

GET INTO THE STUDY



5 minutes

DISCUSS: Draw attention to the picture on **PSG page 136** and ask **Question #1: When have you said, “There’s no place like home”?**

GUIDE: Direct attention to **The Bible Meets Life** on **PSG, page 137**, to the author’s experience of living in many different houses over the course of his life. Note his statement, “When you move a lot, it’s difficult to determine where ‘home’ really is.”

SAY: “Today we will look at what it means for believers to live as strangers and exiles from the perspective that this world is not our home.”

Reinforce **The Point** on **PSG page 137: Our lives in this world should reflect our eternal home.**

PRAY: Begin the Bible study with prayer. Ask God to teach us to live our lives in such a way that we demonstrate the values of our eternal home.

SESSION 5

I AM JUST PASSING THROUGH



The Point

Our lives in this world should reflect our eternal home.

The Bible Meets Life

We all have a place we call home; it shows up on legal documents as our place of residence. Even though we may live there all our lives, that place is temporary for the

follower of Christ. We have a permanent, eternal home in Christ. While we have obligations related to our current residence, we can live our lives in such a way to remind ourselves and others that we have a greater home in Christ.

The Passage

1 Peter 2:11-17

The Setting

In one sense, the home of Peter’s first readers was Asia Minor. We know the region as modern Turkey. In another sense, Peter’s readers were foreigners in this world and to this world’s system. They faced many pressures and temptations in their culture. They needed to know how to live with integrity as good witnesses whose lives would glorify God and reflect their eternal home with Him. Peter wrote to help them meet this challenge.

1 Peter 2:11-12

11 Dear friends, I urge you as strangers and exiles to abstain from sinful desires that wage war against the soul.

12 Conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles, so that when they slander you as evildoers, they will observe your good works and will glorify God on the day he visits.

KEY WORDS: **The Gentiles** (v. 12)—A term Peter used to refer to unbelievers in the culture generally, since he referred to believers with terms usually applied to Israel (1 Pet. 2:9).

The day he visits (v. 12)—Probably refers to the day of “his ‘coming’ ” (2 Pet. 3:3-10), the day of final glorification for believers and final condemnation for unbelievers.

1 ▶ **Verse 11.** While we live as **strangers and exiles** in this world we have the responsibility of representing our eternal King well. The idea of God’s people being strangers in a land that is not their home has deep roots in the Old Testament. Jacob and his sons were strangers in Egypt. Later, the people of Israel were strangers and exiles in Babylon. The Book of Daniel recounts stories from the Babylonian exile. Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego experienced being strangers in a foreign land. Their homeland was Judea, but they were living in Babylon.

Today, Americans residing abroad experience being “strangers” in a foreign land. Most of them look forward to being back on American soil after their sojourn away. Citizens of other countries who are residing in America often feel the same way about their homelands.

As believers, we live in this world now, but we are “temporary residents on the earth ... seeking a homeland ... a better place—a heavenly one” (Heb. 11:13-16). “Our citizenship is in heaven” (Phil. 3:20). Jesus has gone there to prepare a place for us (John 14:2-3). Our home is with Him. ◀

2 ▶ While we are in this world we are to abstain from some things and embrace others. We are to **abstain from sinful desires**. This world confronts us with many temptations, but the greatest dangers are within us. Wealth, status, and forbidden pleasures tempt us because of our own sinful desires. Sexual immorality, excessive food and drink, and acts of revenge would have no appeal for us apart from the “desires of the flesh” (2 Pet. 2:10).

STUDY THE BIBLE

1 Peter 2:11-12



10 minutes

SUMMARIZE: Before reading the passage, set the context by summarizing the information in **The Setting** on page 142.

READ: Read or ask a volunteer to read 1 Peter 2:11-12.

GUIDE: Refer group members to **PSG pages 138-139**, to the author’s story flying to the wrong destination. Point out his observation: “The same is true with our lives on this earth. Our stay in this present world is merely a temporary layover; our ultimate destination is ‘a new heaven and a new earth’ ” (Rev. 21:1).


SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible Commentary 1** to explain what it means for believers to live as strangers and exiles in this world. Ask for volunteers to read the following verses that support this viewpoint:

- *Hebrews 11:13-16*
- *Philippians 3:20*
- *John 14:2-3*

LEADER PACK: Display **Item 10: Strangers** and compare how strangers are treated today with how strangers were treated in biblical times.

STRANGERS

BIBLICAL TIMES		OUR TIMES
<input type="checkbox"/>	Refugee	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Foreigner	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Nomadic	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Sojourner	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Migrant	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Desperate	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Uncertain	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Hopeful	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Welcomed	<input type="checkbox"/>
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DISCUSS: Question #2
(PSG, p. 139): What are the practical implications of living as strangers and exiles?

SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible Commentary 2** on page 143 and this page to learn what it means to “abstain from sinful desires.”

SAY: “In the war against sinful desires, some people are carried away into chronic sin.”

GUIDE: Use **KEY WORDS** on page 143 (**PSG, p. 138**) to explain the phrase *the Gentiles*.

Imagine, for example, that in Babylon Daniel had desired earthly life more than he desired to honor God. If that had been the case, avoiding the lions’ den would have been easy for him. From an eternal perspective, however, there would have been greater danger in staying out of the lions’ den than in being thrown into it.

The danger of sinful desires is real because they **wage war against the soul**. That is, they can do great damage to and even destroy the soul. Though you have been redeemed from “the desires of your former ignorance” (1 Pet. 1:14), you still have a battle to fight with them. In fact, you and I are probably more aware of the conflict with sinful desires as believers than we ever were before we belonged to Christ. Feeling the conflict intensely is a common experience for people serious about growing in godliness. We should expect the conflict and be vigilant.

In the war against sinful desires, some people are overcome and carried away into chronic sin. They are in danger. They may be revealing about themselves that they don’t really belong to Christ or have a home in heaven after all (2 Pet. 2:20-22; Gal. 5:19-21). Even if they do truly belong to Christ, they are compromising their witness in the eyes of others. Other people will observe their lives and ask, “Why should we take them or their beliefs seriously?” ◀

3 ▶ Verse 12. Instead of succumbing to sinful desires, you are to embrace virtue. That is, you are to **conduct yourselves honorably**. Earlier, Peter urged believers “to be holy in all your conduct” (1 Pet. 1:15). We are to live lives of kindness, respect, purity, and helpfulness in this world. We are to be honorable men and women in our communities and work places where we are **among the Gentiles**. When Peter referred to “the Gentiles,” he was referring to the many unbelievers among whom his readers were living. Believers in Christ are “a holy nation” (2:9), a new Israel. As believers, we are to represent our God in the sight of the unbelievers among the nations, “the Gentiles.”

Though your conduct is honorable, some of “the Gentiles” might **slander you as evildoers**. Slander is never fair. Peter’s readers were being treated unfairly at times. Their values were different from the culture at large. They did not worship the pagan gods. They did not agree with pagan moral norms. Unsurprisingly, many people viewed them as misfits and problems in society. They were unfairly criticized and maligned.

When we do not embrace the culture's moral norms, we may be labeled bigots, narrow minded, haters, and enemies of societal progress. It is unfair, but not new and should not be surprising. In fact, the situation presents an opportunity. Slanderers and opponents and others **will observe our good works**. Some will take note of our integrity, purity, courage, and reliability. They will see that we help our neighbors, give generously, and love and serve even our enemies.

Because of believers' honorable lives and good works, unbelievers will **glorify God on the day he visits**. Peter seems at this point to be echoing Jesus' words: "let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven" (Matt. 5:16). "The day he visits" probably refers to "the day of the Lord" (2 Pet. 3:10) when Christ will come.

How did Peter expect people who had been evildoers to glorify God? Some interpreters believe Peter was referring to unbelievers glorifying God when they are under judgment. The idea is that though they are condemned, unbelievers will bow before God and acknowledge to their shame and His glory that they were wrong to slander believers.

Other interpreters believe Peter referred here to former unbelievers glorifying God because they had been converted and had believed in Christ. They may once have been slanderers, but having observed believers' lives and deeds they were saved and joyfully glorify Him in the end. This seems to me to be in keeping with the spirit of Jesus' words in Matthew 5:16. It is also in keeping with the New Testament link between glorifying God and salvation (Rom. 15:7-9).

Be encouraged in doing good works that point to Christ. They will not go unnoticed. Our deeds can have eternal affects on other peoples' lives! ◀

SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible**

Commentary 3 to explain why it's important for believers to conduct themselves honorably among unbelievers.

SAY: "When we do not embrace the culture's moral norms, we may be labeled bigots, narrow minded, haters, and enemies of societal progress. It is unfair, but these labels are not new and should not be surprising. In fact, the situation presents an opportunity: others will observe our good works. Some will take note of our integrity, purity, courage, and reliability. They will see that we help others, give generously, and love our enemies."

DISCUSS: Question #3

(PSG, p. 140): How does knowing you are just passing through in this life motivate you to live for Christ instead of the world?

(Alternate: What are some ways Christians can become too comfortable living here?)

TRANSITION: "In the next verses we discover a command that may seem counter-intuitive to us but is consistent with conducting ourselves in an honorable way in this world that is not our home."

STUDY THE BIBLE

1 Peter 2:13-15



10 minutes

READ: Read or ask a volunteer to read 1 Peter 2:13-15.

GUIDE: Refer group members to the list regarding authority on **PSG page 141:**

- children under parents
- students under teachers
- workers under supervisors
- church members under church leaders.
- citizens under governments

SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible Commentary 4** to explain the importance of submitting to authorities and what the limit is on our submission:

- Note that the emperor at that time was Nero, who persecuted believers.
- We have the same responsibility to submit to government authorities.
- We see several examples in the Old Testament of civil disobedience.

1 Peter 2:13-15

13 Submit to every human authority because of the Lord, whether to the emperor as the supreme authority

14 or to governors as those sent out by him to punish those who do what is evil and to praise those who do what is good.

15 For it is God's will that you silence the ignorance of foolish people by doing good.

4 ▶ **Verses 13-14.** As a part of living honorably in this world, believers are to **submit to every human authority**. The reason for our submission to human authorities or institutions is not that the authorities are more important than we are. Neither is it that they are more powerful than we are, though in some ways they probably are. Instead, we submit **because of the Lord**. It is the Lord's desire and command for us to submit rightly to earthly authorities. We submit to them because we submit to Him.

Imagine a mother talking with her child who has disobeyed a school teacher. The child may say, "I'll obey you at home, mommy, but not my teacher at school. I don't want to be in her class. I won't obey her." The wise mother responds, "In obeying your teacher at school you are obeying me. You are to respect and obey her out of respect for me."

Peter first named **the emperor as the supreme authority** in the Roman governmental framework. The emperor of Rome when Peter wrote this letter was Nero. Peter then referred to **governors as those sent out** by the emperor. Pilate is a New Testament example of a governor.

In America, we don't have an emperor. We have a president and governors. Unlike most of Peter's early readers, we have the privilege of participating in selection of our human authorities. Just like Peter's early readers, we have the responsibility of submitting rightly to authorities.

We may be able to see many flaws in governmental authorities. Nero and Pilate had many flaws for Peter to see. Pilate knew Jesus was innocent of crimes against Rome, but was a coward in the face of mob pressure and condemned Him to crucifixion. Nero was no less corrupt. He grew increasingly cruel over the course of his reign. When Peter was writing this letter, Nero's flaws were already on display.

Peter nonetheless required submission. This should lead us to be very cautious about appealing to flaws in leaders as justification for a refusal to submit to their authority.

Though human authorities are flawed, an important purpose of human government is **to punish those who do what is evil and to praise those who do what is good**. The apostles were unified in valuing this function. Paul taught in Romans 13:1-7 that if we do good, the norm will be for us to have the government's approval. On the other hand, the government is God's instrument to punish wrongdoers. Morally and philosophically flawed leaders may still have a net good effect on a society.

The Bible recognizes limits on obeying human authorities. In Egypt, Pharaoh commanded the Hebrew midwives to kill newly born male children. The midwives disobeyed the command because they feared God (Ex. 1:15-17). God was pleased with them. Hundreds of years later in Babylon, a powerful earthly king commanded Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to fall down and worship a gold statue. They refused (Dan. 3:16-18). God was pleased with them.

So, what is the limit on submission to human governmental authorities? If obeying a human authority means disobeying God, we are to obey God. Barring such unusual circumstances, believers are to submit to government authorities. ◀

5 ▶ Verse 15. Again, Peter pressed home the reason for submission: **it is God's will**. Our ultimate allegiance is to God, not to Caesar or to a president. Submission to the authorities God has placed over us is an act of submission to Him. We obey government authorities because we obey God.

It is God's will that through consistent submission to authorities **you silence the ignorance of foolish people by doing good**. In Peter's day, critics and slanderers made much of Christians not participating in idolatrous sacrifices and civic and social events that were morally off limits to believers. These slanders ignorantly labeled Christians troublemakers, societal problems, and even anarchists. The fact is that sincere Christians are great assets to any society. Peter envisioned that by obeying just laws and living honorably as citizens and residents, believers would show that the inaccurate criticisms against them were baseless.

Peter was not teaching that if we do what is right, we will always sway public opinion in our favor. He knew believers can and do suffer for doing what is right (1 Pet. 3:17). We should be willing to suffer. Over time, however, if we consistently do what is right in respectful ways, many people will see that slanderers are unfairly portraying believers. ◀

GUIDE: Refer group members to Romans 13:1-2 at the bottom of **PSG page 141**.

Ask a volunteer to read this Scripture passage.

SAY: "If obeying a human authority means disobeying God, we are to obey God. Barring such unusual circumstances, believers are to submit to government authorities."

SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible Commentary 5** for an explanation of the phrase *it is God's will* in this context. Reinforce that "you silence the ignorance of foolish people by doing good."

DISCUSS: Question #4 (PSG, p. 142): **What makes it difficult to submit to authorities?**

(Alternate: How can we navigate the tension between submitting to earthly authorities and submitting to God?)

TRANSITION: "Next we will discover specific actions we are to take as believers to submit to human authorities."

STUDY THE BIBLE

1 Peter 2:16-17



15 minutes

READ: Read or ask a volunteer to read 1 Peter 2:16-17.

GUIDE: Highlight on **PSG page 142** the content that starts with “A person can never fully appreciate the value of freedom unless he or she has first experienced the bondage of slavery.” Point out that we were all in spiritual bondage to sin until Jesus set us free. Now we are God’s slaves. Paul described Christians this way: “Having been set free from sin, you became enslaved to righteousness” (Rom. 6:18).

SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible Commentary 6** on this page and page 148 to provide further explanation on the idea in this summary passage that we are to “submit as free people . . . as God’s slaves.”

1 Peter 2:16-17

16 Submit as free people, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but as God’s slaves.

17 Honor everyone. Love the brothers and sisters. Fear God. Honor the emperor.

6 ▶ **Verse 16.** Peter turned at this point to practical counsel regarding our attitudes and motives as we submit to human authorities. Before we proceed to the substance of Peter’s counsel, we will take note that various translations differ at the beginning of verse 16. The Christian Standard Bible uses the verb *submit*, and the New International Version and English Standard Version use *live*. In reality, the verb must be supplied by the translators in all English translations because it is not explicitly included in the original Greek. The context (1 Pet. 2:13-17) is obviously submission, so whatever word is used, it carries this emphasis.

Peter’s practical counsel is for believers to **submit as free people**. We are free because we have been redeemed by the blood of Christ (1:18-19). That is, we’ve been purchased out of slavery. We are no longer slaves to the desires and behaviors that formerly controlled us. We are free to act in love and respect toward authorities. Our submission is not coerced or forced. We are free to give it willingly.

Further, believers are to submit **not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil**. We all know freedom can be misused. Christian freedom is not a license to unnecessarily oppose and offend human authorities. A citizen of a country might say, “I’m a free man and answer to God alone.” If he uses that rationale to do wrong or hatefully defy officials, he has misused his freedom.

At times, believers do well to forgo exercising rights out of consideration for others. Jesus exemplified this for Peter and us. Jesus was not obligated to pay a temple tax, but He did so to avoid offending the authorities (Matt. 17:24-27). Jesus taught, “If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two” (5:41). We are free to do even more than authorities require of us!

Believers are also to submit **as God’s slaves**. “Slaves” is an appropriate word here. It conveys that we belong to God. He owns us, having bought us at a price (Acts 20:28;

1 Cor. 6:19-20). The fact is that every human being is a slave either to sin or to God (Rom. 6:16,20-22). Because believers are enslaved to God they have true freedom from sin. They are free to obey God. True freedom is in slavery to God. When we submit to human authorities we don't need to think of ourselves as "under the thumb" of the government or "kept down" by powerful people. Instead, we are obeying our God. We are choosing to live in keeping with His high calling. ◀

7 ▶ Verse 17. It is God's will that believers **honor everyone**. All human beings are bearers of God's image and, therefore, we are to treat all human beings with dignity. Further, God's invitation to receive eternal life in Christ and become children of God is to everyone. "God loved the world in this way: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). We are to love and honor everyone.

We are especially to **love the brothers and sisters in Christ**. Peter encouraged believers to love one another two other times in this letter (1 Pet. 4:8; 5:14). When believers are slandered in the world, love from their brothers and sisters is precious to them. It also makes an impression on the world. Jesus taught that a key feature of our witness to the world is our love for one another (John 13:34-35).

Peter concluded his instructions on submitting to authorities with contrasting commands: **fear God and honor the emperor**. The message is powerful. Peter did not write and could never have written that we should "fear the emperor." God alone is worthy of the fear (or "reverence," 1 Pet. 1:17) that shows in absolute obedience. We are not to fear people. We are only to fear God. A Roman emperor or other authority may inflict temporal suffering. Only God has the power and prerogative to assign eternal suffering (Matt. 10:28).

If our choice genuinely comes down to obeying a human authority or obeying God, then we are always to obey God. For example, Peter and his fellow apostles had been strictly forbidden by human authorities to preach and teach regarding Jesus. They did so anyway. When called to account, Peter's courageous response was, "We must obey God rather than people" (Acts 5:29). He did not dishonor the authorities, but He did fear God above them.

We are always to honor human authorities and we are always to fear God. If we do, God will lead us to relate rightly to authorities and reflect His greatness and our eternal home! ◀

GUIDE: Refer group members to **PSG pages 143-144**, to the list of four actions believers are to take in this world:

- *Show proper respect to everyone.*
- *Love the family of believers.*
- *Fear God.*
- *Honor the emperor.*

SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible Commentary 7** to provide further explanation to the four actions given in verse 17.

DISCUSS: Question #5
(PSG, p. 144): **In what ways do some Christians abuse their freedom?**

(Alternate: How can focusing on our citizenship in God's kingdom help us be better citizens in this life?)

DO: Encourage group members to take a few minutes to complete the activity "**Just Passing Through**" on **PSG page 144**.

LIVE IT OUT



5 minutes

GUIDE: Emphasize **The Point: Our lives in this world should reflect our eternal home.**

REVIEW: Review **Live It Out (PSG, p. 145)**; (see text to the right). Encourage each group member to follow through this week with at least one of the applications.

WRAP IT UP

GUIDE: Share with group members that there is nothing easy about these verses. We must keep in perspective our context: as citizens of God's kingdom, this world is not our home; we are just passing through. When we live by these principles we bring honor and glory to God.

PRAY: "Father, thank You for our citizenship in heaven with all of the rights and privileges that come with it."

LIVE IT OUT

How will the truths of this passage influence the way you live this week?

- ▶ **Set a reminder.** Place something in your home to remind you this world is not your final destination. Remind yourself that you were made for heaven.
- ▶ **Take Inventory.** Evaluate your life in light of the four statements in 1 Peter 2:17. Ask yourself, "How am I doing in showing proper respect to everyone, loving the family of believers, fearing God, and honoring the leaders in our city, state, and nation?"
- ▶ **Serve.** In our freedom, we are called to serve God and others. Write down ways you can intentionally serve God and others this week. Make this a matter of prayer and commitment as you seek to live your life in a way that honors the Lord.



BIBLICAL
ILLUSTRATOR



Pilgrim flask; (copy) from northern Mesopotamia.

A “foreigner” in the Old Testament was someone outside his native land or society. A related term, “sojourner,” referred to someone who had settled for the long term in a different land or society.

During the time of Jesus and the apostles, Jewish people maintained a strong sense of ethnic identity. Thus the Greek adjective *xenos*, meaning “unknown, strange” became used for a foreigner. For example, Jewish leaders provided a different burial place for foreigners (Matt. 27:7). Both Jesus and the apostles encouraged kindness and hospitality to strangers—those previously unknown and far from

home (Matt. 25:35-44; 3 John 5). Another Greek term translated “foreigner,” *paroikos*, included the idea of “outsider.” *Paroikos* was formed from the Greek words *para*, “beside,” and *oikos*, “house.” Thus a person “beside the house” was outside the home, an outsider or foreigner. Jacob’s descendants were such outsiders in Egypt, even though this lasted for centuries (Acts 7:6); and Moses was such a sojourner in Midian (v. 29).

A third Greek term, *parepidemos*, meant “sojourner” or “pilgrim”—one living among people to whom he or she does not belong. *Parepidemos* was formed from the Greek words *para*, “beside,” and *epidemeo*, “to visit a place.” Consider Abraham and Sarah, “foreigners and temporary residents on the earth” (Heb. 11:13). They were also spiritually not at home, aspiring to “a better place—a heavenly one” (v. 16)

The excerpt above is from the article “Strangers and Aliens” (Fall 2014), which relates to this session. More *Biblical Illustrator* articles are available that relate to this session. See page 7 about *Biblical Illustrator*.

SHARING THE GOOD NEWS

An eternal home in heaven is God’s promise to those who place their trust in Christ Jesus.

Each week, make yourself available either before or after the session to speak privately with anyone in your group who wants to know more about becoming a Christian. See the article, “Leading Someone to the Greatest Decision of All,” on page 2 for guidance in leading a person to Christ.

Remind group members that **page 2** in the **PSG** offers guidance in how to become a Christian. Encourage believers to consider using this article as they have opportunities to lead others to Christ.

**GROUPS
MATTER.**

Grow with other group leaders at the **Groups Ministry blog.**

LifeWay.com/GroupMinistry