

HOSTILITY AND HOSPITALITY

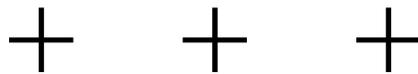
THE SECRET OF LIVING IN AN UNFRIENDLY WORLD

Five Forays into First Peter

A resource for the *Book of Faith* initiative
within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.



book of faith
Open Scripture. Join the Conversation.



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HOSTILITY AND HOSPITALITY

THE SECRET OF LIVING IN AN UNFRIENDLY WORLD

Five Forays into 1 Peter

As Christians who live in America near the beginning of the 21st century, **we do not suffer persecution**. But Christians who lived in Asia Minor at the end of the 1st century did.

There were times when they could be arrested and their property confiscated simply because they dared to stand up for their faith. And if they refused to recant and burn a pinch of incense to Caesar, they could lose it all.

That sort of thing seldom happens today in our culture. Instead what we find is that **the forces that drive our society** subtly—and sometimes not so subtly!—**undermine the values which Christians hold dear**.

The popular media—television and films, slick magazines and tabloid papers, videos and recording artists—set the tone that shapes our culture. It's not that they actually tell us what to think as much as they tell us what to think *about*. And once the issues are defined in certain harmful ways, it is hard to redefine them in more healthy terms.

Then, when we become aware of what is happening around us, **we can feel like strangers in our own land**. Or we will feel as though we have been pushed out, and are now reduced to living as exiles in what has become hostile territory.

Over nineteen centuries ago a handful of Christian communities in what is now Turkey were actually living in strange territory. They were the sort of people who did not belong where they were residing. They were sojourners, living in a cultural exile, at the margins of the predominant social structures.

Whether they were literally subject to legal discrimination is not clear, but they certainly felt the forces that pressure all outsiders. How could they

maintain their integrity and continue to support each other? These were real issues for them. They needed ways to counter the hostility without turning belligerent themselves.

Tucked in the back of the New Testament is a surprising document that helped them in the midst of their uncertainty. **1 Peter is a short letter** only five chapters long in our Bibles. You can read it easily in half an hour.

Its author wrote in the name of Peter, the chief among Jesus' twelve closest disciples. It is unlikely, however, that Peter actually penned this epistle; more likely the author, writing from 20 to 40 years after Peter's martyrdom, admired the famous apostle and chose to credit him with these teachings.

The question of **how the church should relate to the larger society has always been troublesome** for conscientious Christians. At one extreme are those small groups or sects who see the world as completely evil and who therefore try to remain as separate or aloof as possible. At the other extreme are those who seem completely comfortable with the standards of their society and who therefore seldom find any reason to distance themselves.

Most of us are somewhere in between. We may admire many of the principles that undergird our American culture—democratic traditions, respect for individual worth, opportunities to achieve and succeed, a right to privacy, a legal presumption of innocence, charitable and philanthropic organizations, freedoms of religion and speech and press, advances in medicine and technology, the right to peaceful assembly, and so forth.

At the same time we may regret other trends—racial prejudice, poverty and hunger, the decline of our central cities, pornography, political

corruption, capitalistic selfishness, growing economic disparity between upper and lower classes, and the like. Pulled in several directions, we may wonder whether or how our Christian faith impacts our daily living.

1 Peter offers helpful insights. It charts a course for people like us who know we cannot be completely at home in our society, but it does not encourage us to withdraw. Instead, it advocates a way in which Christians can engage and impact our culture from our particular perspective as a special people.

Because we are grouped together within the household of faith, we have all the resources Christians need to live as God's chosen people. We stand convinced that Christ's death and resurrection have established a new situation, and through Baptism we have been constituted as a new community.

This new context now determines how we value ourselves, how we live in our families, how we behave in our communities, and how we structure our churches.

No ancient document can ever fit our modern context one-hundred percent, of course. And we cannot expect everything in 1 Peter to speak directly to us today. But we can dare to make honest excursions into the text, confident that both its rhetoric and its message will continue to resonate with us.

This series of exercises in reading 1 Peter has been prepared in connection with the **BOOK OF FAITH INITIATIVE**, a movement within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Its goal is to enable our people to become "more fluent in the first language of our faith, the language of Scripture."

The initiative is based on the idea that we can read the biblical documents from four perspectives: "literary," "historical," "theological" and "devotional." Attention to these will keep us from thinking of the Bible as an "answer book" for our questions. Instead, reading the Scriptures will

become the means by which we are drawn into a relationship with the living God.

Literary analysis of discursive materials focuses on the content of the document's message. Ask: How can we outline the author's argument? What supporting evidence is used? Does the author appeal to personal experiences? Are quotations from the Old Testament brought into play? Can we detect any Greco-Roman or Jewish rhetorical devices?

Historical analysis focuses on the context in which the narrative originated. Ask: Who wrote this? When? Where? Why? To whom? Did the author use other sources? Does it agree with, or contradict, other writings? How would it have been understood and used by its original readers?

Theological analysis explores the ongoing teachings or message of the text. Do we hear a text as Law, or as Gospel? Is it a word of command and condemnation, or promise and hope? Also, how does it apply to our personal, family and churchly lives? And how does it apply to our community, social and political lives?

Devotional analysis connects our Bible study with our prayer life. Does a passage call us to repentance? Or to action on behalf of our neighbor? Does it help us feel closer to God? Does it lift our spirits, and offer comfort or encouragement?

The **forty discussion starters** which follow are not actually a running commentary on 1 Peter; rather, they are meant to provoke reflection and conversation. Do not feel obligated to respond to all of them. Some you may want to skip; some may ignite extended discussion

So as we study 1 Peter together in our homes or in small groups, let us pray that God's Spirit will lead us to realize more clearly what an elect and chosen people we are. And let us trust that Christ will help us practice that greater hospitality which will prove to be a blessing in our families, in our communities, and in our congregations.

— Pr. Mark I. Wegener (revised, 2012)

FIRST FORAY — 1 PETER 1:1-12

CHRIST IN THE STRUGGLE

Almighty God, by our baptism into the death and resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ, you turn us from the old life of sin. Grant that we who are reborn to new life in him may live in righteousness and holiness all our days, through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. [ELW, prayer #348] *

Read 1 Peter 1:1-2.

These two verses make up the *salutation* of the letter, which typically names the writer and the recipients, and which includes a short greeting. Although those who received this letter were mostly Gentiles, that is, non-Jews, “Peter” addresses them as “the Dispersion.” This refers to the seventy years after 586 BCE when Jerusalem was captured and the ancient Jewish people lived in exile in Babylon. (In the closing verses, 1 Peter 5:13, the author says he writes from “Babylon,” which in all likelihood means from the city of Rome.) Like those ancient Jews, these 1st century Christians felt exiled.

- (1) Look on a map or atlas and find the five territories listed in 1:1. Notice that this region includes the northern half of the central mountainous highlands of the Anatolian peninsula, rather than the more urban centers on the coasts where Christian churches were established early on by Paul and others.
- (2) Note how the salutation introduces two themes—the chosen-ness of the people, and the death (or the “blood”) of Christ—which will appear again and again in the rest of the letter. Be prepared to look for them as you continue reading.

Read 1 Peter 1:3-12.

These verses make up the formal *introduction* (technically known as a *proemium*) to the theme of the letter. They take the form of a *blessing*, and they are actually one single long, complicated sentence! Our English Bibles help us by marking the natural breaks at the beginning of 1:6 & 10. “Salvation” is a key term in each section (3:5, 9, 10).

- (3) How this “salvation” originated is explained in 1:3-5, namely, by God’s action (not ours) as he “gave us a new birth.” How do people commonly understand that phrase—“new birth” or “rebirth” or “born anew”?
- (4) Some of the emotions which even suffering believers can experience as a result of knowing they are “saved” are suggested in 1:6-9. Can you name several of those feelings?
- (5) The conclusion in 1:10-12 says that God’s ancient prophecies anticipated the suffering of Christ, which brought about our “salvation.” *Without reading ahead* in 1 Peter, can you guess which Old Testament stories or passages might fit here?
- (6) In ancient times “salvation” primarily referred to “healing” or to being “rescued” from a life-threatening situation. Thus Asclepius, the Greek god of healing, was often referred to simply as “the savior.” Christians also came to use the term “salvation” to refer to that ultimate deliverance that Christ will accomplish when he returns at the End of Time. How is the term used in this passage? If the present time is a time of suffering, is Christ in the struggle? And if so, how?

* All prayers are from *Evangelical Lutheran Worship: Leaders Desk Edition*
(Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2006) pp. 140-160.

SECOND FORAY — 1 PETER 1:13-2:10

THE STRUGGLE IN OUR SELVES

Gracious and holy God, give us diligence to seek you, wisdom to perceive you, and patience to wait for you. Grant us, O God, minds to meditate on you, eyes to behold you, ears to listen for your word, hearts to love you, and lives to proclaim you; through the power of the Spirit Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen. [ELW, prayer #280]

1 Peter can be divided into three main sections. The first of those sections, 1:13-2:10, helps us understand that we are special people, called by God, set aside as holy. Keep in mind that originally “holy” means “to be set aside as special”; only in a derived sense does “holy” come to mean “perfect” or “sinless.” This section helps us get our bearings by assuring us that we are God’s special, holy, elect people. Therefore, we are called to live our lives, to behave in ways that reflect our special-ness, our holiness.

- (7) Old Testament passages are quoted half a dozen times in this section. It’s always a good idea to check them out. When you read them, see if they have been modified or changed in any way when they are quoted in 1 Peter.

Leviticus 19:2, in 1:15

Isaiah 40:6-8, in 1:24-25

Isaiah 28:16, in 2:6

Psalms 118:22, in 2:7

Isaiah 8:14, in 2:8

Hosea 1:9 & 2:23, in 2:10

Read 1 Peter 1:13-2:3.

- (8) The subsection 1:13-21 is framed by the references to “hope” in 1:14 & 21. Quick: In whom are we to place our hopes?
- (9) More importantly, summarize how God’s gift of Christ is described in vv. 17-21. The images remind us of the Passover lamb that was slaughtered when the Israelites were saved from their slavery in a foreign land (see Exodus 12:1-28, esp. v. 5) and chosen by God to be his special people.
- (10) The next subsection, 1:22-2:3, is framed by references to “new birth” in 1:23 & 2:2. In what ways are we like “born anew” or “newborn” infants?
- (11) Many readers have noticed how often we seem to spot references to Baptism in 1 Peter. Some have even speculated that parts of this letter may have originated as a sermon preached when people were baptized. One intriguing idea suggests that the baptism would have occurred between v. 21 and v. 22. Try rereading this section, with 1:13-21 as the pre-baptism instruction, and 1:22-2:3 as the post-baptism exhortation. What do you think of this idea?

Read 1 Peter 2:4-10.

- (12) The subsection 2:4-8 is based on a “building” metaphor. Believers are “built” into a house that centered on a “living stone” which is Christ. What does this idea convey about your participation in a Christian community?
- (13) The closing verses of this entire section, 2:9-10, pile up a series of grand titles for the Christian community. According to these verses, who are you, and what is your purpose?

In today's world it is easy for us to feel that we are anonymous and unimportant cogs caught in the middle of conflicting pressures from family and friends, work and school. We are supposed to improve ourselves, do better than others, and succeed. Then we can claim, "We're Number One!" We never quite make it, though, and we can always see other people who are performing better than we are. The result is we forfeit our sense of self-worth and our feelings of importance. 1 Peter challenges that self-understanding. Here we learn we are special, holy, elect, God's own people.

- (14) Name two or three of the factors in your own life that tend to put you down.
- (15) Where do you find your sense of self-worth affirmed?

THIRD FORAY — 1 PETER 2:11-3:12

THE STRUGGLE IN OUR HOUSEHOLDS

Triune God, whose will it is that humans live in community; bless family life everywhere and fill all homes with respect, joy, laughter, and prayer. Strengthen the commitment of husbands and wives to one another, that we may mirror your covenant faithfulness; pour out your Spirit on parents, that through them their children may taste your unconditional love; and empower all family members to live in your grace and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. [ELW prayer #332]

The second main section of this letter, 2:11-4:11, begins by addressing the “beloved” (2:11) and closes with praise to God and a final “Amen” (4:11). This section is divided into two distinct portions: 2:11-3:12 lists the code of conduct for the members of a Christian household, and 3:13-4:11 tells how a Christian community should conduct itself.

The list of household duties is carefully structured. It begins with an introduction (2:11-12); continues with instructions for citizens (2:13-17), slaves (2:18-25), wives (3:1-6) and husbands (3:7); and ends with a formal conclusion (3:8-12).

Roman society was built on the family; if its families were strong, the empire would remain strong. Just as the emperor protected the welfare of the entire empire, so the father of the family determined the welfare of his entire household—spouse(s), children, and domestic slaves. Romans were suspicious of strange religions; they worried that alien cults with strange gods might undermine patriotic reverence for the emperor, and that unorthodox ethics might condone immorality and undermine the family structure.

Read 1 Peter 2:11-3:12.

- (16) The introduction and conclusion, 2:11-12 & 3:8-12, insist that Christians must live so honorably that their neighbors will not have any reason to discredit them. If their/our neighbors *do* malign them/us, how are they/we to respond?
- (17) Responding honorably to those who may be mistreating you is easier said than done. Everyone has to submit to the civil authorities; that’s a given. But Christians, according to 2:13-17, think of themselves paradoxically both as “slaves of God” and also as “free people.” How can we apply that ancient “imperial” attitude in a modern “democratic” state?
- (18) As despicable as we think of slavery today, 2000 years ago it was largely unquestioned. No biblical writer condemned slavery; instead they urged slaves to submit to their owners no matter what. Before the Civil War, American slaves were forced to listen to sermons by white preachers on texts like this. Is there any way the instructions in 2:18-25 can speak to us today?
- (19) Notice how deftly the author switches from the subject of slavery to the subject of unjust suffering, and then—*via* a reflection on Isaiah 53:4-9 and a quote from v. 9—to the subject of Jesus’ suffering. Now does the passage apply more easily to us today?
- (20) Today the advice given to wives in 3:1-6 may seem one-sided and chauvinistic. But in Roman times if a wife would adopt a strange religion, her “disobedience” might undermine her family’s unity. To what extent is the apostle’s advice back then helpful for women today?

- (21) After a whole paragraph for wives, only one sentence for husbands! Yet it may have seemed like a radical move for husbands to think of the females in their households as their “co-dwellers” and as “co-heirs” of God’s gift of life. What do you think: Is this a good basis for husbands and wives to relate together today? And in what sense could/can a woman be thought of as a “weaker vessel”?
- (22) This section ends, as do several others in 1 Peter, with a scriptural quotation, in this case Psalm 34:12-16. Notice the reference to “doing good”—in contrast to “doing evil”—and how frequently that theme appears in 1 Peter (e.g. 2:12, 2:14-15, 2:20, 3:6, 3:13, 3:16-17, 4:19). What does this imply for us “do-gooders” today?

Studies beyond number have tried to explore the how’s and why’s of the changing family in America. You recognize a hot-button issue here: “family values.” Our families are, by definition, the people toward whom we feel loyalty, with whom we derive identity, among whom we share and shape our stories and values.

You have to spend time together to be family, and what seems to be eroding so quickly in recent decades is the amount of time families are allowed to share. Often the key factor in the formation of our families is economics, because the pressures of earning a living reduce the time spouses and parents and children have for each other

- (23) Today the struggle to preserve our families is not so much a conflict with outside forces (as it was for the original readers of 1 Peter) as it is a conflict with our internal values. What priorities do we need to maintain if we really want to strengthen our families?

FOURTH FORAY — 1 PETER 3:13-4:11

THE STRUGGLE IN OUR CHURCH

Gracious Father, we pray for your holy catholic Church. Fill it with all truth and peace. Where it is corrupt, purify it; where it is in error, direct it; where in anything it is amiss, reform it; where it is right, strengthen it; where it is in need, provide for it; where it is divided, reunite it; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. [ELW prayer #216]

As we said, the middle section of 1 Peter is divided into two halves. The first half, 2:11-3:12, contained an outline of household duties. The second half, 3:13-4:11, contains two of the most difficult passages in the New Testament: the references to Christ “preaching to the spirits in prison” (3:19) and proclaiming “the gospel to the dead” (4:6). More importantly, this section helps Christian people understand how they are to conduct themselves hospitably within the church, especially if they are experiencing opposition or suffering.

Read 1 Peter 3:13-17 & 4:1-6.

The overarching theme of these subsections is how Christians endure suffering. The discussion digresses to several related topics—the sufferings of Christ, his preaching to “the spirits in prison” and/or to the dead, the role of Baptism—which we will consider at the proper time, but the main point of the whole portion is about how Christians will treat each other within the church, even though at the same time they are running into outward opposition.

- (24) In 3:13-17 the readers of 1 Peter are encouraged not to feel intimidated by outside opponents, but to be ready to confess their faith in appropriate ways. This might have meant a formal legal defense in a court of law! What intimidates us today? And what are some appropriate ways we can “defend the hope that is within us”?
- (25) It has been suggested that you could skip from 3:17 straight to 4:1 without noticing that anything was missing. Some of the Christians in Asia Minor could have belonged to clubs or guilds or religions organizations whose assemblies included wild drinking parties and questionable sexual practices. God will judge them in due time, says the author in 4:1-5, but for you Christians such behavior is a thing of the past. What about us today? Do we have to give up any outside associations in order to be part of the church?

Read 1 Peter 3:18-22.

This is the most difficult passage in 1 Peter, and the questions it raises will never be answered with complete satisfaction. Is Christ’s journey to the spirits in prison (3:19) related to the phrase “he descended to Hades” in the Apostles’ Creed? And if so, does this refer to the “souls” of all who have died in the past, or just to the righteous people of Old Testament times, or just to the people of Noah’s generation? Did he preach salvation or condemnation? Or does this refer to the “evil spirits” who were thought to inhabit the heavenly realms, or to the “sons of God” who cohabited with earthly women before the flood (Genesis 6:1-8), or to the rebellious angels in Jewish legends and the non-biblical *Book of Enoch*? By what logic does the author get from Christ’s suffering, to the “imprisoned spirits,” to Noah’s flood, to baptism?

The following overly literal translation of these verses assumes that the “spirits” are not the souls of the dead, but the fallen angelic powers of all ages, over whom the risen Christ proclaimed his victory.

Furthermore, this reconstruction assumes that 3:18 & 22 are part of an early Christian liturgical piece, and that 3:19-21 (in *italics*) have been inserted to emphasize baptism.

¹⁸Since Christ died once-for-all for sins,
(the) righteous on-behalf-of (the) unrighteous,
in order that you might-be-brought-forward to God,
put-to-death, indeed, by [human] flesh
but made-alive by [God's] Spirit . . .

¹⁹*by whom, also, having-gone to the spirits in prison he preached,*
²⁰*since back-then they [i.e. the "imprisoned spirits"] disobeyed,*
when the patience of God kept-waiting in the days of Noah
while-constructing an ark in which a few, that is, eight souls,
were saved-up through water;

²¹*which also (is) an anti-type (that) now saves youCbaptism,*
not (as) a putting-off of the filth of flesh,
rather, (as) an appeal to God (from) a good conscience,
through (the) resurrection of Jesus Christ.

. . . ²²who is at the right-side of God,
having gone into heaven
and having subjected to himself angels and authorities and powers.

This interpretation will not satisfy all readers, and you may wish to disagree with it. But it helps us focus on the overall purpose of this passage, namely, to connect its readers (who are suffering) with Christ (who also suffered) in such a way that they will see their own baptisms as a means by which they share in Christ's resurrection victory over evil powers.

- (26) Notice how this entire argument—as difficult and convoluted as it may seem!—is rooted in the key events in Christ's life. Can you match up phrases that correspond to his passion, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, and session?
- (27) The reference to Noah, the flood and the ark in 3:20 is not entirely clear. Usually we think of the ark as the means by which God saved Noah's family from the waters of the flood; the author of 1 Peter suggests that the flood waters were the means by which God saved Noah's group from. . . . From what?
- (28) According to 3:21, the flood waters are an "antitype" which corresponds to baptism, and, in the phraseology of the old King James Bible, "baptism doth also now save us." This reference to baptism is thrown in so casually, it is obvious that the readers of 1 Peter must have been quite clear about the saving importance of this sacramental ritual. Are we as clear about this today? Reflect on what it means for us to be "saved" in baptism.

The closing verse of this section, 4:6, seems just as difficult as 3:18-22, as though it referred to preaching the gospel to those who died long ago. But more likely this is a reference to those *Christians* who have died.

After announcing, in 4:4-5, God's end-time judgment on those who bad mouth the Christians' new behavior, the author reminds his readers that those Christians who have heard the gospel and who have since died will in fact live. Even though they may have been judged or condemned by their human "fleshly" opponents, they will live by the power of their Aspiritual@ God.

- (29) Ultimate vindication and life—that’s what 1 Peter offers to Christians who live in a hostile environment. Does that thought strike us as encouraging and uplifting today? And if so, how *exactly* does that work?

Read 1 Peter 4:7-11.

After going to great lengths to show how oppressed Christians can conduct themselves in a hostile environment, the author of 1 Peter takes just a few lines to suggest how they should behave among themselves. But this section, brief as it is, may actually be more important than what precedes it, for it describes the environment within which outsiders can feel at home.

- (30) The key term is “hospitality” in 4:9. Make a list of the many ways such hospitality can be shown within the Christian community.
- (31) “Love covers a multitude of sins” in 4:8 means, “when you truly love others you will forgive a lot of their sins”; not, “if you love others enough, God will forgive your sins.” Do you agree, or not?

When Christians are gathered and grouped together, we most often refer to ourselves as “church” (*ecclesia*); sometimes we think of ourselves as a “community” or “fellowship” (*koinonia*), or as an “assembly” or “congregation” (*synagogue*). But all these terms are conspicuous by their absence from 1 Peter! Rather, the author seems to think of the Christian community as a “household.”

The elect are built into a “spiritual house” (2:5); the slaves mentioned in the list of duties are actually domestics or “household servants” (2:18), not field hands; the “stewards” of God’s graces (4:10) are really “house managers.” The phrase “household of God” (4:17) perhaps best summarizes the concept of Christian community in 1 Peter. No doubt a “hospitable household” would have been a welcome refuge for people who thought of themselves as “aliens” or “exiles” or “strangers” or “sojourners” (1:1 & 17, 2:11).

- (32) What would change if we were to think of our congregations as “households”? What would change if our chief ministry were defined in terms of showing hospitality to strangers and guests?

It is hard to separate the issues that are “out there” in the world from the issues that are important “in here” within the church. So the struggles we have wherever we are will likely be played out to some degree within our family of faith. We can expect to struggle in the church. But at the same time we would also like our church to be a place of refuge, an oasis of calm away from the battles of life. So it is doubly important that we treat each other in the style outlined in 4:7-11.

- (33) What are some of the issues we can identify that can create difficulties both within and without the “household of God”?
- (34) How should we deal with these controversial matters? Should we meet them head on? Should we agree to disagree? Should we ignore them as much as possible?

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FIFTH FORAY — 1 PETER 4:12-5:14

THE STRUGGLE IN OUR COMMUNITY

Lord God, you call your people to honor those in authority. Help us elect trustworthy leaders, participate in wise decisions for our common life, and serve our neighbors in local communities. Bless the leaders of our land, that we may be at peace among ourselves and a blessing to other nations of the earth; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen. [ELW prayer #291]

Like the section which preceded it, the last section of this letter, 4:12-5:11, begins by addressing the “beloved” (4:12) and closes with praise to God and a final “Amen” (5:11). It is divided into two portions: another discussion of what it means to suffer as a Christian (4:12-19), and further instructions for the church (5:1-11). Both of these subjects were treated in the previous section. There we focused on the churchly side of the Christians’ struggles; in this section we will focus on how those struggles are played out in the larger community, in the public arena.

Read 1 Peter 4:12-19.

- (35) Clearly the readers of 1 Peter were suffering public opposition not only because their behavior was different from their neighbors, but also, according to 4:14 & 16, simply because they were identified with the name “Christ.” Today the title “Christian” is common and inoffensive. But it appears only three times in the New Testament, here and in Acts 11:26 & 26:28; in each case it is an insult, as if to say sarcastically, “These people are ‘Christ-lackeys.’” What has changed for us today? Is there any sense in which being identified with Christ would make us offensive to the community in which we live?
- (36) Proverbs 31:11 (in a version different from our English translations of the Hebrew Old Testament) underscores a warning in 4:17-19 that divine judgment will begin for those in the “household of God.” If this warning were for us, what sorts of behavior would we need to be cautioned against?

Read 1 Peter 5:1-11.

- (37) In 5:1-4 the language shifts from “household of God” to “flock of God.” The presbyters or elders are to “shepherd the sheep,” not by issuing heavy-handed orders, but by being supportive examples. From your own history—and without gossiping!—what has been your experience with pastors in your own congregation?
- (38) Proverbs 3:34 supports the advice in 5:5-6 that all, especially the younger people, accept the pastoring of the elders with humility. What do you think of that?
- (39) 1 Peter closes in 5:7-10 with a final reminder to trust God’s grace and watch out for the enemy! Although lions do not roar while they are on the hunt, prowling for food, we get the point of the warning. What should we watch out for today? Be as specific as you can.

Read 1 Peter 5:12-14.

These three verses make up the typical *closing* of a letter. It names the otherwise unknown Silvanus who carried the letter from church to church. It summarizes the content of the letter as a combination of exhortation and testimony.

It sends greetings, and encourages those who receive it to greet each other with a kiss, which would be typical of a family or household. The closing rounds off the transaction begun in the salutation. There in 1:1-2 the letter was sent to the elect in the Dispersion with a prayer for peace; here in 5:12-14 it comes from the elect in Babylon, again with a prayer for peace.

(40) What is your closing greeting for those who have been studying 1 Peter with you?

During the time we have been discussing these forty questions about 1 Peter. Our goal has been to understand more clearly how we can live as a distinctively Christian community or household within a cultural environment that often works according to a different set of values. We have seen that 1 Peter offers a vision in which we are called as an elect people to form ourselves into a household which will practice hospitality, even though we may live in the midst of hostility in our surrounding society. That is how we account for the struggle to maintain our integrity in ourselves, our families, our churches, and our communities.

(41) Finally, let's talk about where we should go from here. How can we keep on supporting each other within our household of faith? How best can we share our hospitality with those who are outside and who feel estranged and alienated? If we can become clear about this, we will have defined the shape of our ministry for the future.