

HOPE AGAIN: When Life Hurts and Dreams Fade

STUDY ELEVEN

Hope Beyond the Culture: How to Shock the Pagan Crowd

1 Peter 4:1–6

You and I are surrounded by lost people, people who do not know the Lord, people whose lives are marked by sin. And we who live in this foreign land, away from our heavenly home, live for the will of God. There should be a marked contrast in our lifestyles.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

IF you've ever traveled abroad, an entirely new set of sensations likely hit you as soon as you stepped off the plane or train.

You saw people who didn't look like you wearing clothes you can't buy at your local stores. They spoke an unfamiliar language you couldn't even begin to comprehend. As you moved through the region, you smelled new combinations of meat, spices, and vegetables that stimulated your tastebuds with mouthwatering flavors.

You soon couldn't help but think, *I'm not at home anymore.*

Those who place their faith in Jesus receive a new citizenship. Because they now belong to the kingdom of heaven, they are no longer "at home" in this world. For now, they remain in this pagan world as exiles awaiting their full homecoming with their God and King.

So how should we act while we're away from home? The apostle Peter answered this question in his first letter, and this *Searching the Scriptures* study will explore his exhortation to remain faithful to Christ on our journey from earth to heaven.



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PREPARE YOUR HEART

Bible study isn't merely an exercise for the head. It should engage the heart as well. Begin your time in Scripture today by speaking with your heavenly Father:

Father, I long to be united with Your Son in our heavenly home, but I recognize that You've left me here on this earth for a purpose. Through my time in Your Word, shape me and prepare me to serve You and Your purpose for my life. In Jesus' name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

The majority of Peter's readers lived on foreign soil. Each day, they interacted with people who looked, spoke, and acted differently from them. The most jarring discrepancy between the lives of Peter's audience and their foreign neighbors was evident in their religious experience.

The Christians worshiped and adored one God who loves them, while their neighbors sacrificed to many gods to pacify these false gods' anger. In fact, each foreign family likely pledged allegiance to a unique set of gods. But the followers of Jesus had no idols and offered no sacrifices.

In essence, the original recipients of 1 Peter were living in a thoroughly *pagan* world. So, in *1 Peter 4:1–6*, the apostle Peter demonstrated how Christians can shine brightly for Jesus even in a dark, wicked, and hostile world.



Observation: Provision, Transformation, Reaction

As you read *1 Peter 4:1–6* and make observations, place yourself in the sandals of one of Peter's original readers. Imagine yourself in a foreign land. Those around you treat you with ambivalence at best, and at worst, they malign, ostracize, and persecute you.



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His Provision—1 Peter 4:1a

With what word did Peter begin this section in *1 Peter 4:1a*? How does this word link this passage to the previous one? In your own words, summarize the key ideas from *3:18* and *3:22*.

In *4:1a*, Peter firmly told his readers to “arm themselves.” Although the Greek term here is usually used to describe military preparation, Peter put a twist on its meaning. Those who are in Christ must arm themselves with what?

Our Transformation—1 Peter 4:1b–3

According to *1 Peter 4:1b*, what kind of relationship with sin do those who suffer for Christ have?



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What two kinds of dispositions did Peter contrast in *1 Peter 4:2*?

“You won’t . . .” _____

“But you will . . .” _____

In *4:3*, Peter expounded upon his point in *4:2* and reminded his readers what it was like before they knew Christ and when they chased their own desires. What kinds of “evil” behavior do “godless people enjoy”?

Their Reaction—*1 Peter 4:4–6*

According to *1 Peter 4:4*, what two reactions will non-Christians have when they see new Christians refuse to “plunge into the flood of wild and destructive” behavior of the world?

1. _____

2. _____

According to *4:5*, what future awaits those who slander followers of Jesus? And according to *4:6*, what future awaits those who accepted the gospel but now are dead?



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First, we no longer serve sin as our master. Second, we no longer spend our days overcome by the desires we once had. Third, we now live for the will of God. Fourth, we have closed the book on godless living. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: To Remain Faithful

In *1 Peter 4:1b*, the apostle offered some puzzling words: “For if you have suffered physically for Christ, you have finished with sin.” Some think this verse suggests that only believers who have endured great persecution can achieve true sanctification. This assumption sees a cause-and-effect relationship between these two realities—as if only suffering *causes* sanctification.

It is better, however, to see an evidence-then-inference relationship in Peter’s words. Consider this statement: “If you have a runny nose, you are sick.” Your runny nose provides *evidence* that allows someone to *infer* that you are fighting an illness. Now reread *4:1b*. What kind of inference can you make about a believer who endures unjust suffering because of his or her faith in Christ?

A key goal of interpretation is to develop evergreen theological principles based on your observation of a passage.¹ Using the following format, develop two or three timeless truths based on *4:1–6*: *To remain faithful to Christ in this pagan world, Christians should . . . because . . .*



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You and I live our lives as Christians away from home. We are citizens of another land, but we're left here to demonstrate what it is like to be a member of another country, to have a citizenship in another land, so we might create a thirst and an interest in that land.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Daniel's Example

The apostle Peter's instruction to remain godly while living in a thoroughly *ungodly* environment is perfectly demonstrated in the life of the prophet Daniel. Daniel spent his life in exile, away from his home of Israel. He was swimming in the waters of paganism—in constant contact with divination, idol worship, and sacrifices to false gods. Yet he didn't allow these influences to drown his faith in God.

As a result, King Darius witnessed Daniel's strong character and offered him a position of high leadership in the empire. The other rulers hated that their king gave special treatment to a foreigner, so they tried to show that Daniel didn't deserve his new prestigious role. What scheme did these rulers devise in *Daniel 6:5–9* in the hope of causing King Darius to turn against Daniel?

According to *6:10*, what did Daniel do when he heard the king's decree? What does Daniel's response reveal about his character?



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Despite Daniel's valuable service to the kingdom, he ultimately defied Darius' decree. The king wanted to keep his trusted ally by his side, but the law was the law. So he begrudgingly threw Daniel into the lions' den to be devoured. According to *Daniel 6:19–23*, what happened the morning after Daniel entered the den?

When Darius witnessed Daniel's faith, he made a proclamation to the whole kingdom:

"I decree that everyone throughout my kingdom should tremble with fear before the God of Daniel.

For he is the living God,

and he will endure forever." (*Daniel 6:26*)

That's the joy of being left on foreign soil. You get to acquaint non-believers with that life that is now yours, and it can be theirs too. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: A Shocking Way of Life

Today, you may feel like Peter's readers or Daniel—as if you're living in an entirely foreign land. If you're wondering how you can navigate life in this dark world, Pastor Chuck Swindoll offers this counsel:

1. *Continue living for Christ.*
2. *Expect to be misunderstood.*
3. *Keep your eyes fixed on Christ.*



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What kinds of worldly influences most tempt you to chase “your own desires” and dampen your desire “to do the will of God” (*1 Peter 4:2*)? How does knowing that you have a new heavenly citizenship strengthen you to resist these influences?

Have you ever felt misunderstood by those who don’t follow Jesus? Have they ever mistreated you because of your commitment to Him? How did you respond in these situations? How did Christ strengthen you to persevere?

As you consider your circle of relationships, who are the closest non-Christians in your life? How can your faithfulness to Christ be a positive witness of the good news of His kingdom? Write down some practical ways you can do this.



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Do you feel far from home today? Does your soul ache for the day when you will dwell with Christ? Don't despair in your feelings, but rejoice, knowing that one day He will lead you out of exile. Until then, remain faithful to Him. Your example may very well inspire others to join you on your journey.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, it's not easy living in this world that is hostile to You, Your message, and Your people. Give me the strength to continue living for Christ. Even if I am misunderstood or mistreated for my faith, help me keep my eyes on Him. Though I'm eager to enter my true home, I will faithfully carry out the purpose You've left me here to fulfill. In Jesus' name, amen.

ENDNOTE

1. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."

