Faithful Through the Fire Nov. 8, 2026

4 of 6 in *Chosen for a Purpose: Living as Exiles on Mission* 1 Peter 3:8-16

Over the past several weeks, something encouraging has been happening at Cornerstone. More than 300 of you signed up to participate in our *Joining God in the Neighbourhood* initiative.

Many of you have been working through the accompanying guidebook, with its daily devotionals, prayers, and practical exercises. There are still copies available in the lobby, so if you'd like to pick one up after the service, please help yourself. There's also a *Joining God in the Neighbourhood* webpage: www.cornerstonechurch.ca/joininggod. There, you can access a digital version of the guidebook, resources for kids, and there's also a place where you can share your *God in the Neighbourhoo*d stories, which we highly encourage you to do.

The heart of this initiative is the conviction that God is already active in the places where we live, work, study, and play. Our calling is to notice where he is already at work and discover how he might be inviting us to join him there.

Let me give you an example from my own neighbourhood.

We had a neighbour who lived a few doors down from us. I won't use his real name. Let's just call him Fred. Fred died last year from a terminal illness. For much of his life, he had been an avowed atheist, and at times quite hostile toward faith. But when he received his diagnosis, something shifted. He began asking questions about God. Pastor Andrew, who also lives on our street, had a series of conversations with Fred about faith. Through those conversations, Fred became a follower of Jesus, and for a season, he even attended weekly worship at Cornerstone. His wife, not a person of faith herself, respected his newfound faith nonetheless, and would accompany him to worship each week because he needed her support to get here.

As Fred's illness progressed, he became less and less able to do things for himself. Several people from Cornerstone who live in or near our neighbourhood pitched in, alongside other neighbours, to help Fred and his family.

I remember one afternoon when I sat with Fred at his home while his wife went out shopping. By then, he had lost his ability to speak, and his walking was very shaky, although his mind was still clear. We sat together on the couch in his living room, watching some of his family's old Christmas videos. But Fred seemed unsettled, and I sensed the prompting of the Holy Spirit to ask whether he'd like me to read him some Scripture. He said yes, and as I read, I could see him settle. It was a simple moment, but a deeply meaningful one.

I remember another moment when a few Cornerstone folks from our neighbourhood were helping rearrange furniture in Fred's home to make room for a new stair lift. One Cornerstone friend, David Eastwood, jokingly asked Fred to help him move a piano. Fred obviously couldn't do that—but he got the joke, and boy, did Fred laugh. It was a beautiful moment of shared levity in the middle of a very

heavy season. And then there were people from my small group who would come and walk Fred's dog. Altogether, it was a wonderful picture of neighbours simply being there for one another.

When I look back, I see so many ways God was at work in Fred's life and in our neighbourhood. There were conversations about faith, a journey to Jesus, practical acts of care, Scripture shared on a living-room couch, laughter shared, and a dog being walked.

And here's what strikes me: none of us had to manufacture those opportunities. We were simply neighbours, learning to pay attention, responding to the person God had placed right in front of us, and discovering that God was already at work.

That's a glimpse of what it can mean to join God in the neighbourhood.

And it's closely connected to the biblical themes we've been exploring in our series in 1 Peter. Peter is writing to Christians scattered throughout the region of Asia Minor, located in modern-day Turkey. The Christians there are a minority, often misunderstood, sometimes treated with suspicion or hostility because of their faith.

Peter reminds them that they've been chosen by God, given a new identity in Christ, and called to make God's goodness known right where they are. Because following Jesus isn't something we do only when we're gathered here on Sunday. It's something we live out in our neighbourhoods, workplaces, relationships, and everyday encounters.

But what happens when those encounters aren't so positive? What happens when people who do not yet follow Jesus disagree with us, misunderstand us, or treat us badly? In other words, how do we respond when following Jesus becomes difficult? How do we remain faithful to Jesus without becoming defensive, hostile, or fearful ourselves?

That's what Peter addresses in the passage we're looking at today. And he gives us three important ways to remain faithful through the fire. The first is to:

1. Stay close to one another.

In verse 8, Peter writes these words:

> Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble. [1]

Notice who Peter's addressing: *all of you*. He's speaking to the whole Christian community. And before he tells them how to respond to criticism and hostility from *outside* the church, he begins with how they are to treat one another *inside* the church.

[1] 1 Peter 3:8 (NIV)

In this verse, Peter identifies five qualities that should characterize this and every church community.

First, be like-minded:

> Finally, all of you, **be like-minded**, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble. (1 Peter 3:8)

This doesn't mean everyone has to think alike or agree on every issue. Christian unity isn't uniformity. It means sharing a common commitment to Jesus and allowing him to shape our priorities, attitudes, and the way we live together.

Second, be sympathetic:

> Finally, all of you, be like-minded, **be sympathetic**, love one another, be compassionate and humble. (1 Peter 3:8)

This is more than feeling sorry for someone. It means entering into another person's experience, trying to understand what they're going through, and sharing in their joys and sorrows.

Third, love one another:

> Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, **love one another**, be compassionate and humble. (1 Peter 3:8)

The original Greek wording Peter uses here carries the sense of family affection. He's reminding us that the church isn't simply an organization or a gathering of people who happen to share some religious beliefs. We are family. We belong to one another because we belong to Christ. And family love means that we don't treat one another as disposable when things get difficult or when someone disappoints us.

Fourth, be compassionate:

> Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, **be compassionate** and humble. (1 Peter 3:8)

Have a tender heart toward one another. Don't become hardened to the struggles of others. Don't become so preoccupied with your own life and concerns that you fail to notice when someone else is hurting.

And fifth, be humble:

> Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and **humble**. (1 Peter 3:8)

Be willing to take the lower place. Don't always insist on being right, getting your own way, or having your contribution recognized. Humility means recognizing that life together isn't all about me.

Put those five qualities together and imagine the community Peter is describing: people genuinely interested in one another, making room for one another's struggles, listening before jumping to conclusions, and offering a place where people don't have to earn their belonging by being impressive, successful, useful, or perfect.

That's a beautiful picture of Christian community, but it's also challenging. Because the church is made up of real people with different backgrounds, personalities, opinions, and expectations. We disappoint, frustrate, and misunderstand each other. Often enough, we rub each other the wrong way.

Pastor and theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer addresses this in his classic book, *Life Together*. He warns us against loving our concept of the church *as we think it should be* more than we love the church *that actually is*, warts and all. Bonhoeffer goes as far as to say that when we love our *dream* of Christian community more than the actual Christian community *itself*, we become *destroyers* of the Christian community.

And that's where Peter's words become so real. Because our sympathy, compassion, humility, and love are tested not when everything is going smoothly, but rather in the complex and often messy realities of life together.

That includes the way we speak about one another. How do we talk about other brothers and sisters in Christ when they're not in the room? Are our conversations marked by love, humility, and a genuine desire to understand? Or do we slip into complaining, gossip, and passing judgment?

Because if we can't practise the way of Jesus inside God's own household—if we reproduce the same patterns of division, suspicion, toxic chatter, and hostility that characterize the world around us—what kind of witness can we possibly offer to that world?

And so, when it comes to remaining faithful in the fire, Peter begins with our life together. When life in this world gets difficult, we need one another. We need a community that strengthens rather than burdens us, where we experience the love of Jesus through one another. The church should be that kind of place—not a hideout from the world, but a place of belonging and encouragement that equips us to live faithfully in the world.

Next, to remain faithful in the fire we must:

2. Choose the way of Jesus, even when others don't.

Having considered how we treat one another within the Christian community, Peter now turns outward. Starting in verse 9, he writes about how we respond to people outside the church who treat us badly—those who insult us, oppose us, or make life difficult because of our faith.

The same qualities Peter calls for within the church—humility, compassion, love, and care in how we speak—should also shape how we relate to those outside it. Our witness depends on whether the way we treat others reflects the way of Jesus. So, in verse 9, we read:

> Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. [2]

It's so easy to mirror those who mistreat us. Someone is rude, so we're rude back. Someone takes a shot at us, so we find a way to take a shot at them. Someone misrepresents us, so we misrepresent them.

But Peter says that's not the way of Jesus. If we respond to hostility with hostility, what makes our response any different from the world's?

Instead, Peter calls us to respond with blessing. To bless means to actively seek someone's good—including bringing them before God in prayer. Rather than nurturing bitterness or retaliating, we are called to respond with the grace and goodness of Jesus.

Peter reinforces this by quoting Psalm 34:

> "Whoever would love life and see good days must keep their tongue from evil and their lips from deceitful speech. They must turn from evil and do good; they must seek peace and pursue it." [3]

Notice how practical this is. Peter brings the teaching right down to our everyday words and actions.

First, *watch what you say*.

> "Whoever would love life and see good days must **keep their tongue from evil and their lips from deceitful speech.** They must turn from evil and do good; they must seek peace and pursue it." (1 Peter 3:10-11; Psalm 34:13-14)

Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from deceitful speech. Our words matter. They can wound or heal, divide or reconcile, tear people down or build them up.

Second, turn from evil and do good.

> "Whoever would love life and see good days must keep their tongue from evil and their lips from deceitful speech. They must **turn from evil and do good**; they must seek peace and pursue it." (1 Peter 3:10-11; Psalm 34:13-14)

It's not enough to avoid doing something wrong. Peter calls us to *take the initiative* in doing what is right. Don't simply refuse to retaliate; look for a way to act with kindness and do good.

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[2] 1 Peter 3:9 (NIV)
[3] 1 Peter 3:10-11 (NIV); quoting Psalm 34:12-14

And third, seek peace and pursue it.

> "Whoever would love life and see good days must keep their tongue from evil and their lips from deceitful speech. They must turn from evil and do good; they must **seek peace and pursue it**." (1 Peter 3:10-12; Psalm 34:13-14)

We can't just stand by passively, hoping peace will happen. It takes initiative and effort. Often, it means taking the first step, reaching out, listening, extending grace, or letting go of the need to have the last word.

And here's something important: pursuing peace doesn't mean avoiding every disagreement or pretending everything is fine. Sometimes peace requires difficult conversations, honest words, and a willingness to address what's broken. The goal, though, is to seek what is good, not to win at someone else's expense.

Then Peter reminds us *why* it's possible to live this way:

> "For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil." [4]

In other words, God sees. God hears. God knows what's happening, including when we're treated unfairly or misunderstood. We don't have to take matters into our own hands. We can entrust ourselves to God, who sees the whole picture and whose judgment is just.

When we respond to hostility with goodness, insult with blessing, and conflict with a genuine pursuit of peace, people get a glimpse of a different way of living—a way shaped by Jesus– and when they do, they may well be drawn to him as a result.

That's what it means to remain faithful through the fire: not allowing the hostility of others to turn us into hostile people ourselves, not allowing the darkness around us to dim to light within us. Instead, we keep doing good, speaking with grace, and pursuing peace—because that's the way of Jesus.

Finally, we must:

3. Let hope be stronger than fear.

Peter now raises a question that would have been very real for these early Christians: What happens when doing the right thing *doesn't* make life easier? What happens when you try to live faithfully, treat people well, and pursue peace, but *still* face opposition?

In verse 13 he writes:

[4] 1 Peter 3:13 (NIV); quoting Psalm 34:15-16

> Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. [5]

Doing the right thing doesn't guarantee that everyone will respond well. Don't assume that opposition means you've done something wrong, or that suffering means God has abandoned you. Remaining faithful to Jesus often comes at a cost. How many know that following Jesus includes carrying crosses of your own? But even when it does, you're never outside God's care or blessing.

Of course, not every criticism we receive is persecution. Sometimes people are offended because *we've* been unnecessarily harsh, arrogant, or insensitive. Peter is talking about the cost that comes when we have genuinely responded in the Jesus way, and face mistreatment nonetheless. He goes on to say:

> Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened. [6]

Peter isn't suggesting that Christians should never feel afraid. He's reminding them that the people and circumstances that threaten them do not have the final word. Their lives are held by God. Their hope is bigger than whatever opposition they face. That's why he goes on to say in verse 15:

> But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. [7]

This is really the centre of what Peter is teaching. Don't let fear take the place that belongs only to Jesus. Don't allow the opinions, threats, or hostility of others to become the ultimate authority over your lives. Revere Christ as Lord.

And notice where Peter says this needs to happen: *in your hearts*. Who is at the centre? Whose voice carries the greatest weight? Whose approval matters most?

When Christ is truly Lord, we don't have to be controlled by what others think of us or how they treat us. We can remain faithful without becoming defensive, hostile, intimidated, or ruled by fear.

Peter then says we should:

> Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect… [8]

I love that picture. Peter assumes the distinct, Jesus-like way that Christians live will prompt questions. People will notice a community that continues to do good, refuses to retaliate, and holds on to hope even when life is difficult. And they'll want to know why.

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[5] 1 Peter 3:13a (NIV)
[6] 1 Peter 3:13b (NIV)
[7] 1 Peter 3:15a (NIV)
[8] 1 Peter 3:15b (NIV)

Peter isn't saying every Christian needs to have an answer to every theological question. He's talking about being ready to explain the hope that sustains us. Why do we keep loving when it's difficult? Why do we keep doing good when others would stop? What makes such a life possible?

We need to be able to put that hope into words—not necessarily complicated words or polished arguments, but honest words about what Jesus means to us and why we trust him.

And Peter adds something important: we are to give that answer "with gentleness and respect."

We can speak about our hope in Jesus with conviction and yet still be gentle. We can be clear about what we believe while still treating others with respect.

That brings us right back to the beginning of the passage. Peter has been talking about how we treat one another, how we respond when people outside the faith mistreat us, and how we pursue peace. Now he brings it all together: our words, actions, and attitudes should tell the same story. The hope we profess should be visible in the way we live. He concludes by saying that we should continue:

> … keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behaviour in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. [9]

Peter's point is that our lives should give credibility to our words. We should live in such a way that even when people criticize or misrepresent us, there's no legitimate basis for their accusations.

And notice that little phrase, "in Christ." This isn't about trying harder to be good people through sheer willpower. It's about a life shaped by our relationship with Jesus—belonging to him, following him, and allowing his character to shape our own.

So what does all this mean for us?

When following Jesus becomes difficult, we don't have to give in to fear. We don't have to compromise our convictions to win approval, become hostile when people disagree with us, or hide our faith because we're embarrassed about the hope we have.

Instead, we keep Christ at the centre. We keep doing good. We keep speaking with gentleness and respect. And we keep living with the kind of hope that makes people curious about Jesus.

Because ultimately, our hope isn't in the approval of others, favourable circumstances, or the promise that life will always be easy. Our hope is in Jesus Christ—crucified, risen, present with us, and Lord over all.

And that hope is stronger than fear.

That's how we remain faithful through the fire. Let's pray…

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[9] ! Peter 3:16 (NIV)