

Date: July 12, 2020
Series: *Faith for Tough Times*
Title: *Faith to be Different*
Preacher: Mark Adams
Scripture: 1 Peter 1:13-21

Take your Bibles and turn to 1st Peter chapter 1. Please stand in respect for God's Word as I read verses 13-21.

13 - Therefore, with minds that are alert and fully sober, set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at His coming.

14 - As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance.

15 - But just as He Who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do;

16 - for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."

17 - Since you call on a Father Who judges each person's work impartially, live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear.

18 - For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors,

19 - but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.

20 - He was chosen before the creation of the world but was revealed in these last times for your sake.

21 - Through Him you believe in God, Who raised Him from the dead and glorified Him, and so your faith and hope are in God.

As you know, my son, Daniel, was deployed for several months as part of the military's response to the Covid-19 coronavirus pandemic. While he was gone, Ashley planted a garden in their backyard; not just as a source of fresh veggies, but to help the kids pass the time while their dad was gone. And it did. Joel and Lydia and Nathan helped plant lettuce, zucchini, watermelons, carrots, snap peas, and all kinds of stuff. They watered the garden and helped weed it. And then they watched to see if the seeds would take root and grow. If there wasn't progress, if a seed didn't germinate or didn't grow properly, it would of course not be a good thing. Thankfully, most of the seeds did sprout and produce. In fact, when we were down there visiting recently, we enjoyed cucumbers and carrots and lettuce fresh from their backyard.

Well, like the plants in this garden, Christians are expected to germinate and grow. When that doesn't happen, it is not a good thing. Paul addressed the problem of a lack of spiritual growth with the Christians in the church at Corinth by saying:

"Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the Spirit---but as people who are still worldly---mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready." (1 Corinthians 3)

This morning we are continuing our study of 1st Peter and what is the first word in our text?

Right, it's "therefore." If you're wondering what the "therefore" is there for---it is to refer to what went before it. Peter says THEREFORE, since, as we learned LAST WEEK, since we have a new birth through faith in Jesus, **"an inheritance that can never perish, spoil of fade, kept in Heaven..."** we must grow up, we must mature spiritually.

Some may ask, *"Well, if our inheritance is so secure---why do I need to grow?"* I'm glad you asked. A couple answers come to mind.

First, if we DON'T grow, if we don't put down good spiritual roots, we won't have the strength to withstand the persecution that Peter says is coming. I'm sure Peter remembered Jesus' teaching on this in Matthew 13 Jesus when He said, **"The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once**

receives it with joy. But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the Word, they quickly fall away.

Our Lord was warning us that if we don't deepen our faith, we won't do well when the tough times of life hit. I mean, when the unfairness that comes with living in a fallen world comes, immature believers tend to become bitter and blame God. And when temptation hits, they are too weak to withstand its draw.

Another reason we need to grow is because only when we do, are we able to experience the best that God has to offer. Remember Jesus said, ***"I've come that you might have life to the fullest."*** (John 10:10) When a Christian remains in spiritual infancy, they miss out on the abundant life God wants to give them. They don't experience the fulfillment of an intimate relationship with God, the kind of relationship that comes from RELYING on His presence and power. In short, they miss out.

Before I met Sue my experience with beaches was limited to Rehoboth Beach or Cape Henlopen Beach---Atlantic beaches in Delaware. So my fun in the sun included water that was cold and dark and deep and rough, waves pounding on sand that was a dirty tan---which I thought was great---until Sue took me to Panama City Beach and I saw sand that was pure white. The water was calm. No waves to worry about. Plus, it was shallow, I could walk out for hundreds of yards and it would not get above my waist. And the water was WARM, like a bathtub---but best of all it was CLEAR. I could see fish and crabs and all kinds of sea life. No worries about a shark sneaking up on me in those waters! In Delaware, I didn't know what I was missing. There was MUCH more to fun in the sun to be had than I was experiencing.

Well, the same principle is seen in the Christian life. Too many believers have been satisfied with a fire insurance policy for eternity. But there is much more to our salvation than that. I mean, it isn't just about getting us into Heaven; it's about getting Heaven into us. It's an abundant quality of life that begins NOW---not when we die.

With that in mind, let's look at two areas where we need to grow deeper in the Christian life so that we can experience both the strength to withstand tough times and the abundant caliber of life that God wants to give us.

1.) First, we need to grow and mature MENTALLY.

Look at verse 13. Peter says we are to have ***"minds that are alert and fully sober."*** Your version may read like this: ***"Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled."***

Our Heavenly Father is using Peter to remind us of the importance of THINKING RIGHTLY---learning to use the brains He has given us. And this is something we need to hear because our culture tends to place more emphasis on FEELING than THINKING. To show you what I mean, do these statements sound familiar?

- *"Hey---have you seen the new FEEL GOOD movie on Netflix!"*
- *"Listen son, When you get on campus---just follow your heart. Do what you feel is right."*
- *"I don't understand the words of that song, but 'I'm so excited and I just can't hide it. I'm about to lose control---and I think I like it!'"*

Even church services are evaluated more on how it makes us feel than on what we learn. We do indeed put more emphasis on emotions, than thinking; feeling, than using our minds.

Of course God has given us the wonderful gift of emotions. Excitement, fear, laughter, sadness, anger, romance, joy are all God-given feelings. And the Bible says there's a time to use those emotions, there IS a time to weep and a time to laugh. But God has also given us MINDS---brains with the capacity to think and

reason and He wants us to use them. As He says through Isaiah, ***“Come now and let us reason together.”*** (Isaiah 1:18). And that’s what God is saying here through Peter. We need to grow our minds. We need to mature UP HERE---we need to, ***“Prepare our mind for action.”*** *The Message* paraphrases it, ***“So roll up your sleeves, put your mind in gear.”***

Let’s face it. Most of the time when we fall into temptation, it’s because we don’t think, we just FEEL. This weekend Sue and I piggybacked on our kids’ Disney Plus subscription and watched Hamilton. If you’ve seen it or remember your history, you know that Alexander Hamilton, who was a married man with children, had a four-month long affair with a woman named Maria Reynolds. If we were to ask Alexander Hamilton, ***“Why did you do that?”*** would he say, ***“Well, I sat down and reasoned it out and this seemed to be the smart thing to do.”*** No! He would say, ***“I let my emotions get the best of me. I followed my heart.”*** In fact, that’s what he said when he confessed his sin later in the play.

Feelings almost always lead us down the wrong road. Feelings are what lead us to lose control and say things we regret. Feelings are what lead us to go into debt to buy things we really don’t need. I’m sure you can think of your own examples---times when you were immature enough to think with your heart instead of your head. If we are going to survive these kinds of challenges, we’ve got to grow our minds.

But it’s more than our BRAINS. You see our brains can be just as faulty and unreliable as our emotions. God warns us about this. He says, ***“There is a way that seems right to man, but it leads to destruction.”*** (Proverbs 16:25) No, what we need to do to mature is to train our brains to think BIBLICALLY. We are to prepare our minds to respond according to God’s commands, for, ***“the law of the LORD is perfect, refreshing the soul. The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple.”*** (Psalm 19:7)

This MENTAL MATURITY is what Peter is talking about in verse 14, ***“As obedient children, do not conform to the evil DESIRES you had when you lived in IGNORANCE.”*** This MENTAL MATURITY is how Joseph was able to withstand Potiphar’s temptings. He said, ***“I can’t do this thing against my God!”*** (Genesis 39:9) And he turned and ran. He had trained his mind for an obedient reaction when the temptation came. Jesus gives us another example when after fasting in the desert 40 days, Satan came to him tempting him, ***“If you are the Son of God, turn these stones into bread.”*** (Matthew 4:3) If Jesus had done what His emotions wanted, He would have instantly yielded. But Jesus responded, ***“It is written, man doesn’t live by bread alone.”*** (Matthew 4:4)

How do you mature in this way? How do you prepare your mind for action according to Scripture? Well, the word “prepare” here is in the tense that conveys the idea of continuing action. You keep on preparing your mind. You read the Bible daily. You do as David says in Psalm 119. ***“You hide God’s Word in your heart---to keep you from sinning.”*** (my paraphrase) You get in a GRACE GROUP---a BIBLE STUDY---and you prepare your lesson long before you ZOOM in---as I’ve seen so many in CC’s class do. The lesson to take from this is that we are to allow God’s Word to so saturate our minds that we think God’s thoughts and react with God’s response.

And let me say something that may step on some toes. Too many of us have trained our minds to respond POLITICALLY instead of BIBLICALLY. And Christians in BOTH political parties are guilty of that. With that in mind, I want to give you some homework. Recently the Supreme Court upheld a lawsuit filed by a woman in Louisiana. The law in question said that to do an abortion in that state the doctor had to have admitting privileges at a local hospital. The woman who filed the suit had learned that the child in her womb had birth defects and had to go to Texas to get an abortion. Here’s your assignment.

What is your EMOTIONAL response to this story?

What is your BIBLICAL response? Using your understanding of the Bible to help you think---how do you respond to this ruling?

E-mail me your answers. Let's see if we can help each other think---not politically, but Biblically.

This mental maturity is important. As Paul says in Ephesians 4:13:15. ***"...we must "become full-grown in the Lord—yes, to the point of being filled full with Christ. Then we will no longer be like children, forever changing our minds about what we believe because someone has told us something different or has cleverly lied to us and made the lie sound like the truth. Instead, we will lovingly follow the truth at all times—speaking truly, dealing truly, living truly—and so become more and more in every way like Christ who is the Head of his body, the Church."*** (The Living Bible)

2.) We need to mature MORALLY.

Peter says we also need to mature MORALLY. Look at verses 15-16. Peter says, ***"But just as He Who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."***

Now, what does the word "HOLY" mean? Many would answer that question in terms of what a holy person doesn't do. A holy person doesn't get drunk, doesn't do drugs, doesn't commit adultery, doesn't lie, or cheat. And not engaging in sinful activities is a part of holiness. As Ephesians 5:3 says ***"Among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people."***

But holiness is not just sin avoidance, it is a passionate pursuit of God's virtues in this world. And that leads us to the first of four motivations for holy living. Four motivations for maturing morally that Peter gives us.

3.) MOTIVATIONS for Holy Living

A. We mature to RESEMBLE God.

In verse 16 Peter quotes God Who says, ***"Be holy, because I am holy."*** Ephesians 5:1 Paul says, ***"Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children."***

The point is, like a child who loves and therefore imitates his or her dad, we strive to imitate our Heavenly Father.

Does God demand justice?

YES---so we should strive to become individuals who demand justice.

Does God care for the poor and the needy?

YES---we should do the same.

Is God generous?

YES---so we show our maturity by being generous.

Is God impartial? Is He faithful? Is He Merciful? Is He loving?

YES! Then we should be all those things.

And that leads me to mention another meaning of the word "holy." It means, "set apart" or "different." Some translations use the word "peculiar." Resembling God can make you look radical at times.

John Wesley is a great example of this. It was his maturity as a Christian, his Godliness, that led him to begin the campaign against slavery in England. William Wilberforce worked with Wesley and took up the fight. As a young member of Parliament, he led the campaign against the culture of the day working for 20 years to abolish slavery in England. I thank God for peculiar, radical, mature Christians like Wesley and Wilberforce. I hope their example inspires you to be more like our Heavenly Father.

Here's a second motivation Peter gives us to mature.

B. To PLEASE God.

Look at verse 17 again, ***"Since you call on a Father Who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear."*** We want our Heavenly Father to be pleased by how we live and knowing He watches us and judges us impartially, that motivates us to live in ways that bring joy to God.

I remember the days we brought our report cards home for our parents to sign and I wanted my mom and dad to be pleased with my work. I was AFRAID of not pleasing them. When we stand before God, we want the same.

Here's Peter's third motivation.

C. The futility of UNHOLINESS.

Look at verse 18: ***"For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the EMPTY WAY OF LIFE---handed down to you from your forefathers."***

The fact is, UNGODLY living is EMPTY living. Going with the fallen flow of this world, disobeying God's loving laws, leaves us feeling guilty and empty. The prodigal son learned this lesson. When his money ran out so did his fair-weather friends. Then he experienced an empty stomach and empty soul in the pigpen and came to himself and said, ***"This is stupid. I've blown it. I'm not staying here one more night. I'd be better off as a servant in my father's house than a slave here,"*** and he went back home.

Yes, there are pleasures in sin---but they are short-lived. We pay a cost when we disobey God; a cost that is way out of proportion to the pleasure it produces.

I can't help but think of Ernest Hemingway. This world-famous author grew up in a Christian home. But Ernest had other goals for his life and left his childhood faith far behind him. He became a writer and a thrill seeker. He hunted big game, fought in several wars, married four women and became an alcoholic. Toward the end of his life Hemingway said, ***"I live in a vacuum that is as lonely as a radio tube when the batteries are dead and there is no current to plug into."*** A few years later he committed suicide. Hemingway experienced the futility of life without God.

Here's Peter's final motivation:

D. The SACRIFICE of Jesus.

Look at verses 19-21, ***"You were redeemed...with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake."***

The message of the Gospel is that because of His love for us, Jesus died in our place. KNOWING He did should compel us to live for Him.

Do you remember the murders of two YWAM missionaries back in 2007? On December 9th of that year, Matthew Murray shot and killed Tiffany Johnson, 26, and Philip Crouse, 24, at a Youth With a Mission (YWAM) training center in the Denver suburb of Arvada. He later killed two sisters at New Life Church in Colorado Springs. Despite the deaths, YWAM continued with their missions training program and not one of the 120 who signed up has dropped out of the program after the killings. Director of the Arvada YWAM Peter Warren spoke with Christianity Today about the shooting and said,

“Matthew was in the building for half an hour talking with students, and then he asked to spend the night. Tiffany was called to the front because she handles hospitality. She told him this was not permitted without knowing the person or arranging the lodging ahead of time.”

In response Matthew said, *“Then this is what I’ve got for you.”* He pulled out a gun and began shooting. He had his foot in the door and after firing a few shots, his foot slipped and he fell back. The door slammed shut on him and automatically locked, so he could not get back in again. Right then, other staff and students were driving up and saw Matthew banging on the door, trying to get back in. When Matthew saw them, he ran away. This is a picture of Tiffany and another YWAM victim Philip Crouse. After a student performed CPR on Tiffany, she regained consciousness and asked another trainee named Holly, *“Is it bad?”* Holly said, *“Yes, it’s bad.”* Tiffany looked at Holly and her boyfriend, Dan, who was also shot, and said, *“We do this for Jesus, right guys? We do this for Jesus.”* Would you say that Tiffany was a mature Christian? Yes, for she did everything---even die---in response to what Jesus had done for her.

Let’s pray.