



BACK TO THE BIBLE SERIES: 1 Peter: Hope Filled Living in a Culture of Despair

By Pastor Bryan Clark

Message Title: How to Love Life and See Good Days Pt. 1

Release Date: Thursday 9/19/19

How, in a culture of despair, do we still love life and find good?

That's what we want to talk about, but I'll tell you right up front, the answer is probably not what you think. If you have a Bible, turn with us to 1 Peter, Chapter 3. Starting in Verse 8, he says:

To sum up, all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit; not returning evil for evil or insult for insult but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing.

(*NASB, 1 Peter

3:8-9)

So, he opens the paragraph by saying, "This is a summary of where we've been." We go back to the reminder that we have been radically changed on the basis of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. Christianity is not a try-harder religion. It's based on the fact that on the basis of the grace and mercy of God, we have been radically changed—and so this new life flows out of this transformation that has taken place. We're told that we are the people of God; we are God's own possession. But with that wonderful truth comes responsibility. We have been called, and we have been called to proclaim the excellencies of the One who has transferred us out of darkness into His marvelous light. How do we do that? We do that by abstaining from fleshly lusts. Basically, as long as we are tied up with our own sin, that's all we think about; that's all we focus on. Sin makes us selfish. That's kind of like "Step one". "Step two" is, then, we make our behavior—and therefore our message—attractive to an unbelieving world by doing good works.

Peter has reminded us again and again it's not enough just to have words. There must be something in our behavior that demonstrates we have been radically changed. He's talked about what that looks like as citizens, what that looks like in unfair relationships, what that looks like at home, and now we summarize it with a series of commands.

To sum up, all of you be harmonious... The word literally means to be united around a mission. If you think of the word harmony, our English word flows out of this Greek word. You think of the melody line, and that's kind of the driving mission; and then all of the harmony is built around that; that's kind of the concept. So you can think in terms that make sense to you, whether you're talking about an orchestra, whether you're talking about an athletic team, whether you're talking about the military, or you are talking about different people, different

personalities, different stories, or different backgrounds. But ultimately, we lay our differences aside in order to unite around the common mission. That's kind of the heartbeat of this term.

All of us are aware there's a lot of concern and struggle in all the division that seems to characterize our culture today. We are a collection of individuals—individualism that is selfish. This self-centered attitude has become almost a virtue in our culture. There is no driving mission that causes us to lay down differences and come together. Consequently, we're nothing more than a collection of individuals, and what we see is only going to get worse until that changes. But we remind ourselves this that we're not just the culture. By the grace and mercy of God, we are the people of God, and we do have a uniting mission. We do have a sense of purpose that drives and defines us—that we lay aside our differences and we come together to accomplish the mission. That's the idea of harmonious.

Sympathetic is pretty much what we would think of it. It's kind of this caring connection with people's feelings. The Greek word includes both joys and sorrows. We weep with those who weep, and we rejoice with those who rejoice, but we come together and experience those emotions together.

Brotherly is a term that has less and less meaning for us as our families become more and more fractured and dysfunctional. But maybe the terminology that would recapture it is this idea of a band of brothers. This military idea where we are on a mission; we are different people from different backgrounds, but we come together as a band of brothers to accomplish the mission. The idea is that we are family. We all have relationships that get strained and are difficult, and a lot of those we just let go. It isn't worth the energy to try to sort it out. But it's different when it's family. We will expend a lot of energy and time to somehow face into it, work through it, and somehow make progress, because there's this sense that this is different—we're family! That's the idea of brotherly. There is this reminder that we are united together as the people of God. I reminded us several weeks ago that the church is made up of people, and people genuinely are all odd and awkward and different. We're all kind of weird in our own ways. But there is the sense in which, "...but we are the people of God. We work through that and we come together to accomplish the mission." It's a high level of commitment in order to come together.

Kindhearted is just what you would think of; we might use the word compassion—just the genuine caring spirit for one another—and humble in spirit. The Greek word really reflects thinking of others as more important than yourself. It's good to remind ourselves whenever we see the concept of humility in the New Testament that this was contrary to the value system in a Greco-Roman culture. They did not see humility as a virtue. They actually saw it as a weakness. It was all about me and my strength, and whatever I needed to get done. So, whenever you see this concept of humility, it was really dramatically contrary to the prevailing culture. But this whole attitude that was in Jesus should be reflected in His people—that we put others first, reflecting the life change we have in Christ.

So, think of verse eight and these commands, which are kind of summing up the discussion that we've had as life within the family of God. The basic idea is that it creates a place of refuge. It's a place where we can go where we are aliens and strangers together, so that we have some sort of a place of refuge where we can grow, where we can heal, where we can gain strength in

order to go out there—and it's not going to be that way out there. So, the idea is: if we can't pull it together in here, we're never going to be faithful out there.

So, verse nine moves out to the broader culture ...not returning evil for evil or insult for insult. Whether you're talking about verbally or talking about social media, it's kind of a new response... that we don't return evil for evil; we don't return insult for insult. We were told by Peter that when Jesus was verbally abused...reviled...He did not revile in return. The text is not a "hunker down and take it" text. It's actually proactive. We do something in return. We give a blessing. Literally the word means to speak well of someone ...giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing. We were blessed in order to be a blessing.

Our first reaction would be, "That doesn't seem fair. If people insult us, in return we offer a blessing?" But if you remember, I offered a newsflash. "Newsflash: Life isn't fair!" The text tells us we should expect to be slandered. We should expect to be treated unfairly. Peter reminded us, "That's the story of Jesus!" It wasn't fair that Jesus took our sins upon Himself on the cross. It wasn't fair that Jesus died in our place. We as the people of God are the last people that should be talking about fairness—but Peter says, "That is the pattern; that's the example that we're to follow." So as people slander us, as people insult us, as people are unfair to us, we don't just hunker down and take it; we actually proactively respond by offering some sort of a blessing.

Now this is really important to think about. I think sometimes it gets in the heads of Christians that in order to be faithful, in order to take our stand as the people of God, we must fight back. You see a lot of this on social media. There is this idea that we somehow have to fight back and take back the country. "That's what it means to be a Christian," and, "That's what it means to be strong," and, "That's what it means to be faithful to our calling." We tend to think because our words are biblical, our words are true, because our words are meaningful to us, therefore those words will be convincing, and people will hear them, people will read them, and in this moment of clarity they will say, "You know, you're right! I'm wrong! Hallelujah, my life has been changed!"

But here's what is actually happening. We live in a very angry culture. The anger is for several reasons, but people are angry, people are hostile, people are frustrated, people are fearful, and it comes out in really destructive ways. When we enter into that and we respond in kind, people are not sorting out the argument and the words we are using. They just perceive us to be another angry demographic, just like everyone else.

It's helpful to understand that the people that agree with you will applaud you. The people that disagree are just made angry. But, at the end of the day, you're not changing the world. What Peter is saying is what's going to cause us as the people of God to be distinct, is that our behavior is so other than what is so common in our culture, people will have to back up and say, "What is the deal with these people that are so radically different?" Think about it: In a culture of such anger and hostility and intolerance, if rather than responding in kind, we responded with

a blessing, we responded in a way that is so unlike the rest of the culture, it would cause people to stop and wonder, “Who are these people? And what makes them act like that?”

The commands in verses eight and nine are really meant to be the strategy to accomplish that. Our calling is “to proclaim the excellencies of Him who has transferred us out of darkness into light.” Our behavior must reflect that rather audacious claim.

In verse ten you see the word for. Now this is the Greek word gar, G-A-R in English. We refer to this as an explanatory gar. Now I know you’re thrilled to know that—you probably want to write that down. But it actually is an important point because an explanatory gar is basically saying what follows is the theological foundation, the rationale, that supports why we should obey verses eight and nine—and it’s essentially a quote from Psalm 34.

So, before we read the words of Psalm 34, I want to remind us of a couple of things. First of all, Psalm 34 was written by David, while he was in the Wilderness School of Leadership. It was written when David, as a teenage boy, trusted God and took on the giant Goliath, and toppled him to the ground. It was a great moment in Israel’s history. It set them free from the Philistines. David continued to trust God and God did amazing things through young, teenage David. But Saul was so threatened by David, Saul determined he must kill David before David takes over the kingdom. So, David, after being faithful to God, is rewarded by having to flee as a fugitive and live in the wilderness, running for his life for more than a decade. It must have been a time of great hurt, a time of great confusion, a time of wondering, “Where’s God in all of this?” You just tried to do the right thing, and this is what you get in return?

Specifically, Psalm 34 was written when David made some bad decisions and ended up in the presence of the Philistine king, Abimelech. David was fearful that Abimelech would kill him, having heard the stories of David as a warrior, so David pretended to be mentally insane. As a result of that, Abimelech was convinced David had lost his mind and tossed him out. It was out of that experience that David writes these words. So before you are tempted to say, “Well, you don’t know my circumstances; you don’t know my story; you don’t know why this wouldn’t work for me,” let’s remember that David is saying, “In the midst of those circumstances, it was possible to love life and to see good days.”

Let’s also remind ourselves that the first readers were those who had been driven out of their homeland because of persecution. They had ended up in northern Turkey as aliens and strangers, foreigners with few rights and privileges, beginning to go through persecution, but that persecution was about to increase dramatically! Even Peter, who writes these words, would soon be put to death by Nero. So we remind ourselves before we say, “But you don’t know my circumstances; you don’t know why this wouldn’t be fair for me,” let’s remember the context of the people for whom this is being written, and they are being told, “In the midst of your circumstances, you can love life and see good days.” So, with that in mind, we read,

“THE ONE WHO DESIRES LIFE, TO LOVE AND SEE GOOD DAYS,
MUST KEEP HIS TONGUE FROM EVIL AND HIS LIPS FROM SPEAKING DECEIT. (Vs. 10)

Cara: All right, Bryan, the last words of your message today, remind us of something the Bible tells us over and over. We have got to get control of our tongues.

Bryan: Yeah, that's interesting how often that message comes up. It is very common. It's all over the book of Proverbs. We had it in James. Now it shows up again, and honestly, we lose our witness when our tongue is out of control. It's as simple as that. So, remember Jesus said, actually our tongue is a symptom of something deeper. It's just coming out our mouths. But the problem's deeper than that, and I think it's also helpful when things "slip out." You know, if I could put that in quotes, it's like it didn't really just "slip out." It's not an "oops" moment. There's something inside of me that was causing that. So even for me as a preacher, one of the things I figured out early on is how I talk in private will come out on the stage. It just will. So, I'm really careful about how I speak in private, because it's going to come out on the stage, and that really helps me discipline myself, even in my most private conversations.

Cara: That's a good tip. I've actually dealt with this myself and there was a good couple of months where I had to change my goTandem to help me out with this. So that's good advice.

Bryan: Yeah. It's a big problem for all of us.

Arnie: So, Bryan, in our culture today, our actions speak louder than any kind of words.

Bryan: Yeah. So, actions give our words credibility, help people process whether they think it's true or not. And honestly, we live in a culture where everybody's skeptical. I think about that all the time. People wander through our doors and it's a legitimate question. Why would I believe anything this guy says? And so there has to be some sort of action that backs up the words. We as a nation lie as a way of life. So, truth is devalued. But when somebody is actually living in a way that's consistent with what they say they believe is true, there's a lot of power in that.

Cara: Peter's writing this letter to people under persecution. The whole time he's telling people to love and see good days ahead. And that actually sounds like James, with counting it all joy.

Bryan: Yeah, it's a lot like James. It's all about perspective. And again, it's about settling whether we're here to set up Heaven on Earth or here to accomplish a mission. And I think it's interesting, David wrote those words. So, Peter's quoting David from Psalm 34 during his time in the wilderness, about a decade and half of fleeing from Saul. So, nobody could say, well, you don't know how hard my life has been. It's like David's life was really hard when he wrote those words. The first readers were people being persecuted. It was going to get a lot worse. So, I can choose to love and see good days regardless of my circumstances. It's my choice. It's a perspective I choose to take.

Arnie: So, the idea from verse eight is to not return evil for evil or insult for insult. And intellectually I think I can get that, but the radical part is to do something at that point - to actually give a blessing is so counter to human nature, it seems like anyways. Yet, it's amazing. Can you give me an example of that?

Bryan: Yeah, so that's a great question. First of all, it is so counter to everything that we experience and that's the point. That's what creates the witness. That's what makes people notice. But I tell you it doesn't have to be dramatic. You know, there probably are these big dramatic examples, but it's just returning kindness for somebody's unkindness. It's helping people that maybe haven't been so nice to us, serving people that maybe haven't been so kind to us. So, an example would be, I think it was two summers ago, we had a group of people that protested the church. They did it twice in the summer. They lined up outside on the street. It was summer, it was hot. And before I even knew they were protesting and could say anything, we already had people that gathered up water bottles, took them out. They gathered up cookies out of the different rooms in the church on a Sunday morning, and they took them water and cookies, made sure they were well cared for. And I think it's just a way to respond that makes it difficult for those who have treated us poorly to know what to do with that.

But I would also say, you know, I think about it for me personally to just grit my teeth and bear it, that's hard. To respond, even if it's responding with kindness or doing something for them, I'd rather do that than just sit and take it [yeah], because at least I can respond in some way, and that gives my energy somewhere to go. So, one of the things to think about is we can't, as Christians, allow others' behavior to define our behavior.

So, you think about how this starts when we're kids. How many times have you heard, well, they started it, which then means that it's okay for me to fight back. When I was in high school, it was, well who threw the first punch? Because then it's okay if you punch back, it's like a license to fight back. And at some point, we have to realize we can't get sucked into that and allow other people's behavior to define our behavior. Our whole witness depends on us choosing to be different.

Arnie: Well and I think we don't realize how powerful of a testimony that is to non-believers. I know my brother is a strong Christ follower. And he got one of these bogus lawsuits, and I was a nonbeliever and I was watching my brother, and my brother did not defend it. He just paid it. And the other guy's attorneys gave back their fees. They felt so guilty. And the testimony was so tremendous, where I am, "sue him, countersue him, get him back." And that's what the world expects. [Yes.] But the testimony then is completely lost. The power of that moment to win people to Jesus is there, but you've got to behave properly.

Bryan: Yeah. And even mature Christians say, well, they started it. I hear that as a defense for social media. It's like, well, they started it, and it's like, it doesn't matter.

Arnie: I'm sure I must've said that once in a while too.

Cara: I know I have.