

THE LIFE OF FLOURISHING

SERIES: FLOURISH - HOPE IN A
STRANGE LAND



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1 Peter 1:13-25, 2:1-3
Third Message
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1 Peter 1:13-2, 2:1-3

[Show Poll Result]

Good morning! We're going to start with a new kind of exercise. We're trying a never-before-attempted exercise of a real-time poll during the PBC livestream. We'll have a couple of these throughout this sermon as a way for you to engage with some of the ideas that we'll be encountering. The way it will work is that you'll go to a webpage on your phone and answer a simple question. Then we'll see the results in real-time as a group of people.

You can now use your phone and head to (a URL to the poll was given). When you get there, you should see a simple question about a very important topic that's near to my heart: ice cream. You will be asked about what is more important to you when choosing an ice cream flavor: the flavor of the ice cream, the ingredients mixed into the ice cream, or the type of container that holds the ice cream.

For example, if you like coffee Heath Bar crunch ice cream, is it because of the coffee-flavored ice cream or the Heath Bar mixed into it? Or maybe it's the ice cream cone.

This morning as we continue our series in 1 Peter called "Flourish," we'll see the author give us very specific instructions on how to flourish. This passage is full of commands on what to do to flourish. We'll see how to have the life of flourishing.

If asking you about ice cream has made you hungry, that's good, because the last phrase of our text bases everything Peter will say on a condition. He says, "If indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good." The grammar of this statement in Greek is formed not really as an "if" statement. It is phrased that way, but the assumption is that this statement is true, which is why some translations state "since you have tasted that the Lord is good."

Let's go to the results of our poll and see what kind of a community we are. Are we a mix-ins kind of people or a base flavor kind of people?

I wanted to get us thinking about ice cream for two reasons. First, ice cream is a good analogy for this passage. I recently tried a new flavor at Salt & Straw called "Salted Hazelnut Praline S' mores." A lot is going on in that ice cream, and each bite has a delicious base flavor of ice cream with lots of different mix-ins: marshmallows, graham cracker, pralines. It's amazing.

Our passage this morning features five powerful and helpful exhortations or commands. They are more general than specific; Peter will get into specifics later in the letter. These are high-level instructions for living a life of flourishing, and they are surrounded by rich theology. Peter doesn't just instruct us; he gives us instructions mixed into the theology that explains them.

The other reason I wanted us thinking of ice cream is because of Peter's closing comment about "tasting that the Lord is good." Have you tasted that the Lord is good? I know some of you can immediately answer yes. Maybe others can't. Perhaps you've heard about God's goodness, but you haven't experienced it for yourself? If that's the case, this passage could help you discover the goodness of God.

My prayer as we look at 2 Peter 1:13-2:3 is that we would see a path toward a life of flourishing based on the overflowing goodness of God.

Hope

As I said, there are five instructions in our passage. We're going to look at all of them briefly. The first instruction is somewhat of a conclusion based on the passage we looked at last week.

1 Peter 1:13:

Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

The imperative in this passage is the unique phrase, “set your hope fully on grace.” Last week we saw how Peter began the letter by explaining the absolute certainty of the future that awaits us if we believe in Jesus. Now he’s telling us to do something. It’s an interesting command.

The first phrase, “preparing your minds for action” is literally translated “girding up the loins of your mind.” In the first century, men would wear long robes, and if they had to do something physical—move quickly or do some work—they would have to gather up their robes in preparation. The next phrase encourages us to think clearly and with self-control—to be “sober minded.”

So we gather up the robes of our minds and get serious. Get ready, on your marks, at the whistle set your hope!

I’d expect a decisive action after this build-up, but this first instruction is a mental one. It’s about thinking something, not doing something. Think about the grace that will be brought to you when Jesus returns. Think about the return of Jesus.

Time for another poll. Go back to poll and answer the next question. I’m wondering how often we actually think about the fact that Jesus is returning to this earth. Several times per day? Every day? Several times per week? Rarely?

I’m afraid that many of us find it hard to even start with this first instruction. Focus your mental energy on the fact that Jesus is returning. Think about the grace that will be poured out on you when that day arrives.

I’m very good about setting my hope. It’s just not always set on the right thing. When I order something online, which is several times per week now, I love tracking that package. Seeing when it’s going to arrive. Tracking its progress. The tragedy of a delay. The absolute joy when it arrives earlier than expected.

I set my hope on delivery packages arriving, but that doesn’t do anything for me. The first of the five instructions to a life of flourishing is to be future-oriented toward the right thing. Set your hope on Jesus returning.

Let’s look at the results of our poll.

[Show poll result]

Being future-oriented forms the basis of everything else Peter is going to say. His whole book is aimed toward the future, which is why we subtitled this series “Hope in a Strange Land.” The key to flourishing begins not with making life work here and now, but recognizing that our fullest life is yet to come.

So with that as the foundation, Peter moves on to the next instruction.

Be holy

The first instruction looked forward, but the second instruction draws from the past history of God’s people. This is one of the first things God told his people when he made them into a nation. Now Peter reintroduces it.

1 Peter 1:14-16:

As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, 15 but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, 16 since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”

The instruction here is found in the phrase “be holy in all your conduct.” That’s what we are supposed to do. But remember the ice cream analogy. This instruction is surrounded by rich theology. There is a contrast between the life of faith and the life of the past. There is the basic principle that children act like their parents. So if we are children of God, our behavior should mirror his. There is the recollection back to the Jewish Law in Leviticus where God said: “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”

Notice that the focus has moved from an intellectual instruction to a behavioral one. Setting our hope was something we did in our minds. Now Peter is talking about conduct. This behavior is rooted in the fact that our hope is set upon Jesus returning. But now it plays out in actions.

It’s popular in our culture to claim or think that all religions basically teach the same ethical conduct. People will suggest that there might be different gods and different stories, but at the end of the day, all religions end up with the same instructions for life.

But this passage shows how mistaken that idea is. The first part of Christian ethics is to hope for Jesus’ return. No other religion includes that kind of a hope. The second instruction is to be holy—literally to be set apart or different from the culture around us.

Our lives as Christians ought to look different from the world around us. Peter doesn't go into specifics here about what kind of conduct is holy—he'll do that more in the rest of the letter—but we know some of the big categories: how we spend our time, how we spend our money, the kinds of sexual choices we make, how we treat people who have wronged us, the humility we have toward people who think differently from us. These are the kinds of things that make our conduct holy. This is what makes us more like God than like our culture.

Fear God

The next instruction is another unique one. It's also a little confusing at first.

1 Peter 1:17-21:

And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, 18 knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, 19 but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. 20 He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you 21 who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

Once again, this instruction also has to do with behavior. We see the same root Greek word from the command to be holy: it's translated "conduct" in our translation. "Conduct yourselves with fear."

Peter gives three reasons which shape our attitude toward God.

First, he says that God doesn't give us special treatment just because we believe in Him. In fact, Peter points out that if we call him Father, then we of all people should understand that he is an impartial judge and not to take his favor for granted.

Second, Peter says that we have been redeemed at great cost. Jesus gave the highest possible price to bring us into his family. We need to take that seriously.

And finally, our salvation is part of a plan that was put into place in pre-creation eternity. If you are listening

to this message right now, you need to know that God had planned to work in your life from before he even created time. Now is the time that all of that planning has been leading up to.

What does it mean that we should "conduct ourselves with fear"?

A few weeks ago, one of my children who is now driving said to me, "I never realized how much driving is based on trusting other people." We were driving down a two-lane highway where cars were passing each other only a few yards apart, each driving 60 miles per hour.

When you drive a car, you should conduct yourself with fear. You need to know that the stakes are high for the activity you are engaging in. Mistakes can have enormous consequences. It's not just your life either—your decisions affect others on the road as well.

I think that's what it means to "conduct ourselves with fear". One commentator put it this way: "The fear is neither dread nor anxiety; rather, it is the healthy response of a human being before an altogether different kind of being, God, and is a sign of spiritual health and gratitude."¹

This is "conducting ourselves with fear." It's realizing that all of this matters. Our lives here have eternal consequences. The stakes are high, and God is in charge.

Love one another

Our first three instructions have mostly been personal: setting our hope, being holy, fearing God. Those are individual kinds of instructions. Now Peter moves into the relational category with the last two.

1 Peter 1:22-25:

Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, 23 since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; 24 for "All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, 25 but the word of the Lord remains forever." And this word is the good news that was preached to you.

Once again there's a lot of rich theology surrounding a simple command: "Love one another earnestly from a pure heart."

Notice a few things about this instruction. It's directed internally. This is "brotherly love," not "neighborly love." That's not to say we aren't supposed to love outsiders, but the initial focus here is on the love that happens within this community. We have to love each other well if we have any hope of loving others.

This love is also based on our eternal life together. Last week we saw the idea of being born again to a new eternal life. Here we see it again. Peter's reasoning goes something like this: you're going to be living together for all of eternity; you may as well figure out how to love each other now.

Which is why Peter points out that "flesh is like grass." If you get to know me well enough, I guarantee that I will be doing something to upset you. I'll say something stupid. I'll be insensitive. I'll use poorly chosen words to explain something. I'm a broken person with fleshly tendencies.

But that flesh will pass away like grass. My sinful mistakes will be washed away. What won't go away is the redeemed person that Jesus has made me into because I'm born of an imperishable seed. And if you are too, then our relationship starts here but lasts into eternity. This idea has helped me even this week in some relational issues. The flesh will pass away, but our redeemed relationships will last forever.

But we still have to work through conflict. So how do we do that? How do we learn to love each other?

Long for nourishment

The last instruction gives us help with sustaining the instruction to love. This is the fuel for the journey of flourishing in relationship.

1 Peter 2:1-3:

So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander. 2 Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation— 3 if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.

Our translation sounds like it begins with a command; however, that first phrase is not actually the real command. Other translations read "putting away all malice, etc., long for the spiritual milk." That's the real command—"long for spiritual milk." That's how we

put aside all malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy and slander. Those are all the things that get in the way of love. Anyone of those can destroy a community. We are all tempted toward all of them. This is what makes love hard.

But we can put them away by longing for the nourishment which comes from God. Once again, there is a connection to being born again. Because we are newly born, we should long for the kind of food that helps infants to grow.

In Paul's letters, he contrasts milk with meat saying that people who can only eat meat are immature. That's not Peter's point here. He isn't saying that anyone is immature. He's saying that anyone who follows Jesus needs to learn to live by the most fundamental kind of nourishment from God.

I remember holding my children when they were babies, and I remember how they acted when they were hungry. You call it "rooting." They move their heads desperately looking for milk. It always felt terrible holding them when they were like that because I'd have to break the news to them: you won't find any milk here.

When you're hungry, you look for nourishment wherever you can find it. And friends, we are hungry. We are desperate to find answers and healing and peace and purpose. We look for it everywhere: social media, news, political opinions, gossip, achievement, friends, etc.

But let me tell you, you won't find any milk there!

Peter gives his readers the instruction to long for the "pure spiritual milk." This is the food from God which helps us to grow up in his kingdom. There's some debate among commentators about whether this refers to the Word of God or a broader category. I think it refers to all the different aspects of nourishment in our faith. That includes the Word of God, but it's also prayer, community, silence, celebration, service, learning. All of it.

One last poll. I'd love to hear from you about what nourishes you the most. What are the things in your spiritual life which you long for as the "pure spiritual milk"?

The thing about eating is that you need to do it every day. You don't eat once, and you're fine. You need food every day. Infants need food every few hours. It's a constant thing.

You don't hear the gospel and believe it, and you're okay. You need to hear it again and again. We need constant nourishment.

Let's look at the list of what nourishes us. This is the Christian life. It needs to be fed.

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Do you feel distant from God? Has your faith been starving? I know it's hard during this season, but find the things you need to nourish your faith. They're probably on this list. Long for what you need. Find a way to get it and commit to that.

Conclusion

Peter has given us a rich feast of what it looks like to flourish as we discover hope in a strange land. These five instructions are very comprehensive. It may not be the entire Christian life, but it's an excellent start. Peter has given us ethics wrapped up in theology.

We set our hope on Jesus; we strive to be holy; we conduct ourselves with fear; we love one another, and we long for spiritual nourishment. Hope, holiness, fear, love, and longing. That's the behavior of the Christian life.

All of this flows out of our salvation in Jesus. None of this makes sense apart from the resurrection of Christ. That's what we saw last week—it's all about the resurrection from the dead.

This is what makes following Jesus different from other religions. The way we live isn't only about making life on earth work. It's all directed toward what is going to happen in the future. That's why the list begins with hope. That's why you can only even think about doing this if you've tasted that the LORD is good.

Let's return to our first question. Have you tasted that the LORD is good? Does this list make sense to you? If not, you can experience God's goodness. We'd like nothing more than for you to ask us what that looks like. Text our number, email us, give us a call. We'd love to talk to you about experiencing God's goodness.

If you have tasted it, then this is your path towards a life of flourishing. Hope. Holiness. Fear. Love. Longing.

We set our hope on Jesus; we strive to be holy; we conduct ourselves with fear; we love one another, and we long for spiritual nourishment. Hope, holiness, fear, love, and longing. This is the life of following Jesus. This is the life of flourishing.

Endnotes

1. Scott McKnight, 1 Peter. New International Version Application Commentary, (Zondervan Academic, 1996), 89.