

Living Hope

I Peter 1: 1-5

**First Presbyterian Church
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Imagine for a moment this scenario. Suppose you are dropped on a road in a beautiful countryside. There is a stream running along the road. There are mountains and a forest before you. You have on sturdy, comfortable clothes and a great pair of walking shoes. You have two full water bottles and a pack full of food

and other supplies. Your body is healthy and strong. These are the instructions inside your jacket pocket: *You have the right to go anywhere you want to in this country. You can do anything you are able to do. You have the authority to make your life how you want it to be.* So the adventure begins. You start walking with vigor. The whole world is before you. But then, as you feel around in your other pockets, you realize you didn't get any more instructions. All you were told was that you were free to do anything you wanted and were able to do. No map is in the pack. You don't know where you are or what's ahead. No one is with you. You pass people who are also walking with vigor. They seem very determined. They seem to know what they are doing. Everyone has in ear buds. They don't want to talk. So, you keep walking into this life that is all yours. As you pace on, you realize you don't really know where this is going to end up. You don't know how to make anything. Like a shelter. Or a fishing pole. Or a farm. Or a relationship. As one day turns into another, you're getting fatigued. You don't have the focus or strength to do much more than keep walking. And all the people rarely look up, much less stop to speak. The whole world is yours, but you are lonely, lost, and running out of hope. You wonder, "Am I not supposed to be getting somewhere?"

That's the way a lot of people feel today. We live in a beautiful country with access to food and clothes and freedom. We have the right to journey wherever we want. We get to make up the meaning of our lives. But there's no map. No help. No companionship. Everyone is faking it as they walk fiercely by. Distracting ourselves from the fear. We're starting to despair of there being any point to this life at all. But what if we dug around in our pockets again and discovered this letter from Peter. It would sound so strange that few would

interrupt their determined walk nowhere to listen to it. But some hearts would feel a thrill shoot through them. Here are the missing instructions about the journey! Here is news about how we got here and where we are going. Just in these few verses, we hear about the transforming power of God the Father's great mercy that gives significance to our past, present and future. Let's explore three aspects.

1) The Past: The Foreknowledge of God the Father. The word here is *prognosis*. To know ahead of time. Feel the impact of this news. God knew you before you were made. The Father thought of you before you came into existence. And in vs. 3, Peter has told us of the character of this heavenly Father: he is full of great mercy. Before the world was made, God saw you in his mind. The Father saw you created and declared you to be very good. The Father also saw you lost and getting found. He saw you in his mind burdened and bruised and then saw you getting lifted up and healed. The Father thought ahead of time of your being saved in every way a person can be saved. And what he thinks, he causes to be.

I want to share with you a thought we talked about a couple years ago, but continues to energize me with its importance. If you had any philosophy or history courses, or even if you just listen to podcasts, you can probably finish this famous line from Descartes: "I think, therefore....[I am]." How do I know I exist? Well, I'm thinking about it, so I must be alive. How do I know what I'm to do with my life, what my purpose is? Well, I think, therefore I am. *My thoughts determine who I am. My thinking, imagining and visioning chart the direction for me. I think, therefore I am, me, on my own, with full authority for my life. I am.* It's Descartes' formula that underlies that whole modern journey along the road we imagined a minute ago. I get to go and do whatever I want. Thrilling. And exhausting. And lonely. And doomed to fail.

One of my theological heroes noted that if you change just one letter in Descartes' original Latin sentence, you get an entirely new concept.ⁱ And it transforms everything. Here it is, "I am thought, therefore I am." How do I know I exist. Because someone has thought of me. God the Father foresaw me. I am not alone on the road. I exist because of relationship. I came from my parents' interaction. I survived infancy only because someone took care of me. I am interdependent on others even now. But more, before all that, I exist because God the Father, full of tender mercy, thought of me and caused me to come into being. He thinks of me right now, and that is why I am alive. He yearns for me to wake up along the lonely, futile road of myself as center and realize how much he loves me. *I am thought, therefore I am.* The transforming power of the mercy of God before the world was made is what brought me into being.

2) The Present: Living Hope. In verse 3, Peter begins his song of praise to God the Father. He has very important information to give us. But this knowledge is best shared not in bullet points but in notes of praise. It's truth we grasp more fully only when we lift our minds and hearts to worship. *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!* Why? Why would we praise this God who is the Father of Jesus Christ? Because he has done something in the world where we live that changes everything. This past event can transform our present lives two thousand years later. This is the great mystical, mystery of Christ.

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.* It's easy to miss what's going on here. Something happened to Jesus in this world of dust and swiftly passing time. God the Father raised the crucified and buried Jesus to new life. Jesus got up from the dead. Jesus rose. The same guy, but made new. Risen Jesus was a new creation, a man no longer mortal. Still a man but outfitted for everlasting life. Now that historical event that happened to that one particular man still has power to change what you feel in your heart, mind and soul, right now. When someone opens their heart to this news, he or she gets made new on the inside. That's the work of the Holy Spirit joining us to Jesus who joins us to his Father. We become a new creation. It's like getting born all over again, but into a higher, fuller life.

I love pondering that these words were written by Simon Peter. The big fisherman had boldly pledged to defend Jesus with his life. But by the end of the night Peter had three times denied that even knew Jesus. Think of Peter's despair as Jesus was sealed in the tomb and Peter knew he had contributed to that. It was a dead stop for Jesus and for Peter. Peter had failed Jesus with deathly consequences. Imagine the relief on Easter Sunday when Peter discovered that he hadn't ruined Jesus after all. Jesus was alive. Peter transformed in an instant from dead despair with no future to a living hope. Everlasting life opened up before him. He got his life back, and more. He was made new. It still happens.



Jordan Peterson is one of the most influential intellectuals of this decade. His book *Twelve Rules for Life* sold millions of copies and Jordan has millions of followers of his podcast. So I was fascinated to watch an interview with Jordan's 30 year old daughter, Mikhaila, as she recalled her journey into faith in God.

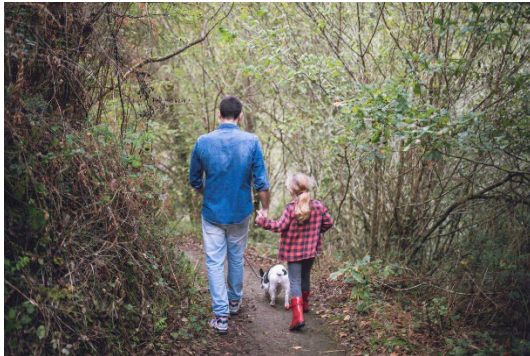
(<https://youtu.be/TVrYijRce8w>). She has struggled throughout her life with

autoimmune and mood disorders. In recent years, she's dealt with first her mom, then her Dad facing long battles with life-threatening illnesses. Mikhaila reports how she had known Christians all her life and envied this sense of inner support they had but she had never known. Not long ago, she married a Christian. He never pushed his faith on her, but in the midst of life being hard on many fronts, he suggested God was who she needed. She asked him how she could connect. He wisely toward her just to go off by herself and sincerely ask God to reveal himself to her. She did, earnestly. And over the next few days thorny areas of her life each started to turn for the better. Not resolve completely but, for the first time, to move in a hopeful direction. She says, one morning "I woke up and felt calm, and kind of lifted, which I think was the Holy Spirit. I felt a calm I hadn't felt before. Aspects of my life were improved. Things were still up and down, but I felt comforted in a way I hadn't before." She now trusts in Jesus. This is a young faith. Just getting started. But turning to God sincerely resulted in being surprised by becoming aware of an unseen hand moving in the midst of circumstances. And creating an inner change. A sense of connection. Of being supported and lifted up even in the midst of struggles. Living hope began to replace despair. This is discovering the tender mercies of our God and Father, who has been thinking of us all along. Mikhaila has much to grow into, and I want us to pray for her, and her father, for their influence in our culture is great.

3) The Future: An Inheritance That Can't Be Lost. So Peter has blessed God for things he did in the past. The Father thought of us. The Father raised Jesus. The Father sends the Spirit who enables us to trust in Jesus and be made new. So Peter has blessed God for the present gift: we have living hope. Because Jesus is alive, we are alive internally in ways we could never have even imagined. We have support and comfort within. But there is also a future dimension. We have resurrection life inside us now. One day, we will get what Jesus has. We will have resurrection bodies like the one Jesus has. What is a spiritual experience now will be a physical reality in future. This is our inheritance. We're going to be saved out of frailty into vigorous, embodied everlasting life. We're going to be saved out of our constant propensity to make it all about us into a life of wide-open intimate love. We're going to be saved out of the lostness of our own devices and desires into the pathways of the beautiful kingdom of God.

I love what Peter says about this inheritance. It won't perish. It can't be defiled. It won't fade away. How powerful are those words coming from Peter who denied Jesus. He knows. If I could squander my inheritance, I would do it. If I could go up and get it and sell it for some trinkets now, I'd do it. I'd get my grubby hands on this lovely salvation and defile it. But God the Father who

foreknew me still knows me. Your inheritance in Christ is where you can't get to it before the proper time. You can't lose it, screw it up, waste it or defile it. You are being kept by the power of God for so great a salvation. The Father thought about you before the world was made. And he loved you before you took a breath. He loved you even knowing how lost and ruined you could get. He saw you receiving the news that his Son had taken all our sin and conquered death. He thought of you getting made new as Christ's work in history became your spiritual reality. The Father thought of you stepping into everlasting resurrected life. He thought of you before the world was made participating in the everlasting dance of the love of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We know the power of positive thinking. You think ahead of time to what you want so that everything will come together to get it. Forethought, visualizing, works for humans. So imagine how it works for the Father of great mercy. What God thinks of, he gets. What God foresees, he brings into being.



Lost on a road where we can go wherever we want but don't know where to go or how to go, news comes. I am thought, by God, therefore I am. Christ has died and Christ has risen. This births me into a living hope. Christ will come again and I will enter the fullness of so great a salvation. I am no longer walking alone. But with the Father. Be of good cheer, dear ones. You're not your own. Isn't that a relief? You belong, body and soul, to your faithful Savior. Go forth and live in hope! Go forth and share that hope!

¹ Joseph Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1968), p. 247