

“The Exile Resolutions” / 1 Peter 2:11–12

Together We Endure: The Letter of 1 Peter, #4

We’re in a series called *Together We Endure*, a study through Peter’s first letter to the church, so if you have your Bible, grab it and turn there. Or turn it on, or open up a new window and search 1 Peter. Whatever. When you get there will you throw in the chat "found it!" Digital sword drill for you who are missing VBS.

Peter is encouraging this scattered group of believers, whose worlds have been turned upside down, to grow up in their faith and be the kind of believers that can endure in a hostile and chaotic world.

We’re picking up in vs. 11 where Peter urges two crucial changes of perspective we must have if we are going to thrive in this kind of world. I’ll give them to you as two resolutions we need to make. Only 2!

The first is in vs. 11: **11 Dear friends, I urge you as strangers and exiles (that’s important context) to abstain from sinful desires that wage war against the soul.**

Resolution 1: “I will die to my need for instant gratification”

Our sinful desires *wage war* against our souls. They kill our faith. The Apostle John tells us the same thing in his letter. **1 John 2:15: “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world... for all that is in the world--the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world.”** If any of us love the world, John says, the love of the Father will not be in us.

Now, neither John nor Peter believes the world is all bad--that pleasures are bad, that Christians should be ascetics or prudes or monks or killjoys who refrain from all pleasure. I know some Christians who are like that, but not Peter and John. God loves the world, and he created the world for our delight and when we enjoy his creation he is glorified.

What Peter and John are warning about is a love for the world that replaces a love for God.

John mentions 3 things in the world that are always competing with God to be our Master.

- The **lusts of the flesh** tell us, “Feel good now, whatever the cost.” Gratification of your physical desires is the only way to be happy, whether that comes from food, sex, creature comforts, or whatever.
- The **lusts of the eyes** tell us, “For life to be good, you must have X.” (the car, the house, the clothes, the second home. This causes us to look out in “envy” at what others have that we don’t)
- The **pride of life** says, “To have worth, you have to be superior.” “You must be the best at Y” or “you must accomplish Z.”

These three drives wage war against the soul. They literally murder your relationship with God. John says, “If any man loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.”

And here’s the problem: We are raised in a world that tells us that one of these 3 is the path to the good life. You gravitate toward at least one of them. Which one probably depends on your personality.

- Some of you are all about feeling good *right now*. The instant gratification monkey is always right there and calling out to you to do whatever to feel good in the moment. Relax. Have fun. Enjoy yourself. Engages the pleasures of food, sex, drink, leisure, and creature comforts whenever and wherever you can. That's what John means by "the lusts of the flesh."
- Others of you are less driven by the impulses of the moment, you can no to your impulses, but you are driven by something you want to obtain in the future. The degree, the job, the income, the victory. You'll study hard now, or train hard now, or save your money and live meagerly now, so that you can get these good things later. That's who John is talking about when he says "the lusts of the eyes and the pride of life."

OK, honesty time. You've got 1 minute to discuss which of these 3 you identify with the most.

1 minute timer with short definitions of lusts of the flesh, lust of eyes, pride of life (as I have them above)

To all three groups, Peter says to lift your eyes away from the world altogether. Vs. 11, you are "strangers and exiles." Interestingly, Peter expands our understanding of instant gratification from just the impulses of the moment to being driven by anything on earth in our quest for happiness.

- I've told you before about the famous "marshmallow test," done in the 1970s at Stanford. "It actually wasn't marshmallows. The participants were 32 children—between the ages of 3 and 5. The children were led into a room, empty of distractions, where a treat of their choice (either two animal cookies or five pretzel sticks) were placed on a table. The researchers let the children know they could eat the treat, but if they waited 15 minutes without eating, they would be rewarded with a second treat. Then they left the room and watched through a camera. They said that kids developed all kinds of coping strategies: some covered their eyes with their hands, some got up and walked around the room; some refused even to look at the treat; one kid even got down and licked the table beside the treat as if somehow the taste of the treat had transmogrified into the wood. Researchers then tracked these children for the next 3 decades, and found that children who were able to wait longer for the preferred rewards tended to have better life outcomes, as measured by SAT scores, educational attainment, physical health, marriage satisfaction, and a whole host of other things.¹ (I've seen recently on social media how a similar challenge has been going around, the gummy bear challenge. And let me tell you, the results I've seen from some of your children do not give me much hope for the future of our civilization. I'll just leave that there.)

So, obviously it's best to be able to delay gratification. It's the athlete who pushes himself when everyone is relaxing who succeeds. It's the student who studies when others are partying that gets the job; it's the businessman or woman who goes that extra mile to stay ahead of the market who obtains success. Learning to say 'no' to instant gratification is key.

- What Peter is telling you is to expand your definition of instant gratification. Don't just say no to comforts and pleasures now to get some earthly reward later in your life; learn to say no to being driven by anything on earth and find your reward in God.
- As strangers and exiles, make your treasure there. Look for your affirmation from him. He's your home; up there is where you seek your reward.

I don't think many of us realize how dangerous and pervasive those 3 things are--the lusts of the flesh, the lusts of the eyes, and the pride of life. Our world is proudly driven by them. At any point we are driven by one

¹ I recently read about a similar study done in New Zealand. Sociologists did a massive project—studying over 1,000 kids over four decades, putting them through all kinds of evaluative tests. The scientists said they were shocked to discover that one factor that mattered more than any other on your health, material wealth, and relational harmony was impulse-control. It was more significant than social class, wealth of their family, and IQ. <https://www.sciencemag.org/news/2018/02/two-psychologists-followed-1000-new-zealanders-decades-here-s-what-they-found-about-how>

of them, they are killing our faith. Let me say it plainly: If you are driven by the desires of the flesh (wanting pleasure or just to feel good), or the lust of the eyes (something you want to obtain), or the pride of life (the desire to make a name for yourself), your relationship with God is being eaten away and your soul destroyed. At every point you are either driven by God or by one of those three things. I love how J.C. Ryle said it: **“Being ruled by the desires of your body will murder your soul.”**

Only by constant fighting these things, dying to them, in the power of the gospel, will you live. Are you doing that? Many people think coming to Christ is mixing a little religion and morality into your life. But coming to Christ means dying to those old ways of living--looking to physical gratification, material attainment or worldly acclaim as your source of happiness--and finding all that in God your home and heaven your eternal country.

This is why we fast, by the way, and why we give. Through occasionally depriving ourselves of food, we are trying to break the hold of instant gratification on ourselves. Through generosity we are trying to break the hold of material acquisition as a captivating drive in our lives. Through doing those things, by the power of the Spirit, we train our hearts to give God more weight in our hearts than our impulses or earthly dreams.

Freedom and joy in the Christian life is found only by surrendering all of yourself, completely, with abandon, to Jesus. There's **a great song we love to sing here that expresses that**--it's called “Withholding Nothing.” What if we stopped and all just sang that together, and you made that your prayer of commitment right now?

SONG: *Withholding Nothing*

Resolution #2: I will replace the question of “What impact does this situation have on me?” with “How can I glorify God and amplify the gospel?”

Look at vs. 12: **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.**

Peter is about to walk us through 3 difficult relationships believers in his day found themselves in: first, being subject to the leadership of non-Christian and sometimes unjust rulers; second, being in the employment and under the control of an unjust Master; and third, being married to an imperfect person.

We'll get into the particulars of those more next time (I know you'll have some questions)-- but I want to give you the big idea today. Peter says in vs. 12 that we need to change our perspective on what the point and purpose of our lives is. We're here, he says, to glorify God and amplify the gospel. For someone who is a resident of this world, what matters is that they get the recognition, the justice, and the reward they deserve here. For someone who is a citizen of heaven, what matters is how their situation prepares us and others for that home.

Let me call back an example I often use to illustrate this: I say, “Imagine if your life were a movie.” If it were--if your life were a movie--who would the main character be? In every movie, of course, there are major characters and minor characters. What happens to minor characters is not as important because the story is about the major character.

- I've seen advertisements for the new Top Gun and I am more than a little excited. Top Gun was one of my favorite movies of the 1980's. The main character was whom? Maverick, of course. Tom Cruise is the main character in every movie he plays. Goose was actually a better character, if you ask my opinion. A better guy. But Goose's whole role in the movie is to die so that Maverick can develop convictions of his own and become the man his dad always thought he could be.

- Goose's story is tragic, but his story contributes to a larger story, and that story is one that turns out well.
- If your life were a movie, who would the main character be? You say, "Well, duh. Me." And for most of us, that's true. And if you are the main character in your movie, then that means you'll evaluate everything that happens in your life by its effect on you. How did it help me? Did it help make my life easier? Did I get what I deserved?
- But if Jesus is the main character of your story, then in everything that happens you ask, "How can this contribute to his story?" The point is not how things better benefit you, but how they help you tell his story. In riches or in poverty, in prosperity or in pain, the question is, "How can I use this to glorify God and amplify the gospel?" When something bad happens, you may say, "Well, this wasn't good for me, but how can this point people to the gospel?"
- You say, "Well, why would anyone want to switch out themselves as the main character?"
- Here's why: One day the curtain on your life will close and the credits will roll. And if the story was all about you, it's over.
- But if your story was bound up in and surrendered to his, then even after you leave this earth, you'll get to participate and rejoice in a story that goes on forever and always ends in victory.

As strangers and exiles, Peter says, view your life through the lens of God's story. In all things, ask, "How can I use this to glorify God and point people to the gospel?"

Look at **vs. 12** again. *When they slander you.* Peter expects us to be slandered and mistreated. As an evildoer! This was literally true for Christians in Peter's day. The early Roman world did not understand Christians and felt threatened by them. And so they made up lies about them. They thought they were superstitious (they believed in miracles), called them atheists (because they denied Roman gods), incestuous (they're marrying their "brothers and sisters"), and that they were cannibals (they were eating flesh and drinking blood together). Christians were the preferred scapegoats for societal problems. When Nero burnt Rome he blamed it on the Christians. Later when the Visigoths attacked Rome they blamed the Christians.

Peter says, "You should expect this. This is what they did to Jesus and he showed you how to respond." Look at what Peter says in vs. ²¹ **For you were called to this, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps...** ²³ **when he was insulted, he did not insult in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten but entrusted himself to the one who judges justly.** ²⁴ **He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree; so that... "By his wounds you have been healed" (Isaiah 53:5).**

What did Christ do when he experienced opposition?

1. **First, Jesus was patient.** You need to get rid of this idea that if you live right that nothing bad will ever happen to you; no lies will ever be told about you; vindication will always quickly come; good guys ultimately win in every situation. It didn't happen that way with Jesus. If you think living rightly ensures you will avoid injustice and suffering, I am not sure what Savior you are following! He suffered unjustly and left that example that we would follow in his steps.
2. **Second, Jesus committed himself to "him who judges justly."** IOW, he waited for vindication from his Heavenly Father and for reward in his heavenly country. If he never got vindication or reward here, that was ok. He was a stranger and exile, and his real home was his heavenly country, so he waited for that.
3. **Third, he kept doing good even when being slandered!** He kept doing miracles. He kept forgiving people, even when they were nailing him to the cross. He took the long view of vindication, letting his good works speak for themselves. Peter says that is what we must do also. Keep doing good works and let them vindicate you. Look, **vs. 12**, **By your... what? By your WHAT will you silence ignorant people? NOT "BY YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS."** Do you hear me? By your good works. Hey--stop complaining that evangelicals are treated unfairly by the media and start taking care of the orphans in our city. When the foster services have no more kids to place and we're the only people at the table, let that change

everyone's perspective. Stop arguing the fact that Christians aren't judgmental and invite a homosexual couple over for dinner. Stop trying to prove that Christians aren't racists and invite into your life people who don't look like you, and try to feel their pain and carry their burdens like you would your own. The more we display the gospel, the more we'll have opportunity to declare it.²

- **I experienced this a few years ago.** A really liberal theology professor wrote a scathing blog about our church a few years ago--saying all kinds of untrue things about us, saying that we were what is wrong with the world. I got a little fired up and wanted to write a response blog, which I feel like I'm pretty good at, but my wife told me, "Let God defend you." So, I did. I didn't respond. In fact, after several weeks I called up the professor, introduced myself and asked if I could take her to lunch. And yep, it was as awkward as it sounds. But she had a different spirit about her during the conversation and eventually she told me, "I have to tell you that something happened last week that has really been bothering me. A poor, single woman in my neighborhood really has gone through a rough time recently. And she told me that if it weren't for people in your church she may not have made it. Members of your church have been there at every step to help--with financial needs, with her kids. And I realized that if this was how you take care of people, what I said about you and your church probably wasn't true. That's a pretty good defense. Amen? That's what Peter is talking about.
4. **The fourth thing Peter points to in the example of Jesus was that Jesus' patient suffering under injustice was the means by which he saved us!** Peter quotes Isaiah prophesying, "*By his wounds he will heal us.*" By his wounds. Jesus' wounds were not some mysterious byproduct of our salvation; they were the very means by which he purchased our salvation. And, in some mysterious way, Peter says, just as Jesus purchased salvation for the world through his wounds, so we will extend that salvation through ours.
- **Paul said the same thing in the book of Colossians.** He said, "*I am filling up in my body what is lacking in the wounds of Christ.*" What an amazing phrase! Filling up in MY body what is LACKING in the wounds of Christ? How could anything be LACKING? Didn't Jesus say "it is finished?" If it's finished, how could it be lacking anything?
 - Well, yes, of course, the work of salvation is finished, but what is not finished is people hearing about the offer of salvation. And salvation is not complete until people hear the message and respond. Like Martin Luther said, "It wouldn't matter if Jesus died 1000x if no one ever heard about it!" People have to hear the message and believe it in order to be saved by it. And it is by our wounds, Peter and Paul say, and how we respond to those words, that people will best hear and believe.
 - As we endure with hope, as we forgive those who treat us wrongly, as we love those who don't love us or treat us rightly, the world sees the truth about the gospel and they learn about Jesus.
 - By our patient endurance under unjust wounds, we follow in Jesus' steps and complete what is lacking in Christ's suffering.

By the way, an interesting word is used here in Greek for example. The word Peter uses for "example" in vs. 21 is "hupo-grammos." "Grammos" means 'to write' (it's where we get our word "grammar" from); "hupo" means "under." 'Hupogrammos' means to trace or copy. Something written under that you copy. Greek parents, teaching their kids to write, would jot out letters on a page and then put a thin little see-through sheet over what they had written. Then their little Greek children would trace what they had written and in that way learn to write correctly. That's what we are to do with our suffering. Lay down Christ's example in our hearts and trace his response with ours.

So, let me ask you to consider: Where might God be calling you to respond this way, like Christ, to some wound you are enduring right now? To a friend who has wronged you that you need to reach out to with forgiveness? Who has treated you unjustly that you need to reach out to in love and forgiveness like Christ reached out to you? Where do you have a broken relationship? Is there someone you are supposed to

² Adapted from Craig Groeschel, "Different Calling in a Dark World," August 21, 2017.

respond to with goodness, like Christ did, to put on display the gospel? Is there somewhere you need to put away your desire for vindication and vengeance, committing that to God, and just love that person like Christ loved you? Bearing patiently their wounds toward you and praying only, "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do?"

You see, maybe God RIGHT NOW is trying to tell a story through you--a story not about you, a story more important than you! Your story can't save anybody! But Jesus's can. And what greater honor than to have your story contribute to his? To have your story point someone to his story, to eternal salvation. Our wounds, and how we respond to them, are how God displays the gospel best. (BTW, I always want to point this out when I say this, I never mean by this, and neither would Peter, keeping yourself in an abusive situation. If that is where you are, you should reach out for help.) What Peter means is constantly loving and patiently forgiving even after we've been mistreated.

(Conclusion)

So, to conclude, as strangers and exiles, Peter says, we set our sights on different goals. We want different things out of life and define success in different ways.

What is your ultimate goal in life? I was reminded this week of one of my favorite missionary stories that I think perfectly illustrates the change of perspective Peter is calling for here. It's the story you might never have heard, yet this guy's life impacts you in incredible ways! His name was Count Nicolaus von Zinzendorf. I bet you that you'd never heard of him. Anybody name your kid after Count Nicolas von Zinzendorf? If you did name your kid Zinzendorf, and they're in the room with you now, mute this video for a minute and apologize to them.

Old Nic was born into a noble family of privilege in Dresden, Germany in the early 1700's. As a Count, he was expected to take over his family's wealthy estate one day, which basically meant that he would do very little and get lots of money for it. His life was destined to be one of leisure, pleasure and prestige.

But shortly after his 20th birthday, he was visiting a famous art museum in Dusseldorf where he was gripped by a painting called *Ecce Homo*, Latin for "Behold the Man." It depicts Jesus just moments before the crucifixion, beaten, bloodied, wearing a crown of thorns. Below Jesus, the painter, Domenico Feti put these words with the mouth of Jesus: "All this I have done for you. What have you done for me?"

Zinzendorf wrote about being profoundly struck by this painting. He was gripped by the brevity of life, what Jesus had actually done for him, and the urgency of the gospel. In that moment, Zinzendorf knew that he could no longer pursue a life of leisure and call himself a faithful follower of Jesus.

He began to use his massive estate to train and send out hundreds of young twenty-somethings from around Germany to carry the gospel around the world. Eventually, he gave away the vast majority of his fortune.

One night in 1727 a small group of them prayed through the night for God to start a movement through them that no one could stop. And they literally never stopped. Literally. Morning came, and they began to pray in shifts, around the clock. That night birthed what became known as the "hundred year prayer meeting," a round-the-clock prayer chain that continued for more than a century. From that prayer movement God raised up thousands of young missionaries to plant churches and establish gospel communities all around the world.

They called themselves Moravians, because that was the region of Germany most of them were from. A few Moravians even moved to the place where I would one day grow up—Winston-Salem, NC—to establish a gospel community there in 1753. Their gospel impact would not only shape the community I grew up in, it laid a foundation for evangelism and church planting all over the Southeast.

As a young man, Zinzendorf wrote words that defined the movement, words that feel like they could have come right out of 1 Peter. Zinzendorf said: "I have but one passion—it is he, it is he alone. The world is the field and the field is the world; and henceforth that country shall be my home where I can be most used in winning souls for Christ... I desire only to preach the gospel, die, and be forgotten."

As a stranger and pilgrim, *Preach the gospel, die and be forgotten.* Are you ready for that to be your motto?

Here's why you can do that with confidence. Peter ends the chapter by saying: ²⁵ For you "were like sheep going astray" (Isaiah 53:6), but you have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls. IOW, "You're going to be ok, because you are safe with Jesus! He came after you when you were lost and will never leave or forsake you now. As Pastor Curtis showed us a couple weeks ago, the one bedrock thing Peter was sure of was that in all things--good and bad, high and low-- Jesus was there, his love never failed, and his presence would never leave. With him, you can not only endure all things, but overcome them all.

Can I ask a question: Are you ready to abandon your hopes in the world and tie yourself exclusively to Jesus and his Kingdom? Have you even started this journey? If not, you can do so through repentance and faith. He's ready to be the Shepherd of your soul and give you hope beyond the grave! The gospel is that though you and I stood guilty of sin, condemned, God loved us enough that Jesus, his Son, came to take our place on the cross, suffering our punishment in our place, if we will receive him. If you've never done that you can do it right now, by bowing your head and asking Christ to save you!

Pray with me? ...

If you know you have already received Christ, why not ask him how to help you live as an exile, dying to your need for instant gratification and being willing to wait until eternity for vindication and reward?