

Be Holy

Series: *When the Going Gets Tough*

Feb. 27, 2022

1 Peter 1:13-21

We're continuing our series in the letter of 1 Peter called *When the Going Gets Tough*.

In that letter, Peter was writing to clusters of Christians who lived in ancient Asia Minor, located in the part of the world we now know as Turkey. Back then, Christians in that area were a misunderstood and often mistreated minority group. They would regularly face hostility in various forms from their pagan neighbours who identified with the majority culture.

Accordingly, 1 Peter is a letter that has a lot to say about how we can find hope in Jesus in the midst of suffering—which seems all the more relevant these days in a time of heightened suffering for so many. How many of you need a renewal of hope right about now? If you with us online, click the button in the chat to virtually raise your hand.

1 Peter also has a lot to say about what it means to follow Jesus faithfully in an era when we as Christians are becoming more and more of a minority presence in the midst of an increasingly secular culture. According to Peter, we are not unlike exiles—people who belong to another King and country—living here as strangers in a foreign land.

We'll come back to those themes later, and at the end of the message, I'll be inviting you to make a Lent commitment. But at this time, let's check out our passage for today. Please follow along as I read 1 Peter 1:13-21:

Therefore, with minds that are alert and fully sober, set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming. As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."

Since you call on a Father who judges each person's work impartially, live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear. For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. Through him you believe

in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.¹

The title of today's message is *Be Holy*, which comes from the call found at the heart of this passage:

But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."²

What comes to mind when you think of holiness? Type it in the chat if you're with us online. Maybe you think of someone who believes they're better than everyone else—someone with a self-righteous, "holier than thou" attitude. Maybe you think of a monk who retreats from mainstream society to live a life set apart in a monastery.

While biblical holiness does have to do with being set apart, it's not about escaping life in the real world. Biblical holiness, rather, is about being *distinct*. More specifically, it's about living your life in a way that authentically reflects *the distinctness of God* to the world around you.

God is holy, which is to say God is distinct, because there is no one else like God—so much so that the angelic creatures around God's throne never cease to cry out, *Holy, holy, holy!*³ And because God is holy, we as God's people are called to reflect his holiness— his utterly distinct beauty, goodness and love— to the world around us.

Why did Peter have to exhort his original readers to holy living? It's because in the face of their sufferings, they were tempted to revert to *unholy* living. As a persecuted minority presence in their society, they were tempted to distance themselves from God and return to lives that were *indistinct* from the pagan culture that surrounded them. They were tempted to go back to the kind of lives they were living before they began following Jesus. Later in the letter, Peter would have to remind them:

But you are not like that, for you are a chosen people. You are royal priests, a holy nation, God's very own possession. As a result, you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light.⁴

One of the goals of growing in holiness, says the text, is to *show others the goodness of God*.

¹ 1 Peter 1:13-21 (NIV)

² 1 Peter 1:15-16 (NIV)

³ See Isaiah 6:3

⁴ 1 Peter 2:9 (NLT)

In other words, Christians like you and me are called to stand out by reflecting the utterly distinct beauty, goodness and love of God to the world around us.

The question is, *do we?*

Some Christians respond to the prevailing culture by **blending into it**. But this approach makes us indistinguishable from culture.

Some Christians respond to the prevailing culture by **retreating from it**. But this approach cuts us off from the very culture we're called to influence for God.

Some Christians respond to the prevailing culture by **fighting against it**. This approach has been quite popular in the United States, and we're seeing it more often here in Canada. There are indeed times when Christians need to stand firm against certain cultural tides. But more often than not, when we choose an adversarial response to culture, we become known for everything we're *against* rather than what and who we're *for*. This may cause us to stand out as distinct, but it usually does so in kind of a grumpy, obnoxious way that hinders our ability to be winsome agents of change in society for God and for good.

As Christians who are like exiles— like foreigners living in a strange land— God calls us to demonstrate holiness— his distinct goodness— through our faithful presence and humble, loving engagement with the culture at large. In the words of my former professor Gordon Smith, you and I are called to live deeply and fully Christian lives within the society where God has placed us, rather than blending into it, retreating from it, or fighting against it. ⁵

So even though our own context is quite different, the question for us is the same as it was for the Christians of ancient Asia Minor: *How can we live holy lives in the midst of an unholy world?*

The Apostle Peter has some advice for us in this regard and here's the heart of it:

To live holy, you have to think holy.

Would you say that with me aloud, or type it into the chat?

In verse 13, Peter tells us:

⁵ Gordon T. Smith, *Wisdom from Babylon: Leadership for the Church in a Secular Age*, 22-33.

Therefore, with minds that are alert and fully sober, set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming.⁶

To live holy, you have to think holy. So your *mind* should be alert, says the text. The original Greek literally reads *gird up your mind*. Here, Peter was picturing a basic garment worn in ancient Israel, this long, sleeveless shirt that reached down to your knees or ankles. For occasions like work or battle, you would tuck or “gird up” this garment into your belt, freeing your legs for unencumbered action. So Peter’s saying that if you want to live a holy life in an unholy world, gird up your mind. Get anything that might encumber your thinking out of the way.

Verse 13 also talks about being fully sober, by which Peter means we need to be clear-thinking. One Bible scholar points out that Peter uses this phrase to describe how the cares of this life and the pressures of the world can “intoxicate” your mind and distract your focus as easily as beer or wine.⁷ Holy living, however, requires a sober or self-controlled mind.

This includes alertness to the fact that Jesus will soon return: *Set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming.*

Here we’re reminded of what Pastor Kevin talked about last week. Focusing on our future hope in Christ is essential for living a holy life here and now.

Jesus will return one day, and God’s rule and reign will be fully established on earth as it is in heaven. God will set the whole world right, once and for all. And we are exhorted to set our hope on this glorious, eternal future that is ours in Christ. But if we never *think* about that hope, how do we expect to live in light of it?

To live holy, you have to think holy.

I’m not talking about academics or intellectualism. I’m talking about intentionally taking the time, effort, and energy to fill our minds with God’s truth so that it shapes the way we see reality and how live each and every day.

GIGO (guy-go; G-I-G-O) is a classic computer-programming acronym (and by classic, I mean *old*). Does anyone know what GIGO stands for? *Garbage in, garbage out*. Bad input means bad output. The same can be said for our lives. If you program your mind with immoral

⁶ 1 Peter 1:13 (NIV)

⁷ Peter H. David, *The Epistle of 1 Peter, New International Commentary on the New Testament*, 67.

thoughts, worldly pursuits and frivolous distractions, the output of your life will be... immoral, worldly and frivolous. But if you program your mind with God's Word, if you think long and hard and deep on the eternal hope that is yours is Christ, if you fix your eyes on Jesus, the output of your life will be... holiness. To live holy, you have to think holy.

Athletes hire sports psychologists to help them cultivate the mental edge they need to perform better. If competitive sports require mental preparation and focus, holy living requires all the more. The scriptures abound with passages that speak to this.

Colossians says:

Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. ⁸

Romans says:

Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. ⁹

Philippians says:

Finally brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. ¹⁰

2 Corinthians says:

... we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. ¹¹

Maybe you hear this and you're thinking, "Okay, Pastor, you don't need to rattle off any more Bible passages. To live holy, I have to think holy—I get it. But it all sounds so... *hard*. I find it's all I can do to wrap my mind around my job, my family responsibilities, my problems, and all the other stuff I have to deal with. By the time I do get a free moment, I'm ready to turn my mind *off* for a while. What happens when I just don't *feel* like thinking holy in order to live holy?"

⁸ Colossians 3:2 (NIV)

⁹ Romans 12:2a (NIV)

¹⁰ Philippians 4:8 (NIV)

¹¹ 2 Corinthians 10:5b (NIV)

That's a fair question. What it really comes down to is motivation. What will keep us motivated to think holy so we can live holy?

In our passage, Peter suggests two motivators. The first is:

A healthy fear of God.

Check out verse 17:

Since you call on a Father who judges each person's work impartially, live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear.

God's given us a mission in this world, but like foreigners, we don't belong to this world. So we must not let this world and its ways define our lives. As we've seen, we're called to reflect the holy distinctiveness of our heavenly Father in everything we do.

And same God we call Father, says the text, is also an impartial judge. He will judge each person penetratingly, with absolute honesty. And later in 1 Peter, it says that judgment begins with— the household of God.¹² That's the church. That's us! Christians will be first in line to face the just scrutiny of a holy God.

And verse 17 says that God will judge each person's what? Their *work*.

Work here refers not to our paid jobs, but to everything we do. Over and over again, the scriptures say that God will judge us according to what we have done, according to our works, according to the way we have lived our lives.

Of course, it is not our works that save us—we can't *earn* our salvation—only Jesus can accomplish that on our behalf through his death and resurrection. But as Bible scholar Scot McKnight says about this passage, *a Christian's works are the logical result of his or her relationship with God*.

Many people may call themselves Christians, but if their lives and their works never really reflect God's holiness, they might need to be asking themselves how authentic their relationship with God really is.

With this in mind, Peter tells us, "live out your time as foreigners here *in reverent fear*."

¹² See 1 Peter 4:17

This doesn't mean that God wants us to be paranoid that he's going to zap us if we screw up. Goodness, no. He is gracious, and patient and forgiving and kind. He's the same God who in his great love sent Jesus to die for our sins. The passage says we call God *Father*—an intimate term of loving relationship.

But we must not forget that God our Father is also an impartial and resplendently holy judge.

The term *reverent fear* has to do with healthy respect.

We have a neighbour named Joe who is a retired electrician. Over the years, if we've ever had an electrical problem, Joe would come over and fix it for us. I was amazed one day when Joe started working with electrical wires at our house without first turning off the breaker switch, like I always do. Of course Joe can do this because he knows the nature and rules of electricity so well. But he would never violate those rules, because he has a completely healthy respect for the power of electricity.

In the same way, we need to have a healthy respect, a reverent fear of our God, who is a loving Father, but at the same time an impartial judge, who says, "Be holy, for I am holy."

Yes, holy thinking and holy living was hard for Peter's first readers, and it's hard for us. What will keep us motivated when we just don't feel like pursuing it? A healthy fear of God is the first thing. The second is:

Recalling the cost of your redemption.

Check out verses 18-21:

For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.¹³

More than 14,000 men, women and children were abducted and forced into slavery in Sudan between 1986 and 2002. Imagine you were one of them.

¹³ 1 Peter 1:18-21 (NIV)

Hear the pickup truck engines as a raiding party from the ruling north roars into your South Sudanese village. You gaze in horror, helpless, as these vicious men force you and several of your neighbors at gunpoint onto the back of their vehicles. You watch your village disappear on the horizon as the truck speeds away. You and your neighbors now belong to these raiders. You are now an enslaved person.

My wife Jan used to work with someone who was involved in a ministry to redeem enslaved Sudanese people from their captors. Large sums of money would be raised, and risky visits would be made with the slave owners to negotiate the release price—the purchase—of the victims. It was the only way they would ever have a chance of being set free and seeing their families again.

Traditionally, the idea of redemption has to do with slavery. It's about the cost of purchasing someone's freedom. I'm not sure what it cost to redeem a Sudanese captive from a life of forced slavery, but one thing's for sure. It wasn't cheap. The monetary cost would have been significant, and beyond that, there were significant safety risks.

Those of us who follow Jesus Christ have been redeemed—redeemed from our slavery to sin and self. God himself paid the price for our redemption, and as our passage says, we were not redeemed with perishable things like silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ. He was a lamb without blemish or defect—the sinless dying for the sinful. Jesus went into enemy territory, as it were, and didn't lay down cash, but his very life as the price of our redemption.

Peter is saying that because God redeemed us at such an unfathomable cost—the cost of the life of the Son of God— then we need to live in a way that honors that unfathomable cost.

Can you imagine a redeemed Sudanese person returning to their former slave owners and saying, "Hey, I changed my mind; will you take me back?" Of course not. God rescued us out of our slavery to sin, not so that we can go back to it, but so that we, by the power of his Spirit, would be free to live a holy life that reflects the utter distinctness of his beauty, goodness and love to the world.

Redemption is like that. It's always involves removal from an old way of life, and placement into a new way of life. As the Apostle Paul says in Romans 6:

So what do we do? Keep on sinning so God can keep on forgiving? I should hope not! If we left the country where sin is sovereign, how can we still live in our old house there? Or didn't you realize that we packed up and left there for good? That

happened in baptism. When we went under the water, we left the old country of sin behind; when we came up out of the water, we entered into a new country of grace—a new life in a new land! ¹⁴

Yes, holy thinking and holy living is hard. When your motivation to pursue holiness begins to sag, remember the cost of your redemption from slavery to sin. The Saviour shed his precious blood for your freedom, so let that motivate you to do everything it takes to pursue holiness, for the sake of his honour and glory.

I'm not sure if you noticed something about the two motivators to holiness we've looked at in our passage— *a healthy fear of God* and *recalling the cost of your redemption*. Do you see what those two motivators involve? Your *mindset*.

How will you be motivated by a healthy fear of God and by recalling the cost of your redemption if you never take time to *think*—really think— on these things? So in a sense we've come full circle, haven't we? *To live holy, you have to think holy*.

How do we do that? Here's a quote from theologian and author J.I. Packer about Christian meditation that gets to the heart of what it means to think holy to live holy:

Meditation is the activity of calling to mind, thinking over, dwelling on, and applying to oneself the various things one knows about the works and ways and purpose and promises of God. It is an activity of holy thought, consciously performed in the presence of God, under the eye of God, by the help of God, as a means of communication with God. Its purpose is to clear one's mental and spiritual vision of God, and to let his truth make its full and proper impact on one's mind and heart. ¹⁵

We'd like to give you an opportunity to take a step in that direction at this time. This coming Wednesday, March 2nd, marks the beginning of the season of Lent.

www.cornerstonechurch.ca/lent

Lent is a 6-week period leading that leads up to Easter weekend. It's a season of discipline and spiritual renewal where you:

1. Give up something specific that tends to hinder your relationship with Jesus.

¹⁴ Romans 6:1-3 (MSG)

¹⁵ J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*, 23.

2. Take up a spiritual practice or discipline that will help you make more space for Jesus.

Lent offers an excellent opportunity for you to think holy in order to live holy.

For example, let's say you give up social media for Lent, because it tends to distract your mind and fill you with worry. In its place, let's say you take up morning and evening prayer using the Lectio 365 app, which allows you to focus your mind and heart on Jesus at the beginning and end of each day.

That's just one example of what a Lent commitment can look like. There are hundreds of possible combinations.

What I'd like to do at this time is give you some time to make a Lent commitment for 2022. Just take your device and go to the page you see on the screen. There, you will find some guidance on how to make your Lent commitment, and also some resource options. You will also find an online commitment form, which you can choose to fill out either using your name, or anonymously.

For those who are here in person, you have the option of using a printed commitment card. If you'd prefer to use a printed commitment card, just raise your hand, and an usher will be happy to bring you one.

May the Lenten season be for us this year a time of thinking holy, so we, by God's grace, showing his utterly distinct beauty, goodness and love to the world around us.

We'll give you a good 4 minutes now to go to this webpage, or use the printed card, and make your 2022 Lent commitment...