

Survival Skills for the Christian

I Peter Review

If you are the adventurous type – from the comfort of your own sofa and protection of your home – you may have enjoyed the TV series Man vs. Wild featuring the survival skills of Edward “Bear” Grylls. With nothing more than a couple survival tools (and his film crew) he would take you to remote and destitute places to teach the art of survival in all kinds of unforgiving conditions from the heat of a dense jungle to the heights of below freezing mountains to the jagged rocks of some vast and rugged terrain. He has traveled the world thrilling audiences with amazing feats and facts of survival. His website tells you to “be brave, inquisitive, prepared for the journey, ready for anything. Unafraid to fail – we never give up. Uncover your adventure spirit and we’ll be with you all the way.”

One of his latest endeavors is called the ‘Survival Challenge’. The lure for participants is this: “Being fit is one thing, but are you fit for survival? This mass scale endurance event seeks to test not just our physical capabilities, but also our mental agility, resourcefulness and never-say die spirit in real life survival situations.”

As we come to this concluding message in our study, Peter has written a survival guide of his own sent to believers in Asia Minor. The Christian life is in itself an endurance event. These believers were facing some difficult if not daunting obstacles because of their faith. The pressure was unnerving and overwhelming. An unforeseen path lay ahead of them. None of them knew what was around the next bend or over the next hill in their journey toward their eternal destiny. Was it more suffering or was there any ease to the difficult path. They needed some guidance on how to maneuver all those challenges with a “never give up” spirit. Peter’s letter is a call to every Christian to be brave and be prepared for the journey. He reminds all

believers that we are never alone in this excursion. His words were meant to encourage us to keep going no matter how difficult the challenges.

Toward the end of his letter he mentions that the same suffering is experienced by other Christians elsewhere, so be encouraged and hang in there. His words would help them stand strong against all the odds or thought of giving up. They are meant to be survival skills for the Christian.

Peter reminded them that they were to live as aliens or foreigners, people who are not citizens of this world. Their citizenship lies elsewhere. Their ruler reigns over another kind of kingdom, one that is eternal.

We received a letter from Cassy Fleming this past week. After having spent 2 ½ years in Papua New Guinea she will be returning in April for a 6 month home assignment. Living in a third world country has left its imprint on her and in her letter she talks about reverse culture shock. Her return will be overwhelming at first surrounded by all the noises of life in America that has been absent in PNG. While she remains a citizen of the US, I’m sure she will feel unsure of where she fits in having a foot really in two different worlds. But the reality is both worlds are just temporary residences for her. While she may feel like a foreigner in both countries she understands her real home awaits her.

That was Peter’s message to believers. The hardships experienced in this world will be joyfully absent in the eternal home that awaits all believers.

Peter has in effect said, as the old spiritual song goes, “This world is not my home I’m just a passin’ through.” Don’t get comfortable, because this world has nothing of lasting value to offer that should make us want to stick around. For our expedition Peter has given us a travel guide.

Any expedition, whether it’s climbing to the summit of some mountain, like Mt. Everest, or exploring

the depths of some jungle, like the Amazon rain forest, has a base camp. A base camp is the main encampment providing supplies, communication, and shelter for persons engaged in wide-ranging activities.

I would like to suggest to you this morning that I Peter has a base camp, a passage that serves as the center of focus for the book, the place to come back to that provides direction, communication, and supplies for the Christian journey. It gives us a focused perspective on a wide range of topics contained within this book. It serves as our goal, objective, our summit, if you will, until we reach our destiny, the place we call our eternal home.

I Peter 1:15-16

When it comes to the promises in this book, we come back to this passage.

When it comes to the provision outlined in this book, we come back to this passage.

When it comes to times of persecution, we come back to this passage.

When it comes to the power to prevail in suffering, we come back to this passage.

When it comes to the practices of the Christian, we come back to this passage.

When it comes to the punishment that will be meted out on many, we come back to this passage.

When it comes to praising the one who made this possible, we come back to this passage.

This passage is the spring board or launch pad to help provide clarity and direction as we journey through this life.

It's a great verse to memorize.

“But, as He who hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation. Because it is written ‘Be ye holy; for I am holy.’”

To be holy simply means to be set apart to God. It means to separate yourself from anything that is

sinful. Holiness is moral wholeness.

The passage says that God is holy. That is one of His essential attributes. It is a defining characteristic of God. If He were not holy, He could not be God. Scripture takes great care at underscoring this attribute of God so that we understand where holiness begins and the standard which is set for us to strive toward.

Exodus 15:11

Psalm 71:22

Psalm 99:9

Isaiah 6:3

Revelation 4:8

Revelation 15:4

Unger's Bible Dictionary provides some beneficial understanding of God's holiness. He did not attain His holiness by being subject to some standard of law or moral excellence that is outside Himself. Instead, all moral law and perfection have their eternal and unchangeable basis in His own nature because He is holy. He has never sinned, not even once in thought or word or action or motive. He is the root of holiness. So the truth of matter as in I Samuel 2:2 is that “There is none holy as the Lord.”

How then are we to take the words of Peter to be holy because God is holy? Our being holy as God is holy seems both not possible and sometimes not practical. We live in a fallen world with a fallen nature that clamors for us to continue in a state of fallenness even after we are saved. It doesn't seem practical at times to be holy when the boss tells us to cut a few corners to save the company some money or to get that promotion. The world and the sin nature tell us that if we want to get ahead we need to lie a bit, everyone else is doing it. When it comes to taxes or job applications change some of the numbers or embellish achievements.

But that doesn't change the tone of the command nor should it foster a “why try” attitude because holiness will never happen in this life.

It may seem impossible on one hand and impractical on the other hand, but do you think that God would give us something to do but not give us the means to do it?

Romans 6:1-12

If II Corinthians 5:17 is true that we are a new creation, it is also true then that the old has passed and the new has come. If we are dead to sin then don't let sin reign. Should we continue in sin, Paul asks, so that God's grace may abound? Should we continue in sin because we know God is merciful and forgiving and loving and patient? The command stands – "Be holy, because God is holy."

In one sense we are holy. Paul begins his letter to the Corinthians by calling them "saints", set apart ones, the same word translated as holy. Yet throughout the letter he challenges them to mend their ways in regard to sins they were committing. While we are clothed with the righteousness of Christ so that God sees us positionally as holy this command by Peter is a call to be in our practice what we already are in position. Keep working at it.

Paul writes to the Galatian believers giving them a key as to how we can strive toward holiness. He says in Galatians 5:16 that we are to walk or live by the Spirit. It's a daily yielding to the work of the Spirit in our lives allowing Him to convict and change us into the character of Christ. When we yield to the Spirit of God obeying His direction in our lives then instead of pursuing after the things that satisfy the sin nature, we will instead pursue holiness. Instead of following after a life of "sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft" and you might stop me there and say yea but Pastor none of that is me. Paul goes on to include some things that may hit a bit closer to home that we need to get rid of because they are the antithesis of holiness. He continues in Galatians 5:20-21 with "hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy;

drunkenness, orgies, and the like." And he concludes the verse by saying that anyone who lives like this won't inherit eternal life.

Reading on in verses 22-23, pursuing holiness is allowing the Holy Spirit to produce His fruit, the character of God in us: "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control."

Let me encourage you to pick up and read a copy of Jerry Bridge's book *The Pursuit of Holiness*. Here's what he says about holiness. "God's command is, 'Be holy, for I am holy.' But as victims of sin's 'guerilla warfare,' Christians are often prone to give up the fight, or at least to compromise with sin in its more difficult forms. Why do we so rarely experience holy living? The central issue confronting us is that Christians fail to understand their own responsibility for holiness. If we sin, it is because we choose to sin – not because we lack the ability to say no to temptation. We are not defeated; we are disobedient."

God has provided us with what we need to live a godly life. When we get into II Peter we will right away discover that "His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and goodness. Through these He has given us His very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires." (II Peter 1:3-4)

Here's the thing I want you to get. When we are pursuing a godly life, then it can never be said of us nor should we ever say it of anyone else "you'll have to excuse me or excuse that person because that's just their nature."

If they are in Christ, if I am in Christ that nature has passed because I have a new nature in Christ. I may fail once in a while but it should not be a regular

habit.

But if we are going to take seriously this command to be holy because God is holy then we cannot be satisfied with the status quo as a Christian. It's like what John says in his first epistle that I'm not what I was and neither am I yet what I'm going to be. John says the same thing as Peter "Everyone who has this hope in Him, (the hope of being like Christ when He appears), purifies himself, just as He is pure." (I John 3:2-3)

Here's a key to keep in mind from Jerry Bridges in his book. "As we grow in holiness, we grow in hatred of sin; and God, being infinitely holy, has an infinite hatred of sin...the Holy Spirit makes us aware of our lack of holiness to stimulate us to deeper yearning and striving for holiness... We need to ask God daily to search our hearts for sin that we cannot or will not see."

Personal holiness is more than just an absence of sin. As we see in the life of Christ, it also includes obedience to the Father.

One of the hymns we sing from time to time is a good reminder of what it takes to pursue a life of godliness. If you wouldn't mind, take your hymnal and turn to hymn #656 – Take Time to Be Holy. Notice with me some of the requirements of pursuing holiness.

The first thing I notice is that it takes time. Positionally speaking when we trust Christ we instantly receive His righteousness.

Philippians 3:9

II Corinthians 5:21

Romans 3:20-24

Romans 4:3, 5

By faith, the moment of our belief God sees us as righteous through Christ's righteousness imputed to us. But practically time is necessary. We don't wake up one morning and have this sin thing licked.

Notice the practical steps this hymn suggests are necessary to strive toward holiness.

Prayer – speak oft with the Lord/spend time with Jesus alone

Abiding or living in Him always

Study – feed on His Word

Fellowship/accountability – make friends of God's children

Service – help those who are weak

Seeking God's blessings

Let God be our guide

Follow the Lord in the good and bad times

Trust in His Word

Let our thoughts and conduct be controlled by the Lord

Prayer takes time.

Studying God's Word takes time.

Fellowship takes time.

Seeking God takes time.

These are practical ways to pursue holiness – which takes time.

The end of the second stanza says that when we pursue and practice holiness others will take notice of our godly conduct.

Now, I've spent most of the message talking about personal holiness as the anchor point to this letter. How does holiness tie into the whole book of I Peter? Let's see if we can take all the different strands and wrap it up into a bow. Our holiness starts and ends with God. In no way can we ever produce it through our own ability. We can't do it. It's God's Spirit in us. Without a personal relationship with God through Christ, holiness is not possible. You can't chant or meditate your way to holiness.

In order for us to be holy we need to first of all consider God's provision.

I. GOD'S PROVISION

Our ability to be holy depends on the provision God

has made for us. We see it sprinkled in a timely fashion throughout the letter.

1:3, 18-19

2:24

3:18

5:10

Our holiness is only possible through the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. Without that we cannot be saved, nor can we become holy. We already saw that His righteousness has been credited to us through faith.

It's a message that Peter proclaimed to the masses gathered in the Temple on the Day of Pentecost.

It's a message he declared to the ruling body of religious leaders following his imprisonment.

It's a message he shared with a lame beggar on the steps of the Temple as he and John entered to worship.

It's a message he communicated to a group of Gentiles seeking to understand faith.

It's a message he wrote about to a group of churches in Asia Minor that he had never met, yet having a common faith reminded them that it was only possible through Christ who died and rose again for them. It was God's provision of salvation, a new birth through faith in Christ.

It's a message you need to believe by faith in order to receive His righteousness and become holy.

Along with that provision comes the promises God has made.

II. GOD'S PROMISES

The One who is Holy, cannot lie, so the promises He has made will come true. You can count on it.

1:4-5 – We have the promise of an unfading inheritance that is kept for us.

1:9 – We have the promise of our salvation.

1:25 – We have the promise that God's Word stands forever, it will never change. Therefore His promises will not change.

2:9-10 – We have the promise that we belong to God as His chosen people who are a holy nation,

and a royal priesthood.

3:12 – We have the promise that His eyes are on the righteous and His ears attentive to our prayers.

3:18 – We have the promise that Christ died for our sins.

5:7 – We have the promise that He cares for us.

5:10 – We have the promise that He is the God of all grace and will restore us, strengthen us, and make us firm and steadfast in trials.

I Corinthians 1:8-9 “He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God, who has called you into fellowship with His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful.”

I Thessalonians 5:24 “The one who calls you is faithful and He will do it.”

Never doubt His promises. His promises make it possible for us to be holy and to live holy during times of persecution, a topic that threads its way throughout the letter.

III. OUR PERSECUTION

In spite of the persecution, Peter provides some guidelines that help us live as a godly example.

1:6-7 – Though they seem strange companions, suffering is cause for rejoicing. Paul wrote that we are to give thanks because it is God's will for us (I Thessalonians 5:18).

Peter says that suffering is just temporary, lasting only a little while and explains that this testing is to mature our faith, to make sure it is genuine. If it is genuine then we will receive praise and glory and honor from God when Christ appears.

James 1:3-4 adds that the testing of your faith works patience “so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.”

The same idea is also seen in 4:12-17 and 5:9-11.

Don't consider it a strange thing if you suffer persecution for your faith Peter says. It's better to suffer for your faith, for doing what is right than suffering for doing something what is wrong.

Suffering isn't fun at all, that's why it's called suffering, but it does have a purpose. The purpose is to hone our holiness, to help us become godly in character and in practice. We are going to face all kinds of difficult situations through which we can demonstrate godliness. The crucible of suffering is the time when character is revealed. How will we act when we encounter trials? That's when our practice becomes evident. Do others see us moving toward or away from godly living as they observe us during testing?

Throughout the letter Peter talks about our practice and the need to prevail, to stand firm and strong during times of suffering. Again, as we will see in II Peter we have been given everything we need to live godly in Christ Jesus.

IV. OUR PRACTICE

When it comes to our practice H. A. Ironside has some simple but sound advice to offer us. "If what they say about you is true, mend your ways. If it isn't true, forget it, and go on and serve the Lord."

What Peter shares throughout his letter are guidelines for holy living.

1:13-16 – Prepare your minds for action.

Be self-controlled.

Set your hope on grace.

Don't conform to evil desires.

Love others sincerely.

2:1-3 – Get rid of malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander.

Desire God's Word.

2:11-12 – Abstain from sinful desires.

Live good lives before the unsaved.

Show proper respect for everyone.

3:1-9 – Wives are to submit to husbands.

Husbands are to be considerate of their wives and show them respect. When they talk, listen. When they ask share or do. Don't give them a cold shoulder or roll the eye. Don't put down their ideas. Christians are to live in unity.

We are to be sympathetic.

Love as brothers.

Be compassionate.

Be humble.

Don't take revenge.

Don't insult.

3:15-16 – Set apart Christ as Lord

Be prepared to give an answer about your hope when others see you suffering for your faith.

4:7-11 – Pray.

Offer hospitality and don't grumble about it.

Use your spiritual gift to serve others.

4:17 – Commit yourself in suffering to your faithful

Creator. We could add to that 5:7 to cast all our anxieties on God. Anxiety is to godly living what the ax is to the base of the tree. Anxiety will chop down any pursuit we have to holiness.

5:8-9, 12 – Stand firm in the faith against the devil.

We are to practice godly living in every situation of life. Let it be the magnet that draws others to Christ.

The result of holy living, even in times of suffering, is offering our praise of God.

V. OUR PRAISE

We notice that in 4:11 "so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ."

In 1:3 we read that God is to be praised for giving to us the wonderful provision of eternal life through Jesus Christ.

Are you giving Him glory even in the suffering?

Let me close with one final thought from this letter. It's about God's punishment.

VI. GOD'S PUNISHMENT

For those who by faith receive the provision of eternal life promised to them through Christ's

sacrificial death on the cross there is hope even in your suffering of eternal glory that awaits you. But for those who reject this provision, there is punishment that awaits them.

4:7 tells us that the end of all things is near. 4:17-18 says that if judgment begins with the household of God what will become of the unsaved? Eternal punishment awaits those who refuse His grace and gift of eternal life.

Peter has covered a lot of ground in 105 verses. God's grace covers it all – salvation, suffering, sanctification. He has called us to be holy.

In his book *New Testament Survey*, Merrill C. Tenney writes “The chief value of the epistle is that it shows Christians how to live out their redemption in a hostile world. Salvation may involve suffering, but it also brings hope, as the grace of God is amplified in the individual life.”

In essence he's saying, I Peter tells us how to be holy. As the family of God we should live and act differently than the world. No matter how we are treated God has meant it for our good and His glory. God's grace is able to sustain us in the storm so that as we go through it we can give Him glory as we continue to mature in our faith becoming more holy in our practice each day.

Peter has given the Christian a survival guide. They are the tools and skills we need to make it through the wilderness of suffering arriving at our eternal destination. Will you accept his challenge to be brave and be prepared? It takes holiness. Every day it will be challenged and tested. Peter wants us to be fit for spiritual survival. What's your plan to pursue it?