

# EXILES

LIVING IN HOPE  
1 & 2 PETER

SERMON TITLE: Grow in Grace  
SCRIPTURE: 2 Peter 3:11-18

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Identity is an ever-present buzzword. This should especially be true for Christians. We are chosen, loved, forgiven, and secure in Jesus. But Peter reminds us of another part of our Christian identity—we are exiles. The "world as it is" isn't our home. We are pilgrims on a journey, telling others along the way about the wonderful things God has done in calling us out of darkness and into his light. And just like Peter's personality, these two letters that share his name are bold invitations to cling to a living hope in the face of any suffering that may come our way.

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We've come to the close of our series *Exiles: Living in Hope* based on the New Testament letters of 1 and 2 Peter. As we've been seeing all through our studies what we are experiencing today in this country—threats from outside the church and inside the church—parallel what early Christians were experiencing in Peter's day. For Peter's friends, remaining faithful to Jesus literally cost them everything—their families, friends, finances, jobs—and eventually it would cost many of them their very lives. And a big part of what kept them going was the promise that—"Jesus is coming soon to fix what sin has broken in the world." But overtime, they began to struggle with the fact that it was taking much longer than they anticipated. And, to make matters worse, false teachers and skeptics had crept into the church scoffing at the whole idea of a final day of judgment. And these false teachers were encouraging Peter's friends to live like them in their greed and sensuality. So in these two letters, Peter is answering the question: *How do we live faithful to Jesus in the midst of a hostile and corrupt world?*—both the world outside the church that hates us and a world inside the church that's trying to undermine everything we've been taught in Scripture? As we finish up today, we're going to focus on a single idea that sums up everything Peter has been saying in his letters—one single idea that if we take it seriously then everything else falls into place. In vv.11-16, Peter, by way of reminder, restates several things he's already mentioned in his second letter that we have covered in previous messages. So, we will focus on the one single idea found in vv.17-18. Really, it's like two sides of a coin. Again, Peter has made it clear that he's trying to remind his friends who are facing hostile threats from outside the church and deceptive threats inside the church to remain faithful to Jesus so he writes:

1. *Take care that you are not carried away by the error of lawless people and lose your own stability (v17).* If you've ever lost your footing while hiking or walking on a slippery surface you will understand what Peter is saying here. He's saying if you don't pay attention to what's going on around you as well as what's going on inside you, you can lose your footing and stumble in your walk with God. Sadly, many Christians today are not "taking care" and they're being carried away by the errors and lies of the secular, cultural mantras of our day and they are re-writing their "Christian" beliefs to fit the world around them. Basically, those beliefs are: (1) The highest good is individual freedom, personal happiness, self-definition, and self-expression. (2) Anything—traditions, religion, institutions, morality—that restricts my personal freedom and happiness must be rejected. (3) The primary social ethic today is tolerance of everyone's self-defined quest for individual freedom and personal happiness. (4) Humans are basically good (adapted from Mark Sayers book *The Disappearing Church*). These are just a few examples of the *errors of lawless people* in our day—people who have rejected God's authority over their lives and have become their own authority. And sadly, they're both outside and inside the church today. The flip side of the coin is this:
2. *(2) But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (v.18).* Peter summarizes his main concern here—that his friends resist the heresies of the false teachers *by* continuing to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus. Chapter 3, verse 18 is the book end to chapter 1, verse 3—"May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord." 1:3 shows us that growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus are not two different things but one thing. Growing in grace is growing in the knowledge of Jesus and growing in the knowledge of Jesus is growing in grace. They are not two things, but one thing—*grow in grace*—the grace you find in Jesus. Grace is not a thing. Grace is not *stuff* that God gives us apart from himself.

God gives us himself when we don't deserve it—that's grace. So, when Peter says, "grow in grace" he's not saying grow in some kind of spiritual substance that you got a little bit of when you first trusted Christ—like—you have a ½ a cup of grace, now grow in grace till you fill the cup up." No, grace is not a thing—not first and foremost a doctrine. Grace is God giving himself to us even though we deserve to be separated from him forever. Grace is Jesus suffering and dying for us so that we can know the love of God that we could never earn or deserve on our own.

And God—*God's grace*—doesn't just come in one color. Grace comes in every color and shade of the rainbow. There is saving grace, hope-giving grace, forgiving grace, rescuing grace, restoring grace, life-changing grace, correcting grace, sin-exposing grace, heart-revealing grace, sustaining grace, sanctifying grace, peace-filling grace, courage-empowering grace, truth-illuminating grace, strengthening grace, worry-crushing grace, humbling grace, need-supplying grace, future grace. And we still haven't exhausted the riches of his grace!!! All these multi-colored expressions of God's grace are the ways we experience God's love. They are the ways we experience Jesus being with us and in us and for us. They are the ways your relationship with God becomes personal to you.

*So how do we grow in grace?* Two ways — *First*, you grow in grace by constantly admitting your need for grace. You remember, as Paul Tripp likes to say, "I am not a grace graduate." We all want to think that we are more righteous than we actually are. But when you make excuses for your sin, then you fail to seek the amazing grace that's your only hope. *God doesn't tell us to confess our sin to shame us, but so that we might have fresh experiences of grace applied to your heart in the moment.* But, the riches of God's grace are only available to those who know they need it. How can it be that we praise God for his grace on Sunday but then deny our need for that grace the rest of the week? Mark it down. You will never outgrow your need for grace until you're with Jesus on the other side and your struggle with sin is no more. The way you grow in the grace that God so freely gives you every day is by admitting how much you need it. *Second*, you grow in grace by celebrating grace. And we celebrate grace by never losing sight of what all the things that Jesus has done for us (see 1Pet1:1-5; 2Pet1:3-4; 1Pet3:18-22).

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### Discussion Starters

Have someone read 2 Peter 3:11-18... then come back and read vv17-18 once more.

1. Let's start Big Picture—What were some of your most important "takeaways" from our studies in 1 and 2 Peter? It may take a moment to think back.
2. Now let's bring things down to this final message: Grow in Grace. What did this sermon/this passage teach you about how you can more faithfully follow Jesus in our hostile world?
3. How are you guarding against being deceived by the secular voices that are trying to lure us away from faith and faithfulness to Christ? How could we stand guard together as a Community Group?
4. In what areas of your life do you feel the Holy Spirit may be calling you to be more on guard than you have been? Are there areas of your life you feel you've already begun to lose your footing?
5. Charlie listed out several "colors" of grace in the sermon and in the notes above? Read through that list slowly and then ask each person which applications of grace do they feel they need in their life right now. Spend some time here. What are the stories behind the needs for that particular expression of grace.
6. Talk about this line from the message: "God doesn't tell you to confess your sin to shame you, but so you will have fresh experiences of grace applied to your sin the moment." How does that help you celebrate grace?
7. Ultimately, how do we celebrate grace?