defeat those in the world but to win them. A church aligned with the purpose of God seeks not to "destroy" the arguments and ideologies of its opponents with clever Twitter posts and well-crafted theological arguments; instead, with love, the church works and labors until rebels become worshipers of the One True God.

Second, the church does not content itself with behavior modification and theological accuracy. The church fails to fulfill its purpose on earth if all she does is convince the world to conform to their behavior and think in a more "Christian" direction. The church does not primarily invest itself in convincing the world that abortion is the killing of a human being, gay marriage is not marriage, and pornography is evil. They do not work to settle the debates between Calvinists and Arminianists, between amillennialist and premillennialist, and between cessationist and continuationist.

Rather, the church labors so that men might with their whole hearts love the LORD their God. If indeed the church finds contentment in the world coming to adopt the church's values, virtues, and convictions without having their hearts move to love the Creator, the church has failed to live out their purpose.

BE ENCOURAGED

If God can make worshippers out of the cruel and brutal nations of Assyria and Syria, the violence of today's world is not beyond His reach. If God converted those in Corinth who sought pleasure in every depraved and twisted form, He can certainly convert into lovers of God the perverse and immoral pleasure seekers who parade their debauchery all over social media.

At times, you may feel alone in a foreign, hostile land. But, you should be encouraged. God has placed you here along with your fellow exiles so that through you, the world around you may see God and join you in knowing and delighting in Him.

PRAISE AND THANKS

Stop and Think

- *What truth about God has stood out to you most from the text & devotion?*

- *How have you seen God demonstrate this truth in your own life?*

CONFESSION

Stop and Think

- *How has the text and devotion instructed you to act or think?*

- *In what ways have you failed to act in line with these instructions?*

REQUESTS

Stop and Think

- *What changes do you need God to make in your mind and heart so that you might obey more consistently moving forward?*

"I will extol you, my God and King, and bless your name forever and ever. Every day I will bless you and praise your name forever and ever. Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised, and his greatness is unsearchable...

"My mouth will speak the praise of the Lord, and let all flesh bless his holy name forever and ever."

PSALM 145:1-3, 21

Responding in Prayer

TO
GLORIFY
GOD

I Peter 1:3-25

God intends to make worshipers out of the nations by showing His glory through the church as they make Him known. For this purpose, the church exists and to this end, they must labor.

To gain a fuller understanding of this purpose - "declaring His excellencies (glory)" - we must now ask, "What are God's excellencies."

In one sense, listing and describing God's "excellencies" would be an eternal project. He possesses infinite glory, and finite creatures will never come to the ends of God's excellencies. New discoveries of God's glory await the believer every day for all eternity. One cannot put all of God's excellencies on paper and then go out and communicate them to completion.

In another sense, Peter has in mind a few truths about God that he has identified and summarized to which he refers as the excellencies of God. His use of excellencies refers to a clear set of truths God has demonstrated in and through the church.

In I Peter 1:3-25, Peter articulated these truths to which he refers as the "excellencies" of God, and in 2:9-10 Peter summarized them as God's work to make the church a

- Chosen Race
- God's Possession
- Royal Priesthood
- Recipients of Mercy

John Piper identified these excellencies as:

*The excellency of His freedom in choosing [them]. The excellency of His grace in pitying [them]. The excellency of His authority and power in possessing [them]. The excellencies of His worth and purity in making [them] holy.*¹

"but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy.'"

I PETER 1:15-16

God's People Exist...

TO SHOW HIS GRACE, POWER, MERCY, AND HOLINESS.

Peter declared each one of the excellencies in the first chapter of his epistle, and to these verses, we now give our attention.

Read I Peter 1:1-25

How did Peter identify the Christians to whom he wrote the letter? (v. 1)

The first devotion of week two examined the meaning of God's choosing His people, so here I only highlight the excellency of such an act. Several truths make God's choosing of you a glorious fact.

First, consider the truth about your sin. God chose you even while you were yet a sinner and hostile toward Him.

Second, consider your weakness. You had and have nothing to offer him. Nothing you can do, nothing you might possess will make you sufficiently appealing before Him. Even if you had something desirable, He needs it not for all you have is already His.

Third, consider His greatness. Who is any one of us that God should be mindful of us? Before Him we are nothing, yet in love, He set His affection on us. Hearts are moved to admiration when the prince chooses the poor servant girl as his bride for in such an election excellency is found. How

Week 3 | Devotion 2

much more praiseworthy is the election of mere mortals who stand guilty of sin by the Holy King of the universe?

According to what did God cause the believers to be born again? (v. 3)

God chose His people according to mercy. When men look at the stars they might see God's divine nature and power displayed, but when men look at the church they should see mercy overflowing in abundance. The church is God's revelation to the world that rather than a judge eager to "throw the book" at the guilty, the LORD stands ready to forgive. He looks on the guilty with pity and compassion. Each member of the church can say,

My identity is fundamentally this: I have been shown mercy. I am a "mercied" person. I get my identity not first from my actions, but from being acted upon—with pity. I am a pitied one.

JOHN PIPER ²

Mercy demonstrated possesses an excellency, and such mercy, when seen, rightly stirs up praise, honor, and glory. The apostle Paul understood this when he wrote, "I received mercy for this reason, that in me... Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in Him for eternal life" (1 Ti 1:16).

What act of God came about according to mercy? (v. 3)

Through mercy, God gave birth to a people. At one time they were not a people but now they were and are God's people. He gathered them, rescued them, redeemed them, quickened them, and now guards them. Their existence speaks to the power and might of their possessor.

And the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great deeds of terror, with signs and wonders.

DEUTERONOMY 26:8

Just as spectators praise the excellencies of a coach who led his team to the championship or a father who heroically pulls his children and wife from an enflamed home, so the world comes to acknowledge and praise God for His power and might which He demonstrates in the bringing safely of His people from darkness into light.

What should be true of God's people in all their conduct? (v.15)

Why should God's people be holy? (v. 16)

Holiness consists in putting aside the passions of the flesh and living in accord with the knowledge of God as made known in Jesus Christ (v. 13). At one time, each member of the church walked in darkness, blinded to the truth about God. In the darkness, they acted in accord with their own sinful nature. But, now that God has brought them into the light, they see and know the glory of God. They have encountered his holiness and they know it to be excellent.

This holiness of God, they too should possess. They must live excellently. They must be holy. They must act in accord with God's character before the watching world. They should be as God is in the world. They should extend grace, show mercy, seek justice, pursue love, deal righteously, and labor with all their might by God's grace to rescue others from the domain of darkness.

KEEP YOUR CONDUCT HONORABLE

God's people have a high calling. God saved them and set them apart so that His excellencies might be seen and known by all. So then, God's people must live lives worthy of that call and purpose. How can they show God to be praiseworthy when they themselves act dishonorably? How might the world come to know God's beauty when they live the same disordered lives as those in the world? Christians must take great care to live in a way that leads to worship of God rather than ill-repute.

PRAISE AND THANKS

Stop and Think

- *What truth about God has stood out to you most from the text & devotion?*

- *How have you seen God demonstrate this truth in your own life?*

CONFESSION

Stop and Think

- *How has the text and devotion instructed you to act or think?*

- *In what ways have you failed to act in line with these instructions?*

REQUESTS

Stop and Think

- *What changes do you need God to make in your mind and heart so that you might obey more consistently moving forward?*

¹ John Piper, "Christian Identity and Christian Destiny," Desiring God, accessed February 28, 2023, <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/christian-identity-and-christian-destiny>.

² Ibid.

Do all things without grumbling or disputing, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world,

PHILIPPIANS 2:14-15

Responding in Prayer



TO
DECLARE

I Peter 2:11-12

According to Peter, God's people exist to "declare the excellencies of Him who called them..." (2:9). You may recall that Isaiah used this similar phrase to define the reason for God's people's existence - "That they might declare my [God's] praise" (Is 43:21). This means that the church exists to make known God's glory, and His glory includes His work to choose, possess, sanctify, and make them holy.

To further understand this purpose, we turn now to the term "declare," and ask the question, "How does the church 'declare' God's glory?"

Read I Peter 2:11-12

What did Peter say the Gentiles (the world) would see before they glorify God?

Interestingly - maybe even a bit surprisingly - Peter teaches us that the church "declares" God's praiseworthiness by doing "good deeds." To fulfill their purpose, Christians must "abstain from the passions of the flesh" (v. 11) which yields many evil works (see Ga 5:19-21).

What did Paul include in his list of fleshly works? (Ga 5:19-21)

"That they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation."

I PETER 2:12

How did Paul describe the fruit of the Spirit? (Ga 5:22)

The words of the apostle Paul help us understand the teaching of Peter. The works of the flesh lack goodness. If the church goes the way of the world and lives according to their fleshly desires and impulses, they will conduct themselves in a way that leads to the same destruction, ruin, heartache, and brokenness the world knows very well. The world knows the pain familiar to those who have walked in sexual immorality.

The world knows the emptiness of chasing every sensual pleasure they can find. The world knows the constant struggle of relational strife, the poison of bitterness, the sadness of division, the constant threat of rivalry, the horrible consequences of acting in a fit of rage, and the regrettable damage done by drunkenness.

By God's design, the church should stand as a counter-culture to the world. Their works should stand as a superior alternative. They should declare the praiseworthiness of God by being a community of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. The works of the Spirit in the life of the church possess a superior quality. When placed alongside the works of the flesh, their brilliance, value, and glory shine brightly. They are attractive.

Men and women long for that which comes by the Spirit and through the church. The world craves unity and peace. The world seeks a true experience of genuine love. The world admires faithfulness, esteems kindness, and praises self-control. When the church fulfills its purpose, the world sees in the church the praise-worthy character of God in radiant beauty and glory.

God's People Declare...

HIS GOODNESS BY DOING GOOD DEEDS

The truth - God's people declare his goodness by doing good deeds - raises an extremely important question. *How do good deeds make God's excellencies known?* Or, perhaps this more pointed question would be more helpful - *Why do our good deeds glorify God and not us?*

Typically, the one who does good deeds receives the glory, recognition, and praise. We praise the individual who performs good acts. In all honesty, attributing a good deed to another rather than to the one who performed it would be morally wrong. God does not commit fraud by receiving praise and recognition for our good works, nor do men wrong us when they praise God for what they see in us. His praise and glory are the end and aim of our being and doing, and in Peter's epistle, the good deeds of the church bring glory to God in at least a couple of ways.

What reason did Peter give for servants to subject themselves to masters? (2:18-21)

Peter called servants to subject themselves even to unjust authorities so that they might show to their masters the character of Jesus Christ who gave an example to be followed. Jesus showed the world that God's integrity, sinlessness, patience, faithfulness, and love held up even under the unjust treatment of those in power. Christian servants should manifest these same excellent and praiseworthy attributes to the world.

The good deeds done by God's people bring Him praise for through their good deeds His excellencies are both seen and experienced. The world knows the longsuffering of Christ as the church suffers long for His name's sake. The world knows the love of Christ as the people of God give up their lives in love for the world. The world knows the gentleness of God

as the men of God respond gently to outsiders. The world sees the excellency of God as the truth when the church refuses to sacrifice truth in the pursuit of relief from harsh authority. The church's good deeds bring praise to God by making the truth about God seen and experienced by the world.

Who caused the church to be born again? (1:3)

Through what was the church born again? (1:23)

To understand how the church's deeds lead to God's glory, you must understand that the church is God's creation. He birthed and formed them. He fills them and He empowers them. "We are His creation..." the apostle Paul wrote (Ep 2:10). We do not boast in our works, for our praiseworthy works cannot be attributed to anyone other than God Himself. The love you aim at your spouse comes from His love which abides in you. Your right conduct at work comes from no other source than the power of God's Spirit dwelling in you.

Believers have been born again and they possess a growing attractiveness. The spirit adorns them with "the imperishable beauty" of a heart powerfully altered and regenerated (3:4). This beauty can be seen and noticed by the world as they watch the conduct of the church. When they see such beauty, they see the effects of God's power and grace on a people.

Look at what God has done!" the world says, "He has taken that abuser and made Him gentle, he has taken that adulterer and made her faithful, he has taken the liar and made him honest, he has taken the rebellious teenager and made him submissive." In this way, the good deeds of the church lead to the glory of God.

BOAST IN THE LORD

The apostle Paul admitted that he worked harder than anyone to commit himself to good deeds while abstaining from the desires of the flesh, but rather than boasting about his success, He quickly and often pointed to the Lord. We too must echo Paul as we do our good deeds before the world.

But by the grace of God, I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.

I CORINTHIANS 15:10

PRAISE AND THANKS

Stop and Think

- *What truth about God has stood out to you most from the text & devotion?*

- *How have you seen God demonstrate this truth in your own life?*

CONFESSION

Stop and Think

- *How has the text and devotion instructed you to act or think?*

- *In what ways have you failed to act in line with these instructions?*

REQUESTS

Stop and Think

- *What changes do you need God to make in your mind and heart so that you might obey more consistently moving forward?*

Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you. And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising.

ISAIAH 60:1-3

Responding in Prayer



PREPARING FOR & ENGAGING IN GOOD CONVERSATION

KNOW THE TRUTH

Study

Know the text, listen to the sermon, and invest time in the provided resource.

Write

Jot down a few thoughts of reflection. Try identifying each of the following:

- A truth that stood out to you and why.
- A question you are still wrestling with.
- An action step you need to take.

SPEAK THE TRUTH

Read Together

Look at the Scriptures together. Read a portion of the other resource that stood out to you in a significant way.

Discuss Together

Compare the takeaways you jotted down. Wrestle with the questions you have. Encourage one another in the actions you identified and ask follow-up questions.

Pray Together

How can your CG pray for one another based on what each one shared? Take notes and pray.

Wait Together

Fruitful growth from your investment of time and effort will come slowly. You need to remember that people are not changed in one CG conversation or one study, but those who apply themselves to know the word and to discuss it will see progress.

CELL GROUP CONVERSATIONS

WHAT TRUTH OR STATEMENT DID YOU FIND MOST HELPFUL OR BENEFICIAL FROM THIS WEEK'S STUDY?

WHAT QUESTION(S) DO YOU HAVE AFTER STUDYING THE TEXTS THIS WEEK?

WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE ABOUT YOUR ATTITUDE? YOUR THINKING? AND, YOUR ACTIONS?

HOW MIGHT THIS WEEK'S STUDY ENCOURAGE, CHALLENGE, OR INSTRUCT THOSE IN YOUR CELL GROUP, MISSIONAL COMMUNITY OR FAMILY?

PREACHING
THE WORD

I Peter 1:10-25

So far we have seen that God's people belong to Him as His chosen possession. They exist to declare His excellencies, and they do so by doing good deeds. They perform these good deeds before men and the world responds by coming to God as the source of their joy and the object of their praise.

This leads us to our last major question, "What should we be doing?" If the church belongs to God (Identity) to declare His glory (purpose), what actions should it take?

One might try to answer this question with a comprehensive list that instructs the believer in every circumstance and situation, but I will attempt to direct us with a short list of three "categories" of actions: **1) Preaching the Word, 2) Delighting in Worship 3) Enduring in Suffering.**

We begin by considering our work of preaching the word.

Read I Peter 1:10-12

What did the prophets search and inquire about carefully? (1:10-11a)

What did the Spirit predict through the prophets? (v. 11b)

"This word is the good news that was preached to you."

I PETER 1:25

What had been announced to the believers to whom Peter wrote? (1:12)

Who announced the good news to the believers reading the letter from Peter? (1:12)

Through whom did the Holy Spirit announce the good news? (1:12)

Peter connected the gospel to the work of the prophets in the Old Testament. Although they did not know the exact person or time of his coming, the prophets spoke of the coming Messiah. Jesus proved to be this Messiah in His coming, His suffering on the cross, and His resurrection from the dead.

After Jesus' resurrection, He sent the Holy Spirit as He promised (Jn 16:7-11). Through those in whom He lived, the Spirit preached the good news about Christ to the world. It is through this work of the Spirit through men and women proclaiming the truth about Christ that the recipients of Peter's letter had come to believe and love Jesus. Although they had not seen Jesus nor walked with Jesus as did Peter and many others, they still loved and rejoiced in Him (1:8).

Though their physical eyes did not see him, the eyes of their hearts certainly had.

"And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy... And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."

ACTS 2:17-21 (See also JOEL 2:28)

Read | Peter 1:13-25

Through what were the believers to whom Peter wrote: "born again"? (v.23)

What makes the word of God distinct from "all flesh"? (v. 24-25a)

What is the "word of God"? (v. 25b)

Peter teaches us something extremely important about God's Word. God's word is the powerful force in the creation of His people. The gospel is not simply a set of propositions the hearer must conform to and adopt. The gospel is not one philosophy among many others. The gospel is God's power unto salvation (Ro 1:16). It is the news that when announced has the power to convert hearers. The gospel preached by the Spirit through messengers to a world lost in darkness gives life and liberation to the dead. It is through this means that the Christians who first read Peter's letter came to salvation and it is by this same means that men and women to this day come to know and love the excellencies of God.

For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.

1 THESSALONIANS 1:4

God's People Make Him Known by...

PREACHING HIS GOSPEL

Once we see that God's people make Him known by declaring the excellencies of Christ as revealed in the gospel, several important implications for the church become apparent.

First, the church must speak about Christ. We must speak of His death, burial, and resurrection. We must tell of the forgiveness of sins that have been accomplished with His shed blood. We must declare that He has been exalted to the right hand of the Father. We must tell of His substitutionary atonement - that He has substituted Himself for us so that He became our sin and we became His righteousness. We must talk about His mercy, sing about His grace, and write about His justice.

The church must not forsake the gospel as they speak about other important issues such as racism, abortion, sexual ethics, church practices, and political interests. The church must stand tall and declare boldly the good news of Jesus Christ without alteration or editing. If the world will see Christ, they will see Him in His glory as the church proclaims God's Word and the Spirit works with power. To stop preaching Christ is to stop spreading light to those dead in darkness.

Second, the church must know Christ for the purpose of declaring Christ. God has chosen to make himself known in Jesus and Jesus can be known in the gospel (1 Co 4:1-6). Jesus is a real person; we do not make him up. We do not craft him into the savior or helper we think we need. We do not get to shape Him according to our ideals. We do not get to imagine what He is like. We do not get to create a LORD and Savior more attractive to the hearer. Instead, we must study Him. We must learn of Him. We must behold Him. We must meditate on him. We must consider Him. We must seek Him.

As we learn of Him, we must faithfully present him in Word to the world knowing that for some He will seem foolish and to others, He will seem offensive. When the gospel meets unreceptive hearts, we must not conclude that God's gospel needs our updating so that the church might remain relevant in a new era or age. Instead, the church must commit itself to know Jesus accurately and presenting Him faithfully. This is our responsibility and the world's hope.

SPEAK MUCH OF CHRIST

How often do you speak of Christ? Do you and your roommate discuss Him and His work? Do you and your spouse spend time contemplating together the riches of His grace? Do your children consider it normal for you to talk about Jesus and what He has done for them? Jesus is a real person who has performed real works. Make Him known by using words to tell of His excellencies and declare His wondrous works.

PRAISE AND THANKS

Stop and Think

- *What truth about God has stood out to you most from the text & devotion?*

- *How have you seen God demonstrate this truth in your own life?*

CONFESSION

Stop and Think

- *How has the text and devotion instructed you to act or think?*

- *In what ways have you failed to act in line with these instructions?*

REQUESTS

Stop and Think

- *What changes do you need God to make in your mind and heart so that you might obey more consistently moving forward?*

Oh sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth! Sing to the Lord, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples! For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; he is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the peoples are worthless idols, but the Lord made the heavens. Splendor and majesty are before him; strength and beauty are in his sanctuary.

PSALM 96:1-6

Responding in Prayer



DELIGHTING
IN WORSHIP

Isaiah 60 - 61

By preaching God's good news, the church declares His excellencies. They publish the details of His saving work. They announce the glories of His grace and the truth about His resurrection. They tell of His wondrous deeds, and they make known His good character. They report about His forgiveness, and they testify to His justice. They do so with words, doctrinal statements, and truth claims. The glorious news about God goes forward as the church speaks an "open statement of the truth" without "tamper[ing] with God's word" (2 Co 4:2).

While the accuracy of the preached word of God must be maintained and guarded, how God's people communicate the good news possesses just as much importance. When they speak of God's work and glory they do so as recipients. They speak as those who have experienced His glory. They testify as those who have tasted His goodness. They declare His excellencies as those who know His excellencies firsthand.

Read I Peter 1:3-9

What did Peter say accompanied the people's belief in Jesus Christ? (v. 8b)

How did Peter describe the joy with which the people rejoiced? (v. 8b)

Peter began the letter by presenting God as the one worthy of praise (v. 3). His praiseworthiness accords with His "great mercy" with which he "caused" the church to be "born again" (v. 3-5).

"You shall call your walls Salvation
and your gates Praise"

ISAIAH 60:18

This people, created and formed by God, are marked by an "inexpressible" joy that is also "filled with glory" (v. 8).

With this reference to joy as the defining mark of God's people, Peter once again takes us back to the prophecies found in the OT, especially those spoken by the prophet Isaiah. Through Isaiah, God spoke of a time when he would once again gather the nation of Israel from all over the world. This regathering would come after He scattered them into foreign lands as an act of judgment.

The reason God gave for judgment can be found in Isaiah 29:13, "*Because this people draw near with their mouth and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me.*" God cut Israel back to a stump, He scattered them throughout the nations only promising to preserve a remnant because the people loved the blessings of God rather than the God who blessed them. The LORD was worthy of their delight, affection, love, and praise yet they found the shiny objects of the world to be more valuable than Him. They had reduced God down to a means through which the true desires of their hearts might be obtained. They served God, not because they found Him to be excellent, but because He might give them excellent things.

"For my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water."
JEREMIAH 2:13

If we understand the sin which led to the nation of Israel's scattering by God into the other nations, we might be able to see the glory of God's work in bringing them back. We find this work in Isaiah 60-61. Here Isaiah describes this new people whom the LORD rescued and regathered.

Read Isaiah 60-61

What did the LORD say He would do about the darkness covering the earth? (60:2)

Thick darkness covered the earth, and men knew not the glory of the LORD. But, God would raise up Israel, His people, once again. He promised to gather them from exile and for them to build His city once again. They would shine forth the light of His glory, and when the nations see it they would come to Him.

What did Isaiah say the nations would bring as they came to join the people of God? (60:6b)

Isaiah told of a glorious future for God's people. As they showed brightly in the world, the world came out from all over to praise Israel's God. Through the wealth of the nations, God built Israel up and beautified them (60:7). All those who entered, came through the walls of Salvation by way of the gates called Praise (60:18). This is a city possessed by worshippers and entered by new-worshippers.

How does this city come into existence? How does the light of God shine through this city? We get an explanation in chapter 61. Here, Isaiah referred to the coming servant of the LORD (61:1; see Lu 4:18-19) who would "bring good news, salvation, healing, and deliverance" (61:1-2a). This message and work would have a glorious effect on the people.

What did the LORD promise to do for those who mourn? (61:2b-3a)

What kind of oil would He give to the mourning? (61:3b)

What kind of garments would He give to replace a faint spirit? (61:3c)

What will the glad people who praise God be called? (61:3d)

Who will get credit for the joy of these new people? (61:3e)

God's People Glorify Him

BY JOYFUL WORSHIP

Isaiah foretold of a people who demonstrate God's glory, His greatness, His beauty, and His praiseworthiness by joyfully, praising Him themselves. They sing with joy to Him and of Him. And why would they not? He rescued them. He established them. He dwelled with them. They knew Him in His beauty and He knew them. This good news, this joy, belonged to them. Their mourning had turned to joy, and this act was performed by the LORD. So they sing of His praise. They declare His excellencies and the world takes note.

Like one rejoicing in the deliciousness of a pastry stirs up our appetite for a bite, so the joyful worship of the LORD stirs up the world's appetite for the God of glory. The LORD satisfies His people with His glory, and in joy, they praise His name. By this God's glory shines brightly, the world sees the light of His glory and by great power, God leads them out of darkness and into His marvelous light.

SEEK THE GLORY OF GOD TO ENJOY THE GLORY OF GOD

The call to do all things for the glory of God is not simply a call to perform a duty. If God is truly glorious and in Him, the greatest delight and joy can be found, seeking the glory of God is one end with our joy. God is the highest good; therefore, He is the source of the highest joy and greatest happiness. If you lack joy, seek God. If you desire happiness, turn to God. If you seek him, you will find Him, and when you find Him, He will prove worthy of your pursuit. In Him, your joy will be found, and the sound of your joy will go out into the earth as testimony and declaration of His excellency.

PRAISE AND THANKS

Stop and Think

- *What truth about God has stood out to you most from the text & devotion?*

- *How have you seen God demonstrate this truth in your own life?*

CONFESSION

Stop and Think

- *How has the text and devotion instructed you to act or think?*

- *In what ways have you failed to act in line with these instructions?*

REQUESTS

Stop and Think

- *What changes do you need God to make in your mind and heart so that you might obey more consistently moving forward?*

My soul will be satisfied as with fat and rich food, and my mouth will praise you with joyful lips, when I remember you upon my bed, and meditate on you in the watches of the night; for you have been my help, and in the shadow of your wings I will sing for joy. My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me.

PSALM 63:5-8

Responding in Prayer

ENDURING IN
SUFFERING

I Peter 2:13-3:6; 4:1-11

One of my professors often said, "Your theology determines your philosophy and your philosophy determines your practice." This short expression captures a major concept in the Scriptures. Man's conduct and behavior (practice) flows out of his way of thinking and understanding (philosophy), and his understanding or thinking takes shape by way of his view of God (theology).

Because of this link between theology, philosophy, and practice, Peter like so many other authors of Scripture began with theology. From his theological claims, Peter called the Christians to a distinct way of thinking about who they were and why they existed. For example, Peter called them to think of themselves as sojourners and exiles in a foreign land rather than rebels organizing a revolution against the tyranny of an evil Roman Empire.

Equipped with a right view of God and a renewed way of thinking about themselves and the world around them, Peter turned to give practical instruction suitable for those called by God to the purpose of making His glory known.

We have seen that the church does so by preaching His word with joyful praise before a watching world. Now, we will see that Peter calls the church to one last category of action, suffering.

The church declares the glory of God in the way that they suffer. Peter wrote much about this suffering, and by looking at the different contexts of our suffering, we can learn much.

God's People Glorify Him By...

ENDURING IN SUFFERING

"But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed."

I PETER 4:13

Read I Peter 2:13-25

What did Peter instruct the church to be about authority? (v. 13)

According to Peter, should servants treat unjust authority differently than good authority? (v. 18)

What actions of Jesus might Christians who suffer under unjust authority demonstrate before a watching world? (v. 21-23)

Peter first called the church to subject themselves to the authorities God has placed over them. They should render the same respect and submission to both good and unjust authorities alike. Why should they do so? Because Christ himself did the same.

Jesus subjected Himself to men with wicked hands and evil intentions. By their hands, He suffered death on a cross. He did so all while entrusting Himself to God the Father who stands overall as the one who "judges justly." Rather than raising a violent revolution for the sake of justice, Jesus endured silently in suffering waiting for the Father in His timing to bring about glory. Sure enough, three days after His death, God with great power brought Jesus out of the grave, and in so doing, He vindicated Christ as His beloved and accepted Son. Jesus glorified the Father by enduring the cross, and the Father glorified the Son by raising Him from the dead and exulting Him to the throne above all.

So Christians show the glory of God by enduring suffering while entrusting themselves to the Father. Christians wait and in God's timing, He works to vindicate and glorify them. In their waiting, they walk in the steps given to us as an example by Christ.

Read I Peter 3:1-6

To what kind of husband did Peter call believing wives to subject themselves? (v. 1)

What reasons did Peter give as a motivation for wives to subject themselves to unbelieving husbands? (v.1b)

How did Peter say they might be won? (v.2)

With what did Peter say wives should adorn themselves? (v. 4)

I imagine few callings would surpass in difficulty the call for a believing wife to subject herself to an unbelieving husband. Many of these unbelieving husbands would have been characterized by the practices of the culture - sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry (4:4). Many would have been among those who mocked or even reviled the believers with whom the wives identified.

Yet, Peter urged them to endure while reflecting Jesus' quiet and gentle Spirit as they live before their watching husband with respectful and pure conduct. As wives endure in patient and faithful love toward their unbelieving spouse, the husband might come

to worship God on account of the glory He shines through the wife. A glory that shines even more brightly before the one from whose hand their suffering comes.

Read I Peter 4:1-11

What surprises the world? (v. 4)

What should Christians be and be doing? (v. 7-10)

Peter drew a drastic contrast between the world and the community of exiled Christians. The worldly people gave themselves to the passions of the flesh. The world serves the idol of pleasure. They give themselves to the pursuit of worldly temporary pleasures, and they find it surprising that Christians deny themselves the same. They notice Christians do not join them, and instead, Christians participate in a new community characterized by self-control, sober-mindedness, love, hospitality, and sacrificial service.

This third context for suffering is the endurance of going without meeting our desires and needs for the sake of something greater. That greater or higher pursuit, Peter identifies as the glory of Jesus Christ shining brightly in everything. Christians endure the loss of temporary relief from pain or immediate satisfaction of a craving for the future glory of Christ radiating through them so that the world that once maligned them might come to "live in the Spirit" (v.6, 11).

WILLINGLY ENTER INTO CHRIST'S SUFFERING WITH HOPE OF GLORY

Christians do not suffer for no reason, they suffer to make known the glory of Christ's suffering. John Piper shows us this:

"God intends for the afflictions of Christ to be presented to the world through the afflictions of His people. God really means for the body of Christ, the church, to experience some of the sufferings He experienced so that when we proclaim the Cross as the way to life, people will see the marks of the Cross in us and feel the love of the Cross from us."¹

For the sake of declaring God's excellencies to the world, the church willingly enters affliction as Christ entered the affliction of the cross so that the beauty of Calvary might shine into the darkness and give light to the lost. In this way, God is glorified and men come to see His worth.

PRAISE AND THANKS

Stop and Think

- *What truth about God has stood out to you most from the text & devotion?*

- *How have you seen God demonstrate this truth in your own life?*

CONFESSION

Stop and Think

- *How has the text and devotion instructed you to act or think?*

- *In what ways have you failed to act in line with these instructions?*

REQUESTS

Stop and Think

- *What changes do you need God to make in your mind and heart so that you might obey more consistently moving forward?*

¹John Piper, *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist* (Colorado Springs: Multnomah Books, 2011), 269-70.

Oh sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth! Sing to the Lord, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples! For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; he is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the peoples are worthless idols, but the Lord made the heavens. Splendor and majesty are before him; strength and beauty are in his sanctuary.

PSALM 96:1-6

Responding in Prayer



PREPARING FOR & ENGAGING IN GOOD CONVERSATION

KNOW THE TRUTH

Study

Know the text, listen to the sermon, and invest time in the provided resource.

Write

Jot down a few thoughts of reflection. Try identifying each of the following:

- A truth that stood out to you and why.
- A question you are still wrestling with.
- An action step you need to take.

SPEAK THE TRUTH

Read Together

Look at the Scriptures together. Read a portion of the other resource that stood out to you in a significant way.

Discuss Together

Compare the takeaways you jotted down. Wrestle with the questions you have. Encourage one another in the actions you identified and ask follow-up questions.

Pray Together

How can your CG pray for one another based on what each one shared? Take notes and pray.

Wait Together

Fruitful growth from your investment of time and effort will come slowly. You need to remember that people are not changed in one CG conversation or one study, but those who apply themselves to know the word and to discuss it will see progress.

CELL GROUP CONVERSATIONS

WHAT TRUTH OR STATEMENT DID YOU FIND MOST HELPFUL OR BENEFICIAL FROM THIS WEEK'S STUDY?

WHAT QUESTION(S) DO YOU HAVE AFTER STUDYING THE TEXTS THIS WEEK?

WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE ABOUT YOUR ATTITUDE? YOUR THINKING? AND, YOUR ACTIONS?

HOW MIGHT THIS WEEK'S STUDY ENCOURAGE, CHALLENGE, OR INSTRUCT THOSE IN YOUR CELL GROUP, MISSIONAL COMMUNITY OR FAMILY?



CHRIST
F E L L O W S H I P

NORTHWEST