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Following Jesus Today
1 Peter 1:1-2
November 11, 2018, Jeff Germs

We are starting a brand new study today in 1 Peter. I'm looking forward to digging in. For your own sake, it would be good for you to read 1 Peter in its entirety in one sitting several times so you get a good idea of what the letter is about.

We are living in what was commonly called the Post-Modern era. I don't hear that term much anymore. I think we are actually phasing out of that era and moving into another, yet to be named. Some are calling it the Post-post-modern era. Not a catchy title, but it does the trick.

Whatever you call the era we live in it is decidedly "post-Christian." It can be debated as to whether or not Canada has ever been a "Christian" nation. I don't think so, for the simple reason that faith cannot be legislated. There was a time, however, when most Canadians would identify themselves as Christian.

Here is a statement from a document. Can anyone tell me what document this is from?

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Whereas Canada is founded upon principles that recognize the supremacy of God and the rule of law:

It's the opening statement in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms in the Canadian Constitution from 1982.

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Pierre Trudeau, Justin's father, was Prime Minister at the time. He thought it was strange that many of his MPs wanted God mentioned in the charter. He said, "I don't think God cares whether he is in the constitution or not."

So, according to this opening statement in our Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, Canada was founded on the knowledge that God is supreme, that he is sovereign, that all truth comes from him, which is also what our judicial system is founded on. There is much debate as to whether or not that is actually true, but if Canada ever was "Christian," things have changed — big time.

We are living in a post-Christian, or a Post-post-modern society. We are living in a time that, not only scorns the idea that there is an absolute truth, but where also, it has become okay to publicly scorn Christianity. It is becoming more and more difficult to stand up and be counted as someone who bases their life on the truth of God's Word.

In a Vancouver Sun article in March of 2017, Douglas Todd cited some statistics.¹

[4-click through one at a time]

The fastest growing religion in B.C. is Sikhism (48.8% growth in the last decade), then Hinduism, Islam, No Religion, other, Judaism, and then Buddhism. All of these religions grew. Now, granted, much of the growth was likely as a result of immigration, but there was still growth. In the same ten year period, those who identified as Christian in B.C. declined by 9.1%.

In my first sermon at CRBC, May 12th, 2013, when I was candidating, I asked you if you had read the article in the Vancouver Sun the previous Thursday where the latest Stats Canada report cited Campbell River, tied with Squamish, as the most irreligious city in Canada.

[5]

That's quite a claim to fame. It's not often that Campbell River is mentioned in the big city papers. 55 percent of Campbell Riverites claimed no religious affiliation at all. And those who answered that they

¹ <https://vancouversun.com/news/staff-blogs/b-c-breaks-records-when-it-comes-to-religion-and-the-lack-thereof>

identified as Christian would be from all denominational affiliations, including some we would consider cults. And weekly attendance at religious services in all faiths is about 13%. That includes all religions.

[6]

Look at this graph of religious service attendance in Canada. Keep in mind that this covers all religions, not just Christian churches. So, the numbers for evangelical churches is bleaker still.

Does that mean that God is losing the battle?

[7]

Absolutely not! Jesus said he will build his church and the gates of hell will not be able to keep the church back. Outside of North America and Europe the church is exploding with growth, and much of the growth is in the middle of extreme persecution. The church of Jesus Christ is growing by leaps and bounds in many parts of the world.

What does that mean for us here in Campbell River? Are we fighting a losing battle? No! I don't think so. There does seem to be growing distrust in the institutional church and many times for good reason. I think the church has not always represented Jesus well. We have come across as judgemental and thinking our role is to legislate morality. We have come across as "holier than thou" and superior at times. We have preached down at people and have not shown them the grace that Jesus shows us.

It's like when Mahatma Gandhi was asked why he didn't embrace Christianity. He responded,

[8]

"I like your Christ; I don't like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ."

Unfortunately, Gandhi is not alone. We have often misrepresented Christ.

Campbell River may be the most irreligious city in Canada, but that does not mean there is not a hunger for spiritual things. There is. God is at work in Campbell River. Ryan got invited to speak about Jesus in one of our local high schools because God is at work here. I'm going to call him up in a few minutes to talk a bit about that experience. He is also the chaplain to the Campbell River Storm because God is at work here.

[9]

There is a hunger in Campbell River for something deeper than the ways we have represented Jesus in the past. And we, as followers of Jesus, need to learn how to represent him in a way that really does honour his name and his heart for people. How did Jesus treat people?

So, in light of all this, how are we to live in our world? How do we teach our kids how to live in a society that is by and large anti what their parents teach them is right and true and good?

This is not a new question. We are beginning a study on 1 Peter.

[10]

These are the same questions that Peter was addressing with the churches of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia – modern day Turkey. They were in a similar situation and were in essence asking Peter how to live in their world that was largely antagonistic to everything they were about.

This letter was written about thirty years after Jesus rose from the dead and ascended to heaven. That is about 1954 years ago, and it is still very relevant for us today. We are going to be answering some of these same questions the early Jesus followers had. How do we live in a world that is disinclined to tolerate the things that we hold as true in our faith? How do we follow Jesus in the workplace, or at school? Or, how do we follow Jesus at home? How do we live in the tension between grace and truth?

Before we read, let me remind you who Peter was. He was one of Jesus' main disciples, one of the inner three, along with James and John. He was the one who was inflicted with that terrible "foot in mouth disease" that caused him to make outlandish statements and boorish claims about how strong his faith was and how, even if all the other disciples abandoned Jesus, he never would. And then, as most of you will recall from previous sermons, he very publicly denied Jesus.

If you really want to get to know Peter you should read the Gospel of Mark. Mark was written by Mark, of course, but most Bible scholars believe that Peter was Mark's main source when he investigated the stories of Jesus. Over and over again Mark tells of Peter's blunders. Now, you gotta wonder why Peter would be so open about how silly he was. If I was Peter, I would have been tempted to tell Mark not to mention all those times I made myself look foolish. The Peter who walked with Jesus was pretty immature, childish and proud much of the time.

Mark wrote his Gospel about four or five years after Peter wrote 1 Peter. So, Peter had obviously matured over that thirty year period to the place where he was okay having his protégé, Mark, tell the world all the times he had said stupid things. You can tell from reading 1 Peter that he had become a man of great depth, insight, and maturity over the thirty or so years since Jesus had died.

Today we are just going to do a quick introduction to the book. Let's read the first two verses.

[11]

1 Peter 1:1–2 (NLT)

1 This letter is from Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ. I am writing to God's chosen people who are living as foreigners in the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. 2 God the Father knew you and chose you long ago, and his Spirit has made you holy. As a result, you have obeyed him and have been cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ. May God give you more and more grace and peace.

Let's take a look at the setting of 1 Peter. Peter was writing against a backdrop of looming persecution, probably around AD64, about the time of the Apostle Paul's death.

[12]

Nero, the emperor of Rome, was just beginning to persecute Christians. It hadn't become widespread yet, but Peter was preparing them for how to deal with it because it would get worse.

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His stated purpose in 5:12 is that his readers would "stand firm" in God's grace in spite of the suffering they were experiencing.

[14]

He addressed the letter to "God's chosen people who are living as foreigners" throughout these various provinces. So, the situation is that they were scattered because of persecution. This first verse gives us lots of clues as to the context in which Peter was writing.

First of all, if you are reading from the ESV, it will tell you that Peter was writing to "exiles of the dispersion".

[15]

The KJV says "***to strangers scattered...***"

The NASB says "***to those who reside as aliens, scattered...***"

NIV says "***to those who are God's strangers in the world, scattered...***"

And the NET Bible says "***to those temporarily residing abroad in...***"

The word "stranger" is actually the Greek word that means foreigner, or resident alien. The word for scattered is the Greek word "*diaspora*." So the picture this gives us is of Jesus followers who were scattered throughout Asia Minor, which is modern day Turkey, because of religious persecution.

You may remember the first Christian martyr after Christ was Stephen. He came up in a couple sermons in recent weeks. After Stephen was killed, with the support of Saul, persecuting Christians became the thing to do. As a result the Christians scattered all over Asia Minor trying to get some relief.

The first mass persecutions seem to have been at the hands of Emperor Nero in the year 64 AD, right around the time Peter wrote this letter, apparently because Nero needed someone to blame for the burning

of Rome, and the Christians were simply a very convenient scapegoat. Romans would go out for a night of entertainment and watch Christians being persecuted.

Here's what the Roman historian **Tacitus** wrote about it in the year it began:

[16]

“...neither human resources, nor imperial generosity, nor appeasement of the gods, eliminated the sinister suspicion that the fire had been deliberately started. To stop the rumor, NERO, made scapegoats--and punished with every refinement the notoriously depraved CHRISTIANS (as they were popularly called).

[17]

Their originator, CHRIST, had been executed in Tiberius' reign by the Procurator of Judaea, PONTIUS PILATUS (governor from 26 to 36 A.D.). But in spite of this temporary setback, the deadly superstition had broken out again, not just in Judaea (where the mischief had started) but even in Rome.

[18]

All degraded and shameful practices collect and flourish in the capital. First, NERO had the self-admitted Christians arrested. Then, on their information, large numbers of others were condemned--not so much for starting fires as because of their hatred for the human race.

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Their deaths were made amusing. Dressed in wild animals' skins, they were torn to pieces by dogs, or crucified, or made into torches to be set on fire after dark as illumination....

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Despite their guilt as Christians, and the ruthless punishment it deserved, the victims were pitied. For it was felt that they were being sacrificed to one man's brutality rather than to the national interest.” (TACITUS, *The Annals of Imperial Rome* Book XV, chapter 47 (A.D. 64) [during the Great Fire of Rome])

So, here they were living in a strange land, aliens, isolated, marginalized and brutally persecuted, and wondering how to live their lives in the middle of all of that.

[21]

So Peter circulated this letter throughout the churches in the provinces mentioned in the first verse, **Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia..**

The tone of the letter is very pastoral as he encourages them to persevere under the persecution that they were enduring. But the theme weaving its way through the letter is the call for his readers to live wisely, as followers of Jesus, as they rubbed shoulders each day with those who were not followers of Jesus.

[22]

A key passage in this letter is:

1 Peter 2:11–12 (NLT)

11 Dear friends, I warn you as “temporary residents and foreigners” to keep away from worldly desires that wage war against your very souls. 12 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.

The obvious question for us, as followers of Jesus, is how do we live our lives in the context of the 21st century in Campbell River, one of the two most irreligious cities in Canada?

Notice that Peter says that the goal of our lives should be to glorify God. We are to live lives that point to Jesus. So, how do we do that?

I want to give you some keys from 1 Peter on following Jesus. These are only a few and we will be looking at them more closely during this series, but I just want to touch on them so you can see some of the major points in Peter's first epistle.

So, first:

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1. Our ultimate goal as followers of Jesus should be for God's glory (2:12)

1 Peter 2:12 (NLT)

12 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.

Peter says that we are to live "properly" among our unbelieving neighbours. The Greek word for "properly" here is *kalos* which means beautifully advantageous, or beneficial as representatives of Jesus. When people look at us as individuals, or us as a church, they will judge Christ. We are representing Jesus so his reputation is at stake.

[24]

2 Corinthians 5:19–21 (NLT)

19 For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people's sins against them. And he gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation. 20 So we are Christ's ambassadors; God is making his appeal through us. We speak for Christ when we plead, "Come back to God!" 21 For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ.

How we act or behave in the world is so important. Brian mentioned that last week as well. We are called to be ambassadors whose lives point to Jesus. How we treat people is vital because they will judge Jesus based on our behaviour. We don't have to agree with those who do not follow Jesus, but no matter what, we need to treat them with respect and dignity, as people Jesus died for.

[25]

2. Live in such a way that people will see the hope we have in Christ (3:15)

1 Peter 3:15 (NLT)

15 ...you must worship Christ as Lord of your life. And if someone asks about your Christian hope, always be ready to explain it. 16 But do this in a gentle and respectful way. Keep your conscience clear. Then if people speak against you, they will be ashamed when they see what a good life you live because you belong to Christ.

Now, obviously if someone is going to ask you the reason for the hope you have they must ask because they see something different in you. They see that you have hope and they ask, "Where does this hope come from?"

Know the hope you have. Where does our hope come from as followers of Jesus? Does our hope come from making sure we live right so as not to make God mad at us? Or, from ensuring that the good we do outweighs the bad by the time we die? That would be a pretty grim way to live.

[26]

Romans 5:1–11 (NLT)

1 Therefore, since we have been made right in God's sight by faith, we have peace with God because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us. 2 Because of our faith, Christ has brought us into this place of undeserved privilege where we now stand, and we confidently and joyfully look forward to sharing God's glory.

[27]

³ We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance. ⁴ And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation.

[28]

⁵ And this hope will not lead to disappointment. For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love. ⁶ When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners.

[29]

⁷ Now, most people would not be willing to die for an upright person, though someone might perhaps be willing to die for a person who is especially good. ⁸ But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners.

[30]

⁹ And since we have been made right in God's sight by the blood of Christ, he will certainly save us from God's condemnation. ¹⁰ For since our friendship with God was restored by the death of his Son while we were still his enemies, we will certainly be saved through the life of his Son.

[31]

¹¹ So now we can rejoice in our wonderful new relationship with God because our Lord Jesus Christ has made us friends of God.

This is our hope. We are friends with God, not because we have earned our way, not because we are better than others, not because we are good enough. We aren't. We are loved by God because Jesus paid the penalty for our sins. That is our hope. Marinate in this passage. When people ask us where our hope comes from because of how we live, we can confidently tell them that our hope has nothing to do with us and everything to do with Jesus. There is nothing we can do to make God love us any more and there is nothing we can do to make him love us any less. He loves us completely.

[32]

3. Don't set up an "us against them" mentality (2:12)

1 Peter 2:12 (NLT)

¹² 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.

They are not the enemy. View people from God's perspective. As you are working, or walking downtown, or at a market and you see the people, stop and really look at them. Each one is someone Christ died for. Your neighbour, that annoying person who just cut you off in traffic, the person at the check out at Quality Foods, or Starbucks, or Timmies, your mechanic, your pastor – all of these people are people God dearly loves.

God Almighty humbled himself, taking on the form of man, to live among those people so they, and we, could have a relationship with him, and that is what he has called us to as well. We live in our neighbourhood as ambassadors of Jesus.

The next point, related to this, is

[33]

4. Don't isolate ourselves from the world.

Do you ever wonder why fish caught in the ocean aren't salty? They are continually in salt water and yet, when we eat ocean fish we have to salt it because even though they are living 24/7 in salt water they are insulated from it. Likewise, we need to be in the world, but not of it.

We should insulate ourselves by staying in the Word, communing with God in prayer, and staying in fellowship with other followers of Jesus without isolating ourselves – **insulation, not isolation.**

You know, studies have shown that the average Christian, within two years of coming to Jesus, will lose almost all contact with un-churched people, except during the hours they work or go to school. It's easy to do because it soon becomes evident that it's hard to follow Jesus out there in the real world. It's hard to stand out as different, so we pull away from un-churched people.

But, Jesus' plan is to use his church to impact the world with the good news of freedom in him, and this won't happen if we remove ourselves from it. So remember, insulation, not isolation. Keep yourself involved in the community so that you are rubbing shoulders with your neighbours. Find some way to stay in the world without being of it.

[call Ryan up]

Another major theme in 1 Peter is **suffering**.

As followers of Jesus we need to have a correct understanding or a theology of suffering. While we are on this earth we are going to have trouble. There's no getting away from it.

[34]

5. Know that we will suffer for following Jesus.

1 Peter 4:12 (NLT)

12 Dear friends, don't be surprised at the fiery trials you are going through, as if something strange were happening to you.

[35]

Philippians 1:29 (NLT)

29 For you have been given not only the privilege of trusting in Christ but also the privilege of suffering for him.

This may not sound like a great selling point for the Christian faith, but suffering goes with the package.

Even Jesus said that this would be so.

[36]

John 15:18–20 (NLT)

18 "If the world hates you, remember that it hated me first. 19 The world would love you as one of its own if you belonged to it, but you are no longer part of the world. I chose you to come out of the world, so it hates you. 20 Do you remember what I told you? 'A slave is not greater than the master.' Since they persecuted me, naturally they will persecute you. And if they had listened to me, they would listen to you.

Typically when we think of the world, we think of those out there, the unbelievers, the ungodly. Who was Jesus talking about here when he said the world will hate and persecute us? Go down to verse 25.

[37]

John 15:25 (NLT)

25 This fulfills what is written in their Scriptures: 'They hated me without cause.'

Who is Jesus referring to here? Not the so-called "sinners." He's referring to the religious people he was constantly butting heads with. Jesus moved towards the "sinners." He treated them with grace and truth. They weren't the ones who hated him. It was the religious.

Don't be surprised if you suffer for the sake of Christ. Suffering doesn't cease all of a sudden as soon as we start following Jesus – contrary to what some believe. And sometimes the persecution will come from those who call themselves God's people.

Another thing Peter tells us is that if we are going to live well as followers of Jesus we need to...

[38]

6. Know that our lives on earth are temporary and that God has a permanent place for us in heaven.

This is a theme that weaves itself through the epistle of 1 Peter. Over and over again Peter reminds us that our lives on earth are not the complete picture. There's more, and God is building us into a permanent spiritual house that will never fade away.

If we live as though this life is all there is, our focus will be on making sure that we are always comfortable in the here and now, and when trouble comes we won't know how to handle it. We need to know that we were made for something higher than what we experience here on this earth.

Lastly, if we are going to live well following Jesus we need to...

[39]

7. Know that we belong to God (2:9)

1 Peter 2:9 (NLT)

9 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.

We are God's people. We need to grasp what this means. Most of the book of 1 Peter should be read through the filter of this truth. No matter what we are going through we are not alone. We belong to God. He chose us. He adopted us into his family and made us into a holy nation, a royal priesthood.

Even though it may seem like we are alone at times, we aren't. God is building us into a people. He is taking us, living stones, and one by one fitting us into his spiritual house on the most secure foundation there is, Christ the Cornerstone.

Remember what it was like as a child when teams were being chosen and your best friend was one of the captains. You were picked first. Not because you were good, but just because you were his friend. You belong. You are not alone. You belong. What a thought!

"You are among those who are called to belong to Jesus Christ."

There is no greater news than this. That's what 1 Peter is all about. It's about belonging. It's about God choosing us, not because we are good, not because we deserve it, but because he loves us. We are his friends and he has not left us alone. Let's review those seven points again.

[40-advance slides one by one]

- 1. Our ultimate goal as followers of Jesus should be for God's glory.**
- 2. Live in such a way that people will see the hope we have in Christ.**
- 3. Don't set up an "us against them" mentality.**
- 4. Don't isolate ourselves from the world.**
- 5. Know that we will suffer for following Jesus.**
- 6. Know that our lives on earth are temporary and that God has a permanent place for us in heaven.**
- 7. Know that we belong to God.**



Following Jesus Today
Week of November 11, 2018

Objective of this study: To get a picture from 1 Peter how to follow Jesus in our post Christian world.

[Remember, the main goal of each Growth Group is to allow God's Word to change your heart so that others would see Jesus in you and be likewise changed to be like him. He wants to change the world through us.]

Welcome (5 minutes)

Have you ever felt "persecuted" for your faith in Christ?

Worship (5 – 10 minutes)

1. Sing a song or two of praise and thanksgiving to God.
2. Spend five minutes in silence asking God to prepare your heart for how he wants to speak to you.
3. After the five minutes have someone interrupt the silence and read **Psalm 46:1-7** meditatively to the group. Pause after each phrase letting God speak to you. **Did anything "jump out at you"?**

[It's really important when doing this study that we each think about ourselves specifically and ways we need to grow, not how Christians in general need to grow. Do the hard work of letting the Holy Spirit speak to *your* heart.]

Word/Work (60-90 minutes)

1. What stood out from the sermon?
2. What do you see happening in our current context that might lead to Christians being marginalized or "persecuted"?
3. Read 1 Peter 1:1-2:12.
 - (a) What was the situation like for Peter's readers?
 - (b) What do you see as main themes here?

Sermon quote: "They' are not the enemy. View people from God's perspective. As you are working, or walking downtown, or at a market and you see the people, stop and really look at them. Each one is someone Christ died for. Your neighbour, that annoying person who just cut you off in traffic, the person at the check out at Quality Foods, or Starbucks, or Timmies, your mechanic, your pastor – all of these people are people God dearly loves.

God Almighty humbled himself, taking on the form of man, to live among those people so they, and we, could have a relationship with him, and that is what he has called us to as well. We live in our neighbourhood as ambassadors of Jesus."

4. What do these scriptures have to say about these key points from this overview sermon of 1 Peter?
 - (a) Our goal is God's glory: 1 Peter 2:12; 2 Corinthians 5:19-21.
 - (b) Live in a way that shows we have hope: 1 Peter 3:15; Romans 5:1-11.
 - (c) Avoid an "us versus them" mentality: 1 Peter 2:12.
 - (d) Don't isolate ourselves from the world: 1 Peter 2:11-12.
 - (e) Accept suffering for Jesus: 1 Peter 4:12; Philippians 1:29; John 18-20.
 - (f) Know that our lives here are temporary and there is joy and permanence ahead: 1 Peter 1:3-7.
 - (g) Know that we belong to God: 1 Peter 2:9.
5. What is your take away for this week? What has the Holy Spirit spoken to you about?

Prayer

1. Spend the rest of the time praying for each other. **Praise God together for how he works, and how he allows us to partner with him to accomplish things in his kingdom.**
2. Here are some things you can pray about for the church:
 - A. That, as a church, we would actively and purposefully engage in the mission of Jesus in Campbell River.
 - B. Our church board and staff as they lead us to live out the mission of Jesus
 - C. River Kids ministry as they reach out to kids in our community.
 - D. **Our missionary of the week:** Glen and Lorain Beukart with YWAM Hockey
 - E. **Local CR church:** Blair and Angela Phibbs at Christian Life Fellowship