



TEAM RUSSIA

DEVOTIONAL

Six of us from First Free Methodist Church and SPU will be travelling to St. Petersburg, Russia, to work with the poor and disenfranchised in this great, historic city. We will particularly be working with orphaned children from the ages of 5-17 doing a VBS style program.

Along with our orphanage work, we will be doing a bit of spiritual formation and soul seeking of our own. It is my prayer that each one of us will come back with a better understanding of who Jesus is and our place in his Kingdom. As we process these things together, the team will explore our own journeys together because they have led each of us to the same place at the same time for a common purpose. Each one of us will *have* to come home different because of how this trip and the people have shaped it.

The purpose of this devotional is two-fold. First, our team, whilst in Russia, will be going through the book of 1 Peter on our own, having group discussions around and keeping it present on our minds in our work with the orphanage. Because we are bound by strict national laws restricting the content of our "lessons" and conversations, I want our minds to be on Scripture, even though we are disallowed from bringing it physically with us. So many times it is easy to get caught up in the completing of tasks, forgetting our reason for being there. We want to be Jesus' hands and feet, allowing ourselves the freedom to move and stay as *He* chooses.

Second, I want others, who so choose, to share, even in part, in our experience. By reading and studying as a body of Christ, we will share in God's Word together, even from two different parts of the world. My hope is that through this you will remember us in prayer, and that we too will not forget to pray for our friends and family that have made this trip a reality for us.

Thank you for your place in our individual journeys, and now as a group. It is your support and encouragement that have pointed us this way on our journey. Thank you for your approval as you have sent us financially and prayerfully. It is the collection of agreement that gives us the confidence in Christ to have these experiences on our journey. Thank you for your prayer as we are stretched and grow spiritually. May they see Jesus in all of our work!

In Christ's love,

Jason Groenink
Megan Hamshar
Serena Severance
Tully Lanter
Meaghan Watkins
Kiri Horton



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DEVOTIONAL

July 21, 2010

1 PETER 1.1-12 (NRSV)

¹Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ,

To the exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, ²who have been chosen and destined by God the Father and sanctified by the Spirit to be obedient to Jesus Christ and to be sprinkled with his blood:

May grace and peace be yours in abundance.

³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, ⁵who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. ⁶In this you rejoice, even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials, ⁷so that the genuineness of your faith—being more precious than gold that, though perishable, is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. ⁸Although you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, ⁹for you are receiving the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

¹⁰Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that was to be yours made careful search and inquiry, ¹¹inquiring about the person or time that the Spirit of Christ within them indicated, when it testified in advance to the sufferings destined for Christ and the subsequent glory. ¹²It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in regard to the things that have now been announced to you through those who brought you good news by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things into which angels long to look!

To these folks, Jesus has *literally* changed their lives. Many today can say this conceptually, but perhaps not literally. How has Jesus *literally* changed your life?

What does it mean to you to have an inheritance, an “imperishable, undefiled and unfading” inheritance, given by Jesus (4)?

Peter is writing to suffering Christians. What do you think he means by “protected?” How has Jesus protected you?

What does it mean to have faith? How do you define it?

What does it mean to you to be “served” by the “prophets of old” in this way as a reader/recipient of this letter (11)?

What does it mean to you to love Jesus? Have you ever really sat and contemplated this? Take time now to do that



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July 22, 2010

1 PETER 1:13-21 (NRSV)

¹³Therefore prepare your minds for action; discipline yourselves; set all your hope on the grace that Jesus Christ will bring you when he is revealed. ¹⁴Like obedient children, do not be conformed to the desires that you formerly had in ignorance. ¹⁵Instead, as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct; ¹⁶for it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy.'

¹⁷If you invoke as Father the one who judges all people impartially according to their deeds, live in reverent fear during the time of your exile. ¹⁸You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold, ¹⁹but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish. ²⁰He was destined before the foundation of the world, but was revealed at the end of the ages for your sake. ²¹Through him you have come to trust in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are set on God.

What do you think it means to prepare yourself for action and holiness?

What does it mean to be holy?

What do you think it means to be "ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your ancestors?" (18)
What are your personal "futile ways?"

Peter tells how we were ransomed not through gold or silver, but through the blood of Christ. Why is this important? Is this how you truly live?

What does it mean to truly trust God? In what way are you *not* trusting him? Write your thoughts here.



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July 23, 2010

1 PETER 1.22-2.3 (MLT)

²²You were cleansed from your sins when you obeyed the truth, so now you must show sincere love to each other as brothers and sisters. Love each other deeply with all your heart.

²³For you have been born again, but not to a life that will quickly end. Your new life will last forever because it comes from the eternal, living word of God. ²⁴As the Scriptures say,

"People are like grass;
their beauty is like a flower in the field.
The grass withers and the flower fades.

²⁵But the word of the Lord remains forever."

And that word is the Good News that was preached to you.

¹So get rid of all evil behavior. Be done with all deceit, hypocrisy, jealousy, and all unkind speech. ²Like newborn babies, you must crave pure spiritual milk so that you will grow into a full experience of salvation. Cry out for this nourishment, ³now that you have had a taste of the Lord's kindness.

How is being a part of God's family the same and different as being a part of your own family?

What does it mean that "the word of the Lord will last forever?"

Malicious behavior and deceit, hypocrisy and jealousy and backstabbing cannot coexist with holiness. How can you get rid of these things in your life?

Have you ever "tasted" the Lord's kindness or goodness? What does it taste like? What did you do with it?

What type of spiritual nourishment do you need right now? Take time now to come near to Jesus, to hear his heart beat, to feel his caring touch and to feed on his goodness. Write your thoughts here.



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July 24, 2010

1 PETER 2.4-17 (THE MESSAGE)

⁴⁻⁶Welcome to the living Stone, the source of life. The workmen took one look and threw it out; God set it in the place of honor. Present yourselves as building stones for the construction of a sanctuary vibrant with life, in which you'll serve as holy priests offering Christ-approved lives up to God. The Scriptures provide precedent:

Look! I'm setting a stone in Zion,
a cornerstone in the place of honor.

Whoever trusts in this stone as a foundation
will never have cause to regret it.

To you who trust him, he's a Stone to be proud of, but to those who refuse to trust him,
The stone the workmen threw out
is now the chief foundation stone.

For the untrusting it's
.. . a stone to trip over,
a boulder blocking the way.

They trip and fall because they refuse to obey, just as predicted.

⁹⁻¹⁰But you are the ones chosen by God, chosen for the high calling of priestly work, chosen to be a holy people, God's instruments to do his work and speak out for him, to tell others of the night-and-day difference he made for you—from nothing to something, from rejected to accepted.

¹¹⁻¹²Friends, this world is not your home, so don't make yourselves cozy in it. Don't indulge your ego at the expense of your soul. Live an exemplary life among the natives so that your actions will refute their prejudices. Then they'll be won over to God's side and be there to join in the celebration when he arrives.

¹³⁻¹⁷Make the Master proud of you by being good citizens. Respect the authorities, whatever their level; they are God's emissaries for keeping order. It is God's will that by doing good, you might cure the ignorance of the fools who think you're a danger to society. Exercise your freedom by serving God, not by breaking the rules. Treat everyone you meet with dignity. Love your spiritual family. Revere God. Respect the government.

Why do you think the Jesus-as-stone analogy is used?

Is it meant to be made "from nothing to something, from rejected to accepted?"

We are presently in a "world" that is not our home, living among "the natives." Do we really believe that our actions can lead others to an understanding and worship of Jesus? In which ways?

Do you ever think of our earthly "authorities" as "God's emissaries for keeping order?" What does that mean?

Look at the charges in the final few sentences of this passage. How do each of these "exercise" our freedom?

"Treat everyone you meet with dignity":

"Love your spiritual family":

"Revere God":

Respect the government":

What does it mean to "indulge your ego at the expense of your soul?" In which ways are you guilty of this?

In what ways are you making your Master proud?



TEAM RUSSIA

DEVOTIONAL

July 25, 2010

1 PETER 2:18-25 (NASB)

¹⁸Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable.

¹⁹For this finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly.

²⁰For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God.

²¹For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps,

²²WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH;

²³and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously;

²⁴and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed.

²⁵For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.

This passage is written specifically to house-servants who are legally bound to the authority of their house-master. This now makes them spiritually bound. How do you think they felt about this particular passage if they lived under oppressive masters?

How can patient endurance of suffering find favor with God?

Why would "suffering" as Jesus did bring about redemption for these house-servants?

Why do you think retributory reviling causes problems?

How are you "suffering" under another person? How have you reviled in return? Take some time now to offer prayer and confession for these.

Eugene Petersaon says in *the Message*, "He suffered everything that came his way so you would know that it could be done, and also know how to do it, step-by-step." Spend time reflecting on this statement.



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DEVOTIONAL

July 25, 2010

1 PETER 3:1-7 (NRSV)

¹Wives, in the same way, accept the authority of your husbands, so that, even if some of them do not obey the word, they may be won over without a word by their wives' conduct, ²when they see the purity and reverence of your lives. ³Do not adorn yourselves outwardly by braiding your hair, and by wearing gold ornaments or fine clothing; ⁴rather, let your adornment be the inner self with the lasting beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in God's sight. ⁵It was in this way long ago that the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves by accepting the authority of their husbands. ⁶Thus Sarah obeyed Abraham and called him lord. You have become her daughters as long as you do what is good and never let fears alarm you.

⁷Husbands, in the same way, show consideration for your wives in your life together, paying honor to the woman as the weaker sex, since they too are also heirs of the gracious gift of life—so that nothing may hinder your prayers.

People have struggled with this text for years. It's interpretation has polarized denominations, served as justification for abuse, been avoided from pulpits and has generally confounded our modern understanding by which we filter our information. This passage, though, needs to be understood within the same scope as it's previous passage, with the guidelines of the passage following. Peter is establishing a Christian understanding of relationships; master/servant, male/female. He is, within his present culture, creating a new understanding of Christian community. We, in *our* present culture, must try to understand it the same way.

How have you felt personally about this passage in the past, or even after reading it today?

How do you think someone can win over a spouse, or loved one for that matter, who does "not obey the word" as said in verses 1 & 2?

How does one adorn their inner self? What do you think that means?

How does one show consideration for another as Peter suggests husbands do for their wives here? Is it simply politeness, or is there more to it than that? How would this "hinder...prayers?"

What do you think "the gracious gift of life is?" What does it mean that men and women are both "heirs?"

How can you show special consideration for someone else today and perhaps win someone over to the "word?"



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DEVOTIONAL

July 26, 2010

1 PETER 3.8-12 (ИЗДАЕ)

⁸To sum up, all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit;

⁹not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing.

¹⁰For,

"THE ONE WHO DESIRES LIFE, TO LOVE AND SEE GOOD DAYS,
MUST KEEP HIS TONGUE FROM EVIL AND HIS LIPS FROM
SPEAKING DECEIT.

"HE MUST TURN AWAY FROM EVIL AND DO GOOD;
HE MUST SEEK PEACE AND PURSUE IT.

"FOR THE EYES OF THE LORD ARE TOWARD THE RIGHTEOUS,
AND HIS EARS ATTEND TO THEIR PRAYER,
BUT THE FACE OF THE LORD IS AGAINST THOSE WHO DO EVIL."

"To sum up..." he says, as if to imply "don't misconstrue what I'm saying here." This sums up the previous 2 sections. In your own words, write down what he is summing up from the last 2 sections you read and studied in regard to being harmonious, sympathetic, humble and a blessing.

What do you think it means to bless someone? Is it the same as "being a blessing to someone?"

How is keeping your tongue from evil a blessing to others?

What does it mean that the "face of the Lord is against those who do evil" as Peter suggests, quoting Psalm 34.15?

In which ways have you *not* been a blessing to someone on this trip? How can you make it right and bless them?



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July 28, 2010

1 PETER 3.13-22 (THE MESSAGE)

¹³⁻¹⁸ If with heart and soul you're doing good, do you think you can be stopped? Even if you suffer for it, you're still better off. Don't give the opposition a second thought. Through thick and thin, keep your hearts at attention, in adoration before Christ, your Master. Be ready to speak up and tell anyone who asks why you're living the way you are, and always with the utmost courtesy. Keep a clear conscience before God so that when people throw mud at you, none of it will stick. They'll end up realizing that they're the ones who need a bath. It's better to suffer for doing good, if that's what God wants, than to be punished for doing bad. That's what Christ did definitively: suffered because of others' sins, the Righteous One for the unrighteous ones. He went through it all—was put to death and then made alive—to bring us to God.

¹⁹⁻²² He went and proclaimed God's salvation to earlier generations who ended up in the prison of judgment because they wouldn't listen. You know, even though God waited patiently all the days that Noah built his ship, only a few were saved then, eight to be exact—saved from the water by the water. The waters of baptism do that for you, not by washing away dirt from your skin but by presenting you through Jesus' resurrection before God with a clear conscience. Jesus has the last word on everything and everyone, from angels to armies. He's standing right alongside God, and what he says goes.

No one likes to think about suffering, even if it's worth it. In which ways do you feel like you've "suffered" on this trip? What type of "suffering" do you feel back home in the U.S.?

What does it mean to be ready to "speak up and tell anyone who asks why you're living the way you are?" What if they don't ask?

What does it mean that "when people throw mud at you, it won't stick?"

In your life, what do you have that this mud would stick to? How can you change that?

Take time now and let the "water" of baptism wash over your sin. Accept Jesus' forgiveness and be confident in this. Write thoughts to remember here.



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DEVOTIONAL

July 29, 2010

1 ПЕТРЪ 4.1-6 (ТМН)

¹Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because those who have suffered in their bodies are done with sin. ²As a result, they do not live the rest of their earthly lives for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God. ³For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do—living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry. ⁴They are surprised that you do not join them in their reckless, wild living, and they heap abuse on you. ⁵But they will have to give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. ⁶For this is the reason the gospel was preached even to those who are now dead, so that they might be judged according to human standards in regard to the body, but live according to God in regard to the spirit.

What do you think it means to “arm yourself with the same attitude?” Is this type of attitude to be used as a means of defense? What is this “attitude?”

Have you ever had anyone surprised by you *not* doing something? What type of abuse did they “heap” on you?

How can you live your life for the will of God even here? How about when you get back home?

As you think about going home, how can you live your life “according to God in regard to the spirit?” Think about how you have changed in the past couple of days and what you would like to see continue. Write those things here.



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DEVOTIONAL

July 30, 2010

1 ПЕТР 4.7-11 (МЯСЦ)

⁷The end of all things is near; therefore be serious and discipline yourselves for the sake of your prayers. ⁸Above all, maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins. ⁹Be hospitable to one another without complaining. ¹⁰Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received. ¹¹Whoever speaks must do so as one speaking the very words of God; whoever serves must do so with the strength that God supplies, so that God may be glorified in all things through Jesus Christ. To him belong the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.

How serious and disciplined are you in your prayers? Is it a regular part of your spiritual life?

The author says "above all, maintain constant love for one another..." Why is this most important? In which ways on this trip have you not put love of others "above all?"

How do you think our constant love can cover a multitude of sins?

What do you understand your "gifts" to be from God? How can you use them to serve someone else on this trip? What about someone who is harder to serve?

Meditate on the benedictory sentence at the end of this passage. Write down some thoughts on what this means to you. May this be ever present on your mind and in your actions today and further!



TEAM RUSSIA

DEVOTIONAL

July 31, 2010

1 PETER 4:12-19 (NLT)

¹²Dear friends, don't be surprised at the fiery trials you are going through, as if something strange were happening to you. ¹³Instead, be very glad—for these trials make you partners with Christ in his suffering, so that you will have the wonderful joy of seeing his glory when it is revealed to all the world.

¹⁴So be happy when you are insulted for being a Christian, for then the glorious Spirit of God rests upon you. ¹⁵If you suffer, however, it must not be for murder, stealing, making trouble, or prying into other people's affairs. ¹⁶But it is no shame to suffer for being a Christian. Praise God for the privilege of being called by his name! ¹⁷For the time has come for judgment, and it must begin with God's household. And if judgment begins with us, what terrible fate awaits those who have never obeyed God's Good News? ¹⁸ And also,

"If the righteous are barely saved,
what will happen to godless sinners?"

¹⁹So if you are suffering in a manner that pleases God, keep on doing what is right, and trust your lives to the God who created you, for he will never fail you.

How has this trip felt like a "fiery trial?" In which ways can you be glad about this?

Christian, meaning "Christ-like" or "little Christ's," was often used in the 1st Century pejoratively to describe these fanatical people involved in this new counter-cultural religion. Among many who follow Jesus today, it has a similar attached negativity because of Christian fundamentalist ideologies. How is the suffering these people experienced in the 1st Century different to the "suffering" of many who promote a modern fundamentalist understanding?

Is being called "Christian" today a "privilege" as the author suggests in verse 16? Why or why not?

Why do you think judgment must first begin with God's own children?

Take time now to "trust yourself to the God who made you." Ask him to give you a clear understanding of his will for you life so that you might wear his name confidently, unwaveringly and lovingly. Write some thoughts here.



TEAM RUSSIA

DEVOTIONAL

August 1, 2010

1 PETER 5:1-14 (ИЯСЛ)

¹Now as an elder myself and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as one who shares in the glory to be revealed, I exhort the elders among you ²to tend the flock of God that is in your charge, exercising the oversight, not under compulsion but willingly, as God would have you do it—not for sordid gain but eagerly. ³Do not lord it over those in your charge, but be examples to the flock. ⁴And when the chief shepherd appears, you will win the crown of glory that never fades away. ⁵In the same way, you who are younger must accept the authority of the elders. And all of you must clothe yourselves with humility in your dealings with one another, for

'God opposes the proud,

but gives grace to the humble.'

⁶Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time. ⁷Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you. ⁸Discipline yourselves; keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour. ⁹Resist him, steadfast in your faith, for you know that your brothers and sisters throughout the world are undergoing the same kinds of suffering. ¹⁰And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, support, strengthen, and establish you. ¹¹To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.

¹²Through Silvanus, whom I consider a faithful brother, I have written this short letter to encourage you, and to testify that this is the true grace of God. Stand fast in it. ¹³Your sister church in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you greetings; and so does my son Mark. ¹⁴Greet one another with a kiss of love.

Peace to all of you who are in Christ.

And so we come to the end. The author is ready to be done writing, and so he leaves the readers with this final charge and encouragement.

By now, I'm sure, you're excited about going home. You're ready to process this trip and the ways in which God has used you. You're ready to get back to life, while being careful not to let go of this experience. You're ready to be done.

Many times we feel that in order to be used, we must have some kind of pomp and circumstance and pizzazz; that the only way people will take notice of us is through some miraculous act or pithy quip. But, as we see here, it is through our humility and suffering that Christ is seen and glorified.

As you start to think about heading home, what does your "flock" look like? Have you ever thought about yourself as a shepherd of others?

What does it mean to "clothe yourself in humility" with others?

Eugene Peterson translate verses 6-7 like this: "So be content with who you are, and don't put on airs. God's strong hand is on you; He'll promote you at the right time. Live carefree before God; he is most careful with you."

How does this speak to you as you prepare to journey home?

From what types of things do you think you will need to "keep alert?"