



Central
Peninsula
Church

...to make and mature more followers of Christ

Living a Godly Life

1 Peter 2:11–12

Neal Benson

February 19, 2017

series: Exiles: Hope Between Two Worlds

Earlier this week I returned from the trip of a lifetime. I was in Israel for ten days with a team of twenty from our church. I've called this adventure "an immersive study trip." We spent time on and around the Sea of Galilee, visited the Jordan River, traveled to the Dead Sea, and finished up in Jerusalem. While we were in Jerusalem we saw where the Temple that Jesus would have visited, we stood on the Mount of Olives, walked through the garden of Gethsemane, and also saw where Jesus was crucified. It was wonderful and very moving at times.

Every time we walked in the city of Jerusalem, I was reminded that I am a foreigner in that land. One day I stopped in the marketplace to film so you can see a glimpse of what I saw. Think about some of the differences you can see in this footage compared to what we're used to. The moms have already noticed that there is no Target, so they aren't shopping here! If you've traveled internationally at all, you've probably visited a marketplace similar to this one. You may have walked on bricks similar to this. It probably had shops tightly packed next to each other. About every tenth shop seemed to be selling the same item. As I shopped in the shops I was captivated by all the unique items you could buy; items that aren't as accessible here on the Peninsula.

The Western Wall is a short eight minute walk from this marketplace. Our team visited the Western Wall one afternoon. The whole experience taught me more about the Jewish culture. The first thing that surprised me was how men and women are not allowed on the same side of the wall; there is a men's side and a women's side. On the male side, each male must cover his head when approaching the Western Wall. You can see men praying out loud. You can see people praying silently. You can see a chair available to sit and read the Torah. You hear people talking in multiple languages. Some people are simply touching the wall with tears streaming down their faces. It's a fantastic place to visit.

Israel is a beautiful land. It honestly reminded me a lot of California. It was green, lush and coastal. You can drive a few hours and be in the desert; it was just like driving past Bakersfield! Israel also has a large military presence. I felt very safe while traveling there. The people were super friendly and I didn't have a negative encounter with anyone. But as beautiful as this country is, the truth is that Israel is not my native land. The rules and regulations are different from what I grew up with.

But you don't have to travel to feel like a foreigner. Many times you've felt like a foreigner right here on the Peninsula. Maybe it was at a party where you felt like an outsider. It might have been at a sporting event where you knew very little about how the sport is played. Maybe you've felt like a foreigner at your company. You've realized that no one at your company has trusted Jesus as their Lord and Savior. The way they talk, the way they act, the way they carry themselves reminds you that you're different from them. Just being in their presence makes you feel like a "stranger in a strange land." Have you ever experienced this? Have you experienced feeling like a foreigner in your own country or in another place?

Open your Bible to 1 Peter 2. If you have ever felt like a foreigner anywhere you're going to be able to relate to the people Peter is writing to. This morning we continue our study in this book. Peter writes this letter to a group of believers in Asia Minor who are being persecuted for their faith. He is going to give them instructions about being Christ-followers in a foreign land. What he wrote almost 2000 years ago is the encouragement many of you need today as you live as a foreigner here in the world—maybe not a foreigner in citizenship, but a foreigner because your citizenship is in heaven.

Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us (1 Peter 2:11-12).

Peter encourages Christ-followers to live in right relationships within their society. The encouragement is two-fold. Do you see it? The first part is expressed in the negative when he instructs them to abstain from sinful desires. The second part is expressed in the positive when he tells the believers to live good lives.

Dear Friends, There is a Battle to Fight

The first part of this encouragement is expressed in the negative: to abstain from sinful desires. Peter addresses his readers as "dear friends" before giving them difficult instructions on how to live in the pagan society around them. Have you ever had someone do this? They will remind you of your relationship with them before saying something difficult to you? Peter is exhorting these believers to live in right relationships with those around them. To do that, though, they have a battle to fight.

Peter urges them to abstain from sinful desires which wage war against their soul (v. 11). Peter uses the Greek word παρακαλῶ (*parakalōō*) which we translate “urge.” In the Greek language this word can also be translated “implore.” Paul uses this same word in 2 Corinthians 5:20 when he implores the people of Corinth to be reconciled to God. Peter is calling the readers to reorient themselves to what is happening around them. He is imploring them to fight the sinful desires that wage war against our soul.

Right before he tells them to fight the battle of sin, Peter reminds them that they are foreigners and exiles in the land where they are living. There is much scholarly debate as to whether or not they are foreigners scattered in a different land. This could mean Jewish people who placed their trust in Christ, and once lived elsewhere but now have been dispersed. If this is so, the locals of the area were watching them just like the people of Israel were watching me this week. They are watching them to see how they fit in their society. They are seeing if these believers are honest people and true to what they say they are.

The other side of the debate is that these exiles could be native to the land. Since they've placed their trust in Christ, their neighbors are watching how they live their lives. Foreigners have different ways of doing things and their neighbors would have known. They once lived one way, but the Holy Spirit drew them to God. They confessed Christ as their Savior and now they are living in the new life that the New Testament talks about. Each of us can probably relate to one side of this situation.

The phrase Peter uses here—foreigners and exiles—is almost an exact quote from the Old Testament. When Abraham's wife Sarah died, he spoke to the Hittites living around him. Standing next to the body of his dead wife, he asked them to sell him a piece of land to bury her (Gen. 23:3-4). I imagine he had tears streaming down his face as he made this request. Overwhelmed with sorrow, he longed to have a place to bury the love of his life. Abraham knew that he was a stranger in their land. When you read the story, you find out that the people knew Abraham was a stranger. They knew about his life; they had been watching how he lived among them. They also had a deep respect for him.

So this encouragement from Peter is not only for the people in Asia Minor 2000 years ago; it is also for us. The verb “abstain” is a fitting verb to use here for people who are strangers. It means to distance oneself. This is fitting for the life of the believer to distance himself or herself from sin. It is similar to what an alcoholic learns when trying to get sober; no one encourages them to just hang around the bar to see their old friends. If the person is truly going to get sober they need distance from their old watering hole.

Now someone might be thinking; “Neal, what kind of sin is he talking about here?” Thank you for asking that question! Peter is using a general word for sin, but some scholars think he may

intend a bent towards sins of the sexual nature. The Apostle Paul sheds light to this in Galatians 5. *“The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God”* (verses 19-21). He lists the acts of the flesh, the sins we have a propensity to commit. I love how Paul starts this sentence by saying the acts of the flesh are obvious. The sinful deeds a person commits are obvious to those around them.

Listen to what two great Bible scholars from different eras have to say: “Our real battle is not with people around us, but with passions within us” (Warren Wiersbe). If you've been a Christian for a while, you might be more familiar with the person in the next quote: “I have more trouble with D.L. Moody than with any man I know.” (D.L. Moody). Aren't these statements so true? When you yield to the sinful desires of your flesh, you begin living a life in contrast to the ways of God. You have to recognize sin and fight it!

As humans we're great at justifying and diminishing our sin. We pretend it's not there or ignore it, hoping it will go away. It's like taking Advil for a broken leg. Let me tell you how nasty our sin is. Two summers ago I woke up in the middle of the night and smelled this horrible smell. I knew it was the smell of death, because I lost two hamsters as a kid, but I was so tired I went back to bed. The next morning was a Sunday, so I went off to church early. My wife texted me around 8 am and said, “I think there's something dead under our house.” I knew she was right, but I just told her to open the windows and air the house out.

After church I got home and the house smelled fine. But before we went to bed we shut the windows and the smell of death returned. I knew what I had to do. I had to crawl under the house and see what was there. So I geared up: I put on old dirty pants, an old sweatshirt and my kid's headlamp. I grabbed a hoe from the garage in case I had to fight off any wild critters, and went under the house. It was a long crawl but as I neared the opposite side of the house, right under my bed, I saw this little nest in the corner. Now I was ready for the battle!

I started poking at it with the hoe. I actually was wishing I had something better because I was waiting for something to jump out and eat me. All my irrational fears expressed themselves under the house that night. Nothing came out, so I pulled down the nest down and began opening it to see if that was really the problem. There it was, a big old nasty dead rat! The smell was horrible. I had a bag with me and cleaned up the mess and made my way out.

Because I love my wife and value a fresh smelling home, I crawled under the house to clean up the mess. This dead rat is what you

hidden sin is like. You've hidden sin in your life, closed the windows so no one can see it, and are pretending it will disappear. There are too many times in your life you haven't dealt with the sin immediately. If you have hidden sin in your life, I implore you to fight the sin. Gear up, do the hard work, and clean the sin out of your life. These sinful desires are waging war against your soul and you must win; there is too much riding on it, which we're going to see as the text continues.

Living a Life that Attracts Others to Christ

This leads us to the second encouragement Peter gives to believers. It is the encouragement to live a life that attracts others to Christ (v. 12). Some people have called this lifestyle evangelism. Christ-followers are to live such good lives that nonbelievers will desire God. If you look at verse 12 again, you will see that Peter tells the original audience to "live such good lives." Another way you can translate "good" from the Greek is: fine, praiseworthy or beautiful. It gives the text a new meaning when we think of living a beautiful life. Listen to how the New Living Translation reads for this verse: "Be careful to live properly among your unbelieving neighbors. Then even if they accuse you of doing wrong, they will see your honorable behavior, and they will give honor to God when he judges the world."

I wonder if, as Peter was writing this encouragement, he thought back to sitting on the north side of the Sea of Galilee. As he sat on the southern facing slope and listened to Jesus teach, he would have heard a similar instruction. *"You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven"* (Matt. 5:14-16). Just this last week I learned something new about this verse. While we were in Galilee, our tour guide pointed out this city that Jesus was talking about. When Jesus gave this example of a city on a hill, he was pointing at a small city that sits just to the northwest of the Sea of Galilee. All the listeners would know about this city and the light it gave at night.

Peter is encouraging the believers to live their lives in such a way that others see it and will know there is something different about them. The worst thing for a Christ-follower is bad press. The best thing for a Christ-follower is good press. We all know there is something different about people who live good lives. They are the kind of people others are drawn to. Think about some of the people I would call "super saints": the Mother Teresa's, C.S. Lewis, Rick Warren and Christian Huang. These are people we want to be more like. Why is that? Because of their love, commitment and dedication to Christ.

Understanding what is happening in the world when this letter was written will help us out here. This is the Greco-Roman

period of history. During this time period, a disciplined life was highly encouraged. Such a life had a high value in the Roman culture. If you've studied Greek history, you know that the Greeks would discipline their minds and study all kinds of material. This was looked upon with high favor. It was desirable to be self-disciplined and others longed to model their lives after those who had the strength to do it.

Peter wants the believers to live in such a way that the unbelievers around them will take notice. He is not asking them to shrink back and assimilate into the society around them. Instead, he is encouraging them to live by Christian values, to live lives of integrity, honor and grace. What would happen if you came to my neighbors and talked to them about me? What would they say to you? I think they would tell you what a great dad I am! That I'm always walking with my kids, playing with them outside, riding bikes or skateboards down the street. I think they would say that I've done my best to share with them about Jesus but do not push Jesus on them. I think they would tell you I'm a kind and honest man. That is my hope. I'm not perfect and I know that.

I do know that my neighbors are watching how I live my life. I think almost all of my neighbors know that I'm a pastor. I have regular conversations with my neighbors when I'm walking home from dropping the kids off at school or going on family walks. I've shared my faith with many of them and I generally get the same look when they find out I'm a pastor. I'm sharing all of this because the people around us are watching our lives. Your neighbors know that you leave your house each Sunday morning, and they are watching to see if your faith lines up with your actions.

There are people who have pushed others away from Christ by the way they live their lives. They say they are a Christ-follower but their actions are putrid. And this isn't restricted to the street we live on. People at your company are also watching how you live your life. Moms at the park are watching. People in the grocery store are watching. People on the train are watching. They want to see if you're living a life different than they are, a life they might desire to have themselves.

In the summer of 1805, a number of Native American chiefs and warriors met in a council at Buffalo Creek, New York. They gathered to hear the gospel presented by Mr. Cram from the Boston Missionary Society. After the sermon, a response was given by Red Jacket, one of the leading chiefs. Among other things, he said, "Brother, you say that there is but one way to worship and serve the Great Spirit. If there is but one religion, then why do you white people differ so much about it? Why not all agree, as you can all read the Book?"

He went on to say, "Brother, we are told that you are preaching to the white people in this place. These people are our neighbors.

We are acquainted with them. We will wait a little while and see what effect your preaching has upon them. If we find it does them good, makes them honest and less disposed to cheat Native Americans, we will then consider again of what you have said.”

Your commitment to Christ can be the catalyst that invites the people around you to trust in Christ. It can be what invites them into an eternal relationship with God and they will glorify Him! We all need to engage with people who have yet to trust in Christ as their Savior. This requires living such a good life that those around you are going to want to know more about the God who changed you. It will encourage them to seek to learn more about Christ and what He's done for you.

Now here's the truth and this is for free this morning! You can't do this alone. Peter is writing this text to a group of believers. We are not called to live the Christian life alone. ***“And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching”*** (Heb. 10:24–25). We need the help of others to live a disciplined life. Just as Peter is writing this to a group, we need the help and encouragement of others. The life of a Christ-follower was never meant to be done in solidarity. If you're not living in community with other believers, come talk with me, I'd love to help you get connected in community.

The main thing we can take from this text is to fight sin and live a godly life. Peter gave two points of encouragement in these two verses. One came in the negative form and one came in the positive form. This means we have to live disciplined lives that are void of sin. Does that mean we are going to be perfect? Not at all! If we are honest with ourselves, it is much easier to live undisciplined lives. It would be easier to eat a pint of ice cream each night, never read our Bibles, and indulge in all kinds of sin. Eating ice cream isn't a sin, but you get my point about overeating. The life of following Christ doesn't allow for that. There are values that go along with being a Christ-follower.

Just as I was a foreigner in Israel, we have to keep in mind that we are foreigners in this world. People are watching how we live our lives. That might sound creepy but it's true. Our neighbors are watching how we parent our children. Our neighbors are watching how we treat our spouses. Our co-workers are watching how we use our time in the office and how we talk about others. If you're a Christ-follower, our citizenship is in Heaven. The Kingdom of Heaven has different values than earthly locations. The Kingdom of Heaven is looking for people who will fight sin and live a godly life. Is that you?

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

© 2017 Central Peninsula Church, Foster City, CA
Catalog No. 1427–6FC