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Feeding the Sheep

Because our study this quarter is on 1 and 2 Peter, we are reading the words of someone who was with Jesus at most of the important moments in His ministry. Peter also had become a prominent leader among the earliest Christians. These facts alone would make his letters worth reading. But these letters take on added interest given that they were written to churches experiencing troubled times: they faced persecution from without and the danger of false teachers arising from within.

Peter warns that among the things that these false teachers will promote is doubt about the second coming of Jesus. “Where is the promise of his coming?” they will say, “for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation” (*2 Pet. 3:4*). Today, more than two thousand years later, we know the reality of that charge, don’t we?

Besides Peter’s warning about false teachers, the suffering the churches experienced is a topic that he returns to several times. This suffering, he says, mirrors the sufferings of Jesus, who took our sins in His body when He died on the cross (*1 Pet. 2:24*). But the good news is that Jesus’ death brought nothing less than freedom from the eternal death caused by sin, as well as a life of righteousness here and now for those who trust in Him (*1 Pet. 2:24*).

Peter says that Jesus not only died for our sins but will return to earth and usher in the judgment of God (*2 Pet. 3:10–12*). He stresses that the prospect of judgment

should have significant practical implications in the life of the believer. When Jesus returns, He will destroy all sin and will cleanse the earth with fire (2 Pet. 3:7). Then Christians will receive the inheritance that God has been storing up for them in heaven (1 Pet. 1:4).

Peter has very practical words on how Christians should live. First and foremost, Christians should love one another (1 Pet. 4:8). He sums up his view by saying, “Finally, all of you, have unity of spirit, sympathy, love for one another, a tender heart, and a humble mind” (1 Pet. 3:8, NRSV).

Peter’s epistles are also a fervent proclamation of the gospel, the central message of the whole Bible. After all, if anyone should know the saving grace of the Lord, it is Peter. This same Peter, who so openly and crassly denied his Lord (even with cursing), saying, “I do not know the Man” (Matt. 26:74, NKJV), is the one to whom Jesus later said, “Feed My sheep” (John 21:17, NKJV). These two epistles are examples of Peter’s doing just that—feeding the Lord’s sheep.

And, of course, any part of that feeding would include the great truth of salvation by faith in Christ, a theme that his fellow worker, the apostle Paul, so powerfully proclaimed. This is the truth of God’s grace. Peter knew about this, not just theoretically, or just as a doctrine, but because he had experienced the reality and power of that grace for himself.

As Martin Luther wrote in his commentary on Peter: “Consequently this Epistle of St. Peter is one of the grandest books of the New Testament, and it is the true, pure Gospel. For Peter does also the very same thing as Paul and all the Evangelists do in that he inculcates the true doctrine of faith, how Christ has been given to us, who takes away our sins and saves us.”—*Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and Jude* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1982), pp. 2, 3.

Jesus told Peter to feed His sheep. We are among those sheep. Let’s get fed.

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How to Use This Teachers Edition

Get Motivated to Explore, Apply, and Create

We hope that this format of the teachers edition will encourage adult Sabbath School class members to do just that—explore, apply, and create. Each weekly teachers lesson takes your class through the following learning process, based on the Natural Learning Cycle:

1. Why is this lesson important to me? (Motivate);
2. What do I need to know from God’s Word? (Explore);
3. How can I practice what I’ve learned from God’s Word? (Apply); and
4. What can I do with what I’ve learned from God’s Word? (Create).

And for teachers who haven’t had time to prepare during the week for class, there is a one-page outline of easy-to-digest material in “The Lesson in Brief” section.

Here’s a closer look at the four steps of the Natural Learning Cycle and suggestions for how you, the teacher, can approach each one:

Step 1—Motivate: Link the learners’ experiences to the central concept of the lesson to show why the lesson is relevant to their lives. Help them answer the question, Why is this week’s lesson important to me?

Step 2—Explore: Present learners with the biblical information they need to understand the central concept of the lesson. (Such information could include facts about the people; the setting; cultural, historical, and/or geographical details; the plot or what’s happening; and conflicts or tension of the texts you are studying.) Help learners answer the question, What do I need to know from God’s Word?

Step 3—Apply: Provide learners with opportunities to practice the information given in Step 2. This is a crucial step; information alone is not enough to help a person grow in Christ. Assist the learners in answering the question, How can I apply to my life what I’ve learned?

Step 4—Create: Finally, encourage learners to be “doers of the word, and not hearers only” (*James 1:22*). Invite them to make a life response to the lesson. This step provides individuals and groups with opportunities for creative self-expression and exploration. All such activities should help learners answer the question, With God’s help, what can I do with what I’ve learned from this week’s lesson?

When teachers use material from each of these four steps, they will appeal to most every student in their class: those who enjoy talking about what’s happening in their lives, those who want more information about the texts being studied, those who want to know how it all fits in with real life, and those who want to get out and apply what they’ve learned.