

# EXILES

LIVING IN HOPE  
1 & 2 PETER

SERMON TITLE: Not Belonging Together  
SCRIPTURE: 1 Peter 4:1-11

DATE: March 10, 2019  
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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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Yes, we are exiles. As followers of Jesus, in some way, we don't fit in. We are strangers and aliens; we are separate.

Yes, we have a living hope that will outlast all of what makes exile difficult, but that doesn't make it easy right now.

Just as in Peter's day, our modern day is slowly growing more and more antagonistic towards Christianity. So, what are we going to do about it? How should we live in light of that hostility? We know that we're called to be different than the world, but how are we different than the world *with* other believers? Our distinctness from the world pushes us to the margins but also towards each other. So, what does it mean that we are exiles together? That's what Peter wants us to think about.

This is a fragile idea to consider for many reasons. Not does Peter call us to submit to authorities and cultural norms, but we're also called to engage graciously with those who don't know Jesus. This makes our distinctness from the world even sharper. And when Peter discusses these things in 1 Peter 4:1-11, it feels like he's using two different tones (4:1-6 and 4:7-11).

Peter begins by telling his friends to arm themselves with a special kind of thinking - that they should *think about* and *endure* suffering like Jesus. Suffering for the Christian is four things: inevitable, hard, transformative, and temporal. That's how Jesus thought about it, so that's how we should think about it. And processing suffering like this will cause Peter's friends to "cease from sin" (4:1), specifically the sins associated with the pagan worship in their former religious lives. And not participating in those things caused them to be maligned and mistreated by the culture of their day.

Thinking about and enduring suffering like Jesus can also cause us to cease from sin. A willingness to suffer like Jesus also means a willingness to be done with the sin that Jesus suffered for. It's a contradiction to look to Jesus as an example of suffering, and at the same time look to him, and sin against him. Peter wants his friends and us to know:

Because Jesus suffered *for* sin, if you suffer like him, you will cease *from* sin.

But Peter's tone changes in verses 7-11. Here he talks about self-control, love, hospitality, and service. He talks about a selfless community that is happily focused on each other, and that feels like a strong shift from being reviled and cursed in verses 1-6. What's the connection? Well, in Peter's mind both of these sections (1-6 and 7-11) are about belonging. God's kingdom does not belong with earthly kingdoms. But how should we live in this "not belonging"? Well, we should do it together. That's a safeguard for us. We're called to be exiles together, and that life together is intended to have a distinct flavor to it:

The church in exile is meant to be a self-controlled, self-giving, others-serving community that is ready to suffer like and for Jesus so that God would be glorified.

So, how should we seek to embody this vision of church life? How do we get to the place where this kind of life is tangible and celebrated, and not merely considered as a good idea? Here are questions to consider that may help us live out Peter's vision of exiles in community:

- How are you willing or unwilling to suffer *like* and *for* Jesus?
- How are you willing or unwilling to help others suffer *like* and *for* Jesus?
- Is comfort an idol in your life that stands in the way of suffering well?
- Is comfort an idol in your life that stands in the way of serving others well?
- Do you ever run from social marginalization to social recognition? If yes, why?
- Do you arm yourself with thinking about status, self, and success?
- Or, do you arm yourself with thinking about Jesus, suffering, self-control, and others?
- Can your relationships with other Christians be primarily defined in terms of love?
- When you share your life with people, do you grumble?
- When you share your life with people, do you do it to get attention?
- When you speak, do you do so in God's strength, speaking life to others?
- When you serve, do you do so in God's strength, considering others' needs above yours?

Questions like these are an attempt to take the essence of what Peter is saying and make it have hands and feet in our everyday lives. But this passage begins and ends with Jesus. So, we're called to answer these questions as we pursue lives of worship and adoration to him. He's our example for all of this:

He was slandered and maligned. He was reviled, and he did not revile in return. He was a prophet, not welcome in his own hometown. He came to his own, and his own did not receive him. The Son of Man had no place to lay his head. He suffered, knowing that it was temporal. And in his suffering, he bore our sins in his body on a tree. The righteous for the unrighteous to bring us to God, that we might die to sin, and live to righteousness. He is our supreme example of suffering and serving well. And we're called to embody this portrait of life together with our eyes fixed steadily on Jesus, "in order that, in everything, God may be glorified through him – to him belong glory and dominion forever and ever." (4:11).

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## Discussion Starters

*Have someone read 1 Peter 4:1-11*

1. Are there any ways that you are currently experiencing criticism or marginalization because of your faith? How have you responded?
2. Who is someone you know who has suffered well in a way that honors Jesus?
3. Which of the three "one another" commands is the most natural for you?
4. Which one of the dozen questions at the end of the message is most challenging to you? Why?
5. Have you ever experienced a glimpse of the gospel through the hospitality of another Christian? If so, how?
6. What kind of spiritual gift do you have - speaking or serving? What does it look like for you to use it?
7. What is your biggest "take away" from this passage and/or this message?