

Script: Pastor Frank Johnson

First Peter: Truth for Temporary Citizens of Earth “Suffering, Part I: Getting Our Relationships Right”

1 Peter 3:8-12

Take a first look.

I. Former conservative columnist Cal Thomas told this about becoming a serious follower of Jesus:

I had gone to a building called church, but it didn't mean anything to me. We never read the Bible at home. It was a cultural thing. I had accepted Christ at age 12, but it lay dormant in my life because I didn't feed [my faith]. At 16, I was a DJ on the local rock & roll radio station. I had my own show from 7:00 in the morning 'til noon on Sunday. It helped me rationalize not going to church.

I had started to work for NBC in 1961 as a copy boy in Washington. I had moved up, and I had this plan of where I would be by age 30. But at 27, I wasn't advancing as I thought I should be. I felt like I was in a basement, no direction. In 1971, my wife, Ray, and I were feeling a lot of emptiness. So, we started to go to church. Someone recommended Fourth Presbyterian, pastored by Richard Halverson. We loved it and started attending.

But I was still trying to have it all and not succeeding. I was working six or seven days a week. The culture tells us that if we achieve this, or make this, or buy this, then we will get the [American] dream and be happy.

On a Friday in 1973, my boss at NBC said, "Got a minute?" [Sounds like something I might say He went on,] I got fired—because of my ego, big mouth, and jealousy of now-dead people. That was part of the trembling struggle toward the glory of Christ. He was holding me back for my sake.

My wife said, "You will never be free of the burden of success if you don't thank God for losing your job." In tears I recommitted my life to Christ that night. And that led to 11 years in the wilderness.

[I went to KPRC-TV in Houston.] Coming from D.C., it was like a tailspin into the wilderness. But God had a plan. Outwardly, my change could be seen in me learning not to blaspheme.

Ralph Neighbor, a [Southern Baptist] pastor in [Houston, Texas], taught me doctrine. I also met Francis Schaeffer in Houston. In 1971 or 1972 I had heard him in D.C. I didn't understand him, but I told my wife that I must know more about him. Later, at a retreat, I picked up *True Spirituality*. This decoded Schaeffer's ideas for me.

Schaeffer showed me how to use my gift redemptively. [I saw that what] the apostle James said about the tongue and fire applied to me. One result is that I try to stick to issues and not to cut people down.

I went to L'Abri, where I remember having a lunch with Schaeffer. There was a knock on the door. Billy Graham was there; he was staying at a chalet up the road. He asked to join us for lunch. Schaeffer didn't treat him any differently than he did the music librarian from Chicago who was there. I will never forget that. Schaeffer also showed me how to integrate my faith and life. I hadn't gotten the pieces of my life together yet.¹

II. Cal Thomas found that the pieces of one's life come together in Christ, and that when those pieces fit together within oneself, they also have more potential to fit together with other selves,

¹ Tony Carnes, "Conservative Like a Fox," *Christianitytoday.com* (7-08-04).

especially those who also belong to Christ. Thomas came finally to admit that he was a proud person—he compared himself with others hoping to come out ahead. Christ began to change that.

III. We begin to get our human relationships right when we bring our lives more and more under the mercy of God in Christ Jesus. Peter helps us see what shape life will take when you bring it under the mercy of God.

Take a closer look at 1 Peter 3:8-12.

I. GETTING OUR RELATIONSHIPS RIGHT COMES FROM TAKING INITIATIVE. 1 Peter 3:8

1. As Christians, we should initiate *harmony*. This is the challenge of being “one-minded.” This doesn’t mean that we think exactly alike on all subjects. It *does* mean that we agree on the spirit and purpose of the Christian life and the community of faith. We should at least be singing in harmony with one another, even if we sing slightly different notes.

A—Let’s test ourselves: Are our Christian relationships characterized by harmony or discord?

I—The late Charles Colson initiated a process in the 1990s for which he took a lot of fire from friend and foe alike. He invited several evangelical and Catholic leaders to come together for serious discussion. The subject was not politics—it was not a grass roots caucus meeting. The subject was not simply the morality of our present culture, though that entered the discussion at some point. The subject was *salvation*. The leading question could have been stated like this: What are the true terms of human salvation? Colson had some skin in the game, as he was married to a practicing Catholic Christian.

On this side of the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century AD, there has been a great divide between Catholic and evangelical understandings. This group of Christian leaders met and drafted a document entitled *Evangelicals and Catholics Together* (ECT). It was first published in 1994. Books and articles abounded afterward, critiquing it positively and negatively. I read more than one of these critiques. The participants in ECT were not acting in an official capacity, nor was this a Great Council of Church Leaders. From subsequent meetings of these imminent thinkers and leaders, a second document entitled “The Gift of Salvation,” appeared in December of 1997, which addressed many of the concerns voiced since the first publication.

“So what?” we might ask? They did not heal the divide between Catholics and Evangelicals, did they? So, what was the point? Here is the issue: According to Peter, Jesus’ followers are to be “like-minded,” or “one-minded.” Does this not mean that we should believe the same things on the essentials of the Christian faith? Yes! It does.

God has called us to guard the unity of the faith. Jesus prayed that we would be *one*, and in the very same prayer, He prayed that we would be sanctified in the *truth* (See John 17). We should pray for the same, for a *unity of love and truth* among Jesus’ followers. Perhaps we don’t see how in the world this could happen, but we should pray for it, anyway.

2. We should initiate *sympathy*. Here is a calling to *feel the pain* of our brothers and sisters in Christ, to “suffer with” them, as this word suggests.

A—How are we affected when we hear that a Christian brother or sister is going through hardship? Does it affect our thoughts, feelings, or actions? It should.

I—Several years ago now, I read about a feud on Twitter (now X). This online fight happened in 2019 between a Trump supporter named Michael Beatty and a veteran comedian named Patton Oswalt. Oswalt made a snarky comment (par on Twitter/X) about President Trump. Beatty replied with accusations and insults. “Out of curiosity, Oswalt began scrolling through Beatty’s Twitter timeline. What he found took him by surprise, which prompted Oswalt to tweet the following admission:

Aw, man. This dude just attacked me on Twitter and I joked back but then I looked at his timeline and he’s in a LOT of trouble health-wise ... He’s been dealt some [terrible] cards—let’s deal him some good ones. Click and donate—just like I’m about to.

His followers began to click and donate, raising a multiple of the \$5,000 the GoFundMe page requested. In response, Beatty wrote this:

You have humbled me to the point where I can barely compose my words. You have caused me to take pause and reflect on how harmful words from my mouth could result in such an outpouring.

This is the power of *sympathy*—feeling the pain of someone else. Some people in our present world seem incapable of this right now. For instance, it is alarming to have seen the number of vicious comments that have been made on social media and in broadcast media again Erika Kirk, whose husband Charlie was murdered at a rally at a university in Utah. Rather than expressing sympathy, some have called for her murder, also. We rightly question the moral foundation of such people. We pray that God might give them a change of heart, leading to repentance and faith.

3. *We should initiate brotherly love.* Φιλιάδελφοι (*philadelphoi*) is the Greek word here, akin to that from which the city of Philadelphia gets its name. It is “family-love,” a friendship that is more than friendship. It is the commitment of ongoing relationship.

A—Remember, our Christian relationships are the only permanent human relationships we have. How are we expressing this permanence and the commitment to each other that it should evoke?

I—Surely Christian marriage should express this commitment significantly. Billy Graham wrote about his marriage in his autobiography called *Just As I Am*. He described his over-five-decade relationship with his wife Ruth in these words: “We are happily incompatible.” So many marriages end today under the justification of “irreconcilable differences.” Differences do not have to become irreconcilable. As Christians, we are taught to view our differences as strengths, as opportunities to express *together with each other* more fully what it means to be the Body of Christ.

4. *We should initiate compassion.* The vivid word-picture behind this word is “with healthy intestines.” The ancients thought that your feelings came from somewhere down there, “gut-level” ... literally. The expression “tender-hearted” would strike close in modern speech. This refers not only to actions, but also emotions.

A—How are we affected by the circumstances of our brothers and sisters in Christ? Are we able to “rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep” (See Romans 12:15)?

I—We must never forget the confession of Pastor Martin Niemoller of Germany, made after he survived the Nazi terror. “In Germany they came first for the communists, and I didn’t speak up because I wasn’t a communist. Then they came for the Jews and I didn’t speak up, because I wasn’t a Jew. Then they came for the trade unionists and I didn’t speak up

because I wasn't a trade unionist. Then they came for me and by that time no one was left to speak." Pastor Martin confessed a lack of *compassion*. Compassion causes you to feel for the people and then act on their behalf.

5. We should express *humility*. This is a comparative term. Its opposite is *pride*. When you compare yourself with someone else and you come out better, that is pride. When you compare yourself with someone else and you come out lower, that is humility. The real question is, "With whom are we comparing ourselves?" If it is with each other, we are always going to either feel inferior or superior. If we compare ourselves with Christ, we will always come out inferior, and the result will be a greater appreciation of the grace of God.

Paul urges, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in *humility* [same word group as here] consider others better than yourselves" (Philippians 2:3, NIV).

A—Are we willing to build others up, to consider their needs and interests above our own?

I—It seems that some people capture this spirit and practice in a way that others don't. The greatest international loss in 1997 was not Princess Diana of Great Britain. It was Teresa of Calcutta, India, the Catholic sister who simply and with determination served the needs of the poor.

"In 1969 Malcolm Muggeridge, a British journalist and the editor of *Punch*, a satirical magazine, went to Calcutta to make a documentary movie about Mother Teresa for the BBC. She didn't want to do it, but church leaders finally persuaded her. When she finally agreed, she said, '*Let us do something beautiful for God.*'"

"When they began filming, a strange thing happened. Even though there was not enough light in the hospice for filming, the finished film was bathed in a particularly beautiful soft light. Muggeridge figured it was the halo of love he sensed there. Later, he wrote a book about Mother Teresa and used that phrase, *Something Beautiful for God*, as the title. He eventually became a Christian as a result of that relationship."²

What pride repels, humility embraces. Pride can never yield lingering joy; only humility can.

II. GETTING OUR RELATIONSHIPS RIGHT COMES FROM NOT TAKING REVENGE. 1 Peter 3:9

1. *Peter calls us to conquer the desire to pay back.* This is a universal response to being hurt, whether physically or emotionally. We want those who have hurt us to feel the same sting of psychological or even physical pain that we have felt, to shrink back with wounds like those we accuse them of dealing out to us. We want "an eye for an eye," and we want to be the ones who exact the price of justice.

2. *Instead of a spirit of revenge, he calls us to take initiative to bless even those who have mistreated us.* To "repay evil with evil or insult with insult" is human. To repay good with evil is diabolical. But to repay evil and insult with blessing is Christlike.

A—Are we allowing the power of the Spirit of Jesus to conquer desires for revenge against those who have hurt us?

² From the editors of PreachingToday.com, <https://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2010/october/2102510.html>. See Malcolm Muggeridge, *Something Beautiful for God* (HarperOne, 2003, 1971).

I—Here again enters the example of Jesus. See 1 Peter 2:21-25. If Jesus had not offered His back to those who persecuted Him, if He had not suffered, the righteous for the unrighteous, we could not be saved! Let that resonate in the mind for a few moments.

III. GETTING OUR RELATIONSHIPS RIGHT COMES FROM PRACTICING ESSENTIAL ETHICS. 3:10-12

The powerful quotation in vv. 10-12 is from Psalm 34:12-16. This is the Scriptural basis of what Peter urges us to do in vv. 8-9. The psalm-writer asks who would like to “love life and see good days.” There are at least three moral imperatives in the text that answer the question.

1. *Speak the truth.* Speaking evil and speaking to deceive will rob the speaker and the hearers of joy. Only the truth, spoken in love, can ultimately lead to life and joy.

A—Can our word be trusted?

I—I remember when we went before the city Planning Commission the first time to petition for a business license for Jeannie’s art studio. She was preparing to offer oil painting classes, and we wanted to do things right. The response of the Commission was interesting. There were a few things that they were required by city ordinance to require of us: parking space, fire extinguisher, signing restrictions. At one point in the proceedings, one of the members made an admission. He said to the effect, “You know, we don’t want you to feel penalized for being honest. So many people just do their business without ever requesting the required license.” He was almost apologizing for having to enforce restrictions that so many avoid by simply ignoring the legal process altogether. “Live not by lies,” was the refrain of Alexander Solzhenitsyn, survivor of the GULAG prison system of the atheist-communist experiment in the Soviet Union. It should be the refrain of every follower of Jesus.

2. *“Turn from evil and do good.”* What direction are our lives going? Are they moving in the direction of that which is morally good and in keeping with the character of God as He has revealed it in Jesus Christ?

A—We can never be truly happy living a selfish life. A selfish life is an evil life, strangled by the oppression of self-will.

I—Fred Bueckner, a Presbyterian novelist and inspirational writer, wrote, “Of the Seven Deadly Sins, anger is possibly the most fun. To lick your wounds, to smack your lips over grievances long past, to roll over your tongue the prospect of bitter confrontations still to come, to savor to the last toothsome morsel both the pain you are given and the pain you are giving back—in many ways it is a feast fit for a king. The chief drawback is that what you are wolfing down is yourself. The skeleton at the feast is you.”³

3. *“Seek peace.”* This peace is the Hebrew idea of *shalom* (Psalm 34:14). We are to seek and pursue “*completeness, soundness, health, wholeness, contentment, tranquility, prosperity,*” as the Hebrew lexicons define this term. Here is the opposite of a spirit of vengeance. Peter urges us to “pursue” peace, to chase after it as the miner chases the vein of pure gold, to run after it like the Olympic competitor pursues the Gold Medal, to go for it like the

³ Frederick Buechner, *Wishful Thinking: A Theological ABC* (Harper & Row, 1973).

honest business person pursues a profit on the monthly accounts. Do anything but be casual about it. Don't just take or leave peace. We must make *shalom* our goal.

A—Are we known as peacemakers and therefore as children of God?

Jesus pronounced the blessing on this kind of person: “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God” (Matthew 5:9, NIV). This does not imply that there is peace already. He did not say “Blessed are the peace-keepers,” but rather, “Blessed are the peace-makers.” This assumes that there will be an absence of peace in human relationships, and that our goal and aim should be to bring it about.

4. *Pray earnestly.* Verse twelve brings the whole thing together. God watches out for the good of those who do good. He watches those who do evil alright, but with a face of justice, not mercy. And He stoops to listen to the earnest prayers of those in whose lives His Holy Spirit is free to work.

A—Are we known as people of prayer, or as slanderers and complainers?

I—The challenge of Peter's quotation of this passage is this: what is the habit pattern of our lives? Does it reflect the powerful and transforming presence of Christ? Lamar Wadsworth used to write for *Proclaim* magazine. One time, he described a relationship he had with Rev. Prince Moore, an elderly black pastor who was his friend, mentor, and prayer partner during the seven years he lived in Dalton, Georgia. He told how he was intrigued by the “deep, genuine, unpretentious spirituality” of the man. So, one day he probed for the secret of his prayer life. He told him of the frustration he felt at times when he did not feel like praying, times when he struggled to keep his mind from wandering. Rev. Moore told him, “I don't always feel like praying, but the Lord is here just the same, and it would be rude not to speak with Him.”⁴

Take it home (applications). **Reread 1 Peter 3:8-12.**

I. What element(s) of this word of encouragement do we need to take to heart the most right now? What are we going to do about it?

I. The Christian ethic is different from the ethic of this temporary world. Have we found the power of such a distinct lifestyle?

II. That power comes from a vital relationship with Christ. This kind of life can only be lived as His Spirit works within us and brings about the fruit of a godly attitude and godly actions.

⁴ *Proclaim*, Spring 1998, p. 23.