

1 & 2 Peter: Faith Under Fire

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!

According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

(1 Peter 1:3–5 ESV)

How To Grow Up In A Hurry

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1 Peter 2:1-3

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Introduction:

Good morning church! I want to invite you to open your Bibles this morning to 1 Peter 2:1; that's on page 1014 in your pew Bibles. As you know very well by now, Peter is writing to a group of churches in modern day northern Turkey in the very early days of Roman persecution. But Peter knows – and the Holy Spirit knows – that things are going to get worse – a lot worse. A storm of formal and fatal persecution is going to wash over this area in wave after wave after wave over a period of about 250 years. Peter wants them to be ready for that and so he's been giving them some very useful and urgent counsel and we are continuing to look at that counsel again this morning. Hear now the Word of the Lord, beginning at verse 1 of chapter 2. This is God's Word to us.

So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander. 2 Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation— 3 if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good. (1 Peter 2:1–3 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God!

This is a pretty straight forward text. Peter says to these folks: You're going to need to grow up quick. You need to get strong, sturdy and well grounded in advance of the storm that is coming. So you need to do two things right away – this is sort of a crash course in Christian sanctification.

How To Grow Up In A Hurry:

The first thing you need to do is:

1. Turn away from the poison and nonsense of the world

He says:

put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander. (1 Peter 2:1 ESV)

If you want to grow up quick then you can't be sucking up that poison into your soul. Growth and health is not just about eating the right stuff – it is about that and we'll get to that in a minute – its also about NOT EATING the wrong stuff.

That's true for people and its true for plants – I learned that the hard way this summer.

We have a beautiful lilac bush in our backyard and my wife loves it – it is by far her favourite thing in our yard – I think that is true even when I'm back there – but this year it didn't bloom hardly at all. It put forth a few brown crumple flowers but none of those beautiful purple flowers that she was used to. She was very upset about this so I went on the internet and I found out that you have to be very careful with your lawn fertilizer if you have a lilac bush. The nitrogen in lawn fertilizer is good for grass but really, really bad for lilac trees and I had gone heavy on the fertilizer this year right under our little lilac bush.

I had unintentionally poisoned the root of my wife's favourite tree.

Obviously, you don't want to do that and you don't want to do that in the spiritual realm either.

Peter is saying that if you want to grow – if you need to grow quick - then you have to make sure that you are not sucking up all the poison and nonsense of the world.

Let's look specifically at what he says there about this poison.

He speaks about malice – that refers to actions and words that are harmful to other people. He talks about deceit which refers to trickery or falsehood. He mentions hypocrisy which is the masking of inward evil with outward show. He says we’ve got to put away envy which is the opposite of thankfulness for the good that comes to others. And then he mentions slander which is any speech that harms or is intended to harm another person’s status or reputation.

That stuff is POISON to the believer’s soul.

That’s how it IS OUT THERE – that’s how people treat each other – but that can’t be how we treat each other – that can’t be the air we are breathing in the church. It has to be different in here. This needs to be a greenhouse. We need to tweak and tune this place for rapid and massive growth.

And that stuff will kill you.

So have nothing to do with it.

Don’t get caught up in the internet outrage machine – don’t be passing conspiracy theories around – don’t be playing political pile on – don’t allow yourself to get recruited into any sort of on-line lynch mob – stay away from that stuff – because if you suck it up it will literally poison your soul.

The second thing you need to do Peter says, is you need to:

2. Turn towards the life giving milk of the Word

In verse 2 we read:

Like newborn infants, **long for** the pure spiritual milk (1 Peter 2:2 ESV)

Some translations add in the word “word” as does for example the NASB:

like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, (1 Peter 2:2 NAS95)

Whether you add it in or not doesn't matter – Peter is referring back to the closing verses of chapter 1 which were about the word:

24 The grass withers, and the flower falls,
25 but the word of the Lord remains forever. (1 Peter 1:24–25 ESV)

So turn away from the poison and the nonsense, Peter says, and wrap your lips around that. Like a newborn baby at feeding time, get excited about reading the life giving Word of the Lord. That's what he's saying.

I love how Edmund Clowney puts it; he says:

“Christians must be addicted to the Bible”.¹

Now this isn't “bibliolatry” - we aren't worshipping the Bible for crying out loud – no! We love the Word of the Lord because it gives us the Lord of the Word! Luther said that the Scriptures are the cradle wherein Christ is laid. That's why we read the bible – we read the Bible to see Jesus and Peter is saying you need to be hungry for that – you need to be eager for that like a baby is eager for his mother's milk.

Now sometimes in the Bible the word “milk” is used as a metaphor for “entry level truth” as in “move on from milk to meat” – its used that way in 1 Corinthians 3:2 for example – but here the emphasis is on CRAVING – it's on DESIRE – so milk here stands simply for our spiritual nourishment as it comes to us in the whole Word of God. You need to want that, Peter says, you need to latch onto that like a baby latching on to momma.

Have you ever seen a little baby when it's hungry?

I was into the hospital last week to see Ashley and Alicia – Barrie and Julie Cleavelly's daughters – and as you might now, they've both had premature babies within just days of each other, it is really quite remarkable. One baby was 1.5 pounds and the other was 2.5 pounds – they are both

¹ Edmund Clowney, *The Message Of 1 Peter* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1988), 78.

incredibly small but growing rapidly and hungry all the time. And as I was visiting with them both babies were sleeping but little Joel was having a milk dream. You could see it on his face. He was making little sucky faces and he was moving around – you could just tell – there is nothing in the world right now that compares to feeding time for this little guy. He was thinking about it even in his sleep.

That's how you need to be, Peter says. You need to want the Word of God like you used to want your mother's milk.

That's how you've got to be if you are going to get big enough, strong enough and sturdy enough to survive the storm. That's what he says – that's where the text lands – look at it again:

1 So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander. 2 Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it **you may grow up** into salvation (1 Peter 2:1–2 ESV)

He actually uses a passive verb there – meaning he says that if you do that – if you turn away from the poison and you latch onto momma and you suck up the good stuff – you will be GROWN UP. Growth is going to happen to you. Peter isn't saying that they have to make themselves MATURE – they can't do that – only God gives the growth. But what you can do, Peter says, is stop consuming all of that garbage that is poisoning your soul. You can't off the junk and you can start sucking up the good stuff. If you do that – growth will happen to you.

And you are going to need that because when this storm hits everything small, everything light, everything insubstantial is going to be blown away.

That's the message and the urgency of the text.

Two steps! Right? What could be easier than that? No more poison, lots more Bible.

Done.

If only it were that easy. Understanding this text is one thing – applying it is quite another.

So we're going to spend some time now talking practically. We're going to talk first about how to protect our roots.

How To Protect Our Roots

If you are doing to your roots what I did to my wife's lilac tree than you are experience similar results. You are going to poison your own spiritual growth. So how do avoid doing that?

The first bit of counsel I would give you is this:

1. Be careful how you spend your time on-line

I understand that the internet is not going away. I understand that Social Media is the new Public Square. I understand that the internet is to our age what the printing press was to the Age of the Reformation – I understand what an incredibly blessing the internet can be.

And I also understand how quickly it can erode and diminish a human soul.

The internet has amplified and made more accessible every single thing that Peter just told us to have nothing to do with. Let's look at the list again. He just told us to turn away from:

all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander. (1 Peter 2:1 ESV)

Last time, I checked, that's pretty much all there is available on Social Media. Social Media seems designed to stir up envy. Social Media seems designed to speed slander, falsehood and gossip.

Now to be clear I'm not saying that the Social Media invented all of these problems – if it had then Peter wouldn't have been talking about this stuff back in the 1st century – but he was – which means that this has always been a problem. Back in grandma's day – gossip and slander happened at the hair salon – now it happens on Facebook. So social media didn't invent this problem, it just makes this problem bigger, faster, wider and worse.

It allows us to say things we would never say in person. It allows us to share things we do not entirely understand and haven't take the time verify. It is changing the way we relate to one another people and it is threatening to turn the Public Square into a cesspool of negativity and slander.

Now you can't completely avoid it – and you shouldn't completely avoid it. Jesus prayed for us to be **IN THE WORLD** but not **OF THE WORLD** – there are a lot of lost people in the world and most of them are now on line. So we have to be there – but we have to be wise and prepared and aware of the effect that it can have on our souls - that's all I'm saying.

So, be careful how you spend your time on line. Know where to go and where not to go. Know when to share and when not to share. Know how to tell when a discussion has taken a turn towards the cruel, caustic and unkind. Know how to be salt and light in that context and then most importantly – know when to disengage. Know when to turn it all off – when to **SHUT IT DOWN** and when to come up again to the better and cleaner air outside.

You know, a hundred years ago we started figuring out that people should only spend so much time down working in the coalmines. If you spend too much time down there it will affect your eyes and your lungs and you can die. Well the same is true with respect to the internet. We have to go down there – there are precious things in there – but we have to be wise about how much, how long and how deep. In our day and age that might just be the most important take away from this message.

Secondly, and again this applies at the hair salon, out in the church lobby or deep down in the internet – wherever you are – as Christians we in particular need to be slow to speak and eager to understand.

2. Be slow to speak and eager to understand

The first couple of words there – malice and deceit – have to do with harming other people through falsehood. You know, we don't have to look very far right now in the culture to discover just how harmful it can be when people are sharing and spreading things online or at the coffee shop that are simply not true. Lives can be destroyed in our day and age by fake news, by false

accusation and by rumour and innuendo. We make a mess of other people's lives and we make fools of ourselves when we say things and share things that we haven't taken the time to personally verify.

The police have actually warned us about doing this with missing person alerts². Sometimes parents who aren't supposed to have access to their kids will use Facebook to find out where their kids are so that they can go and take possession of them. The RCMP has asked people not to share those notices unless they come from a reputable news source – but very often we're moving too fast to verify the information that we are spreading around.

The Bible says:

If one gives an answer before he hears, it is his folly and shame. (Proverbs 18:13 ESV)

James the brother of the Lord says:

let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger (James 1:19 ESV)

Here's what I'm saying – you don't want to get sucked into the internet slander machine. So slow down. Listen long. Ask good questions and be eager to understand. That will be good for your witness, and Peter says, it will be good for your soul.

Thirdly, as your pastor, I would encourage you to:

3. Abhor all forms of defamation

Peter says, put away all slander. Have nothing to do with that. That will do harm to other people and it will be poison in your soul.

Too many Christians today – particularly though not exclusively young Christians – and particularly though not exclusively male Christians – think that the highest expression of their

² <https://www.facebook.com/RCMPKindersley/posts/1955807267988185>

spiritual zeal is found in assailing and attacking other believers. And yet Peter says here to have nothing to do with that – he'll say later in the letter:

Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. (1 Peter 4:8 ESV)

That doesn't sound like HERESY HUNTING or CHARACTER ASSASSINATION is something that the average Christian believer should be engaging in. We aren't supposed to be exposing one another – we are suppose to be covering for one another.

Now that isn't to say that there isn't a place for correction. Paul says in Galatians:

Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. (Galatians 6:1 ESV)

Do you hear that? Paul says that you will need from time to time to restore a brother or sister – but be so careful when you do it – lest ye be tempted to revile another believer – lest ye slip over the line and defame or slander another believer – in which case you will be taking poison into your own heart and soul.

Notice also that Paul says that only the spiritual should even try this – obviously gently correcting an erring brother is an extraordinarily hazardous undertaking. It can be very easy to lose your way and to lose yourself in the cesspool of negativity – particularly if you attempt to do these things on-line.

Fourthly, in terms of protecting your root system I would encourage you to:

4. Enjoy and celebrate the successes of other people

I mentioned before that the word Peter uses here in verse 1 translated as envy means: “the opposite of thankfulness for good which comes to others”³ – Peter wants us to turn away from that – if you can't be happy for other people, it will poison your own soul – so make the decision to celebrate every good thing that happens to the people around you.

³ Wayne Grudem, *1 Peter* Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 1988), 99.

Learn to be a bit of a cheerleader.

Learn to promote and protect the happiness and well being of other people.

We live in a very competitive and individualistic culture – that is soul killing. If you want to be strong and sturdy and stable in the days to come – develop the habit of building into other people.

The Bible says that we are only strong when we are strong together.

But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another. (Galatians 5:15 ESV)

If you build one another up – you are both going to be strong on that day – but if you turn on each other – envy each other – bite and devour one another – then you are both going to be consumed and blown away.

So as always in the Bible, there is something we need to turn away from and there is something we need to turn towards. Peter is saying, we need to turn away from that cesspool of negativity out there and we need to turn towards the pure, spiritual milk of the Word.

How To Enjoy The Pure Spiritual Milk Of The Word:

I want to talk about how to do that in the last couple of minutes that we have. Notice if you will that Peter doesn't just say: "You have to read more Bible". He could have said that, but instead he said you have to long for the pure spiritual milk of the word – the emphasis is on desire. Peter wants us to LOVE the word, CRAVE the word, ENJOY the word – so how do we go about doing that?

Let me give you 4 quick suggestions.

1. Read broadly

The Bible makes a lot more sense to us once we develop a bit of a sense of the bigger picture. If we take the Magic 8 Ball approach to the bible and just shake it up and see what verse pops out

we'll never really get the sense of the whole. To do that you have to commit to some sort of Bible reading plan. If you read through the Bible every year or every other year you will eventually begin to see how all the pieces fit together and that will make every individual chapter and verse seem that much sweeter.

There is simply no substitute for whole bible reading.

Read the Bible broadly so that you get the sense of the Big Picture.

And then secondly; read the Bible deeply.

2. Read deeply

In addition to working your way through the whole bible over the course of 1 or 2 years also try to study your way through one book of the Bible very slowly over the course of a year. Get a little introductory commentary like one of these (display The Bible Speaks Today or God's Word For You) and work your way through a single book of the Bible slowly, prayerfully, deeply, verse by verse, chapter by chapter.

I will tell you that the majority of my personal growth as a Christian has happened in this way. I would say that my RMM stuff is like talking to my heavenly Father on the phone – its good, its necessary, it keeps the lines of communication open – but our relationship goes deeper largely on the basis of these more in-depth journeys and conversations. The one is like a phone call, the other is like a 3 day hike in the woods. You can't always do the latter – which is why you do the former – but the latter makes all the difference in the world.

Thirdly, you need to learn to own the story.

3. Own the story

Here's what I mean by that. Some of us don't understand what we're reading. We think this is the history of Israel or the history 10 brain dead kings from 3 thousand years ago and you just

wonder what in the world is this about? Why do I have to read this story? And the answer is because it's your story. Paul said that. He said:

For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, 2 and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, 3 and all ate the same spiritual food, 4 and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ. (1 Corinthians 10:1-4 ESV)

All that stuff that happened to them – that is our family history. Those were OUR FATHERS – Paul said that to a bunch of Gentiles. When you understand that the Old Testament is your family history – it immediately comes alive. You start making connections. This is why I do that because I am just like my weird old uncle David or my dear old aunt Hannah. We start to see ourselves in the text. And so we should. These things, Paul says, were written down for us – on whom the end of the ages has come.

And then lastly and most importantly, as you read the Bible you must learn to look for Jesus.

4. Look for Jesus

As we said earlier we love the Word of the Lord because it gives us the Lord of the Word. That, by the way is where Peter ends. Look at the last verse, we haven't said much about it yet.

if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good. (1 Peter 2:3 ESV)

The word "if" there isn't trying to communicate doubt – it is trying to communicate motivation. Some Bibles translate it as "since" – since you have tasted that the Lord is good, long for the pure spiritual milk of the Word.

You know who you are meeting when you open up the bible. You are meeting Jesus. Luther said the Scriptures are the cradle wherein Christ is laid. Learn to read the Bible such that you are seeing Jesus on every page! If you know that you are going to be meeting Jesus when you open up this book then you are going to LONG FOR the pure spiritual milk of the Word.

Can you imagine if you could only know about your dad through a bunch of tapes that he had recorded for you before he died? I bet you'd be very eager to listen to those tapes.

Many years ago, when we were in the process of adopting our daughter Mikayla, we thought for a brief period of time that we were going to lose her. She was about 2 at the time and she was daddy's little girl. We had a very special bond and the thought of losing her was very hard on me. I didn't know where she would go and I wanted to always be with her in some way so I started making video tapes so she could hear my voice and know that her daddy loved her.

That's what the bible is my friends! Jesus can't be with us right now – physically – but he has put his Spirit in us and he has set his Word before us. So that we can always hear his voice and so that we will never forget – that the Lord is good and he loves us.

So turn away from all the death and nonsense out there and turn aside and meet with Jesus.

He knows you – he grows you – and he is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God, let's pray together.