

Script: Pastor Frank R. Johnson

# First Peter: Truth and Hope for Sojourners

## “The Lifestyles of Sojourners”

### 1 Peter 2:11-12

Take a first look.

I. “LIFESTYLES OF THE RICH AND FAMOUS” was a popular TV show from 1984-1995. Robin Leach surveyed and interviewed people who qualified as “rich and famous.” I think I watched one full episode and bits of a couple more. There seemed to be at least a couple of things in common between all the rich and famous who were interviewed (I obviously jump to conclusions based on limited evidence here). They spent a lot of money on themselves, and they bought a lot of luxury.

II. WHAT WOULD IT BE LIKE IF SOMEONE DID A VIDEO SERIES ENTITLED “LIFESTYLES OF THE GODLY AND UNKNOWN”? What kinds of things would be found in common between those in whose lives the Holy Spirit was powerfully at work? What kinds of values and priorities would such lives reflect? What would they buy? How would they be found to live? Would anyone watch it? (Probably not).

III. In a couple of short verses, Peter summarizes the lifestyle called for by a vital relationship with God through Jesus Christ. We need to hear again his word of challenge.

Take a closer look at 1 Peter 2:11-12.

#### **I. AS SOJOURNERS ON EARTH, OUR LIFESTYLES SHOULD REFLECT OUR TRUE SELF-IMAGE.**

Don't miss what I am mean by “self-image.” I am not speaking solely about a sense of self-worth. I am speaking about cultivating *an essential image of ourselves* that is based on how God sees us. What kind of *selves* are we in this limited corner of the cosmos, not according to our own very limited viewpoint, but according to God's?

*Peter reviews the essential outlook promoted in this entire letter in these two verses, setting up his teaching about our relationships while in this present temporary world.*

1. We see ourselves as *aliens*, not ultimately belonging to this world. This word “aliens” emphasizes this idea. As *aliens*, we don't fully belong here. We can never call this our final home. We ultimately belong somewhere else.

A—As sojourners, we must not make ourselves quite fully at home—not yet. Here are two ways of thinking about this:

**I—Firstly, we can say that we are here on a *diplomatic mission* from the kingdom of heaven. We are, as Paul put it, “ambassadors for Christ” (see 2 Corinthians 5:20). We represent Our Lord and Savior in this temporary land. We may find ourselves quite able to get around, carry on business, learn and grow in the land, but this is not our true home.**

**I—Secondly, we can say that we are here on a *work visa*. We must respect the law of the land, but we answer to a higher law, laid down by the Legislator of the Universe.**

We must respect the laws of the land of our temporary citizenship, but we must not mistake them for the laws of heaven. When there is a conflict between these laws, the Higher Laws always take precedence.

**Paul makes this clear in Philippians 3:20 (FJV): “For our citizenship exists in heaven, from where also we keep on awaiting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.”**

**I—So we should expect a contrast between the lifestyles of the temporary citizens of earth and those whose citizenship is in heaven.** Consider this report a few years ago from Jennie Garcia, IMB (SBC)<sup>1</sup> missionary in Thailand. She tells about an older woman named Granny who came to faith in Christ as an older person.

“Our first glimpse of Granny was when, in her 80’s, she arrived at church on the back of a motorcycle. Her children, with whom she lived, discouraged her association with Christians, so she came on her own.... When her daughter was transferred, Granny moved too.

“Recently we heard that she died. She spent her last year bedridden, but she still made her wishes known: foremost she did not want her body taken to the Buddhist temple to be cremated. Nevertheless, since Buddhists always cremate, no sooner was her body cold than her family had it at the temple.

“When it came time to throw the switch on the electronic funeral pyre, the system shorted out. The temple called in an electrician to repair the thing. He fiddled and pronounced it well. They threw the switch again and Boom! There was an explosion that caught the decorations on fire, but not Granny.

“By this point, everyone agreed that Granny’s God was not to be trifled with and that Granny needed to be buried. Friends and neighbors took up a collection to buy a burial plot.” And then Garcia adapts a quote from Hebrews 11:4: “‘And by faith (s)he still speaks, even though (s)he is dead’ (Heb. 11:4).”<sup>2</sup>

This story really is not an argument about the ethics of cremation versus embalming. That must be discussed on other grounds. However, we should agree that to have one’s body cremated in a Buddhist temple is quite a different thing than being cremated at the local funeral home. Such an act would be a tacit, if not an outright, statement of approval of the worldview of Buddhism. As a Christian, this is not possible. In life and in death, resident *aliens* are called to be different, to align with our true citizenship in the Kingdom of Heaven. This should be reflected in the principles by which we live—and die!

2. We see ourselves as strangers, only here for a temporary stay. This word “strangers,” which could be translated *sojourners*, emphasizes the temporary nature of our visit here.

A—Again, since this is not a permanent resting place, we must not make ourselves completely at home just yet.

**I—Years ago, Andre Kole, the talented illusionist who had traveled all over the world as a representative of a Christian youth organization, came to Ellensburg to perform. He has written about the death of his wife Aljeana.** She had an incurable brain tumor, and for two years she endured incredible suffering. She gradually lost the use of her arms and legs and couldn’t move her head or body. She became totally blind. Day after day she could do nothing but lie helplessly in bed. Kole wrote, “While Aljeana was still able to do some speaking, she always shared a poem that ended with these lines: ‘We should not long for heaven, if earth held only joy.’”

<sup>1</sup> IMB = International Mission Board; SBC = Southern Baptist Convention.

<sup>2</sup> from *Commission*, March 1998, p. 28c.

How could she have such a hope? Because she knew this place, the earth as we now know it, was only a stopover. Once the plane landed and the boarding call was heard, she was out of here forever to her true home in heaven to await the Resurrection.

## II. AS SOJOURNERS ON EARTH, OUR LIFESTYLES SHOULD REFLECT SELF-CONTROL.

1. *Abstaining from sinful desires is not only possible, but necessary.* Here is an axiom that we must affirm: *God never commands what He does not enable.* Let's turn that around: *God only commands what He empowers.* He calls us to live a holy life; He empowers us by the Holy Spirit to do it.

A—We can conquer, with God's help, temptations to ungodly sexual involvement.

**I—Sexual desire is not sinful in itself, but it becomes so when people give in to fantasies about sexual experience with those they are not committed to in the lifetime covenant of marriage between one man and one woman.**

Some years ago, Jeannie and I watched a nighttime news magazine (*Was it Dateline NBC?*). The story was about a young woman who had a child out of wedlock. What made the story interesting to the broadcast journalists was this: No one knew that she was pregnant until the time came for her to deliver the child. And, while she was secretly pregnant, she was teaching a peer-class on the virtues of sexual abstinence prior to marriage. She was asked the expected question: "If you knew you were pregnant, how could you stand before your peers and present your abstinence message?"

Her answer was clear and concise (I paraphrase): "I now know better than I did before how important that message is. I know firsthand why it is the best choice."

Unfortunately, the message of Planned Parenthood and many other sex-ed classes is just the opposite. They say, "Saving sex for marriage *may* be OK, but no one can really expect you to hold out that long. So we offer you instead The Great Rubber Hope" (in the semi-sarcastic words of the late theologian Thomas Oden). Remember, my friends, that there is no prophylactic for the soul. There is no way to keep a piece of one's heart from going with one's body in sexual intimacy.<sup>3</sup>

**I—The same thing is true about other "fleshly desires" that confront us and threaten our holiness.** In our time and place, we can easily be overcome with a spirit of greed. Every television commercial and every advertisement in a magazine or on a billboard suggests, if it doesn't outright claim, that our happiness depends on buying the product that is advertised. We will never be happy without driving the latest SUV from the company rated the highest on luxury or safety or consumer satisfaction. Women can never be their feminine best without wearing Victoria's Secret (although, judging from ads that I have unfortunately seen, there isn't much that is left "secret"). Children can never have happy lives growing up in America without the newest video game. These are all lies, of course, but legal lies, "legal fictions," with which we allow ourselves to be badgered constantly. I am regularly amazed at what children find to amuse themselves. The brand new \$200 toys sit idle in the corner of the closet while the children play outside with sticks and cardboard boxes (those in which the expensive toys were packed). Do we really expect things even more temporary than our present passing world to bring us true happiness? If we do, we are losing the war against "fleshly desires."

---

<sup>3</sup> I refer the reader of my script to Meriam's Grossman's book, *Unprotected: A Campus Psychiatrist Reveals How Political Correctness in Her Profession Endangers Every Student* (New York, Sentinel Books, 2007), especially chapter one, "Unprotected," pp. 6-9.

2. *Abstaining from sinful desires will be a struggle.* The analogy Peter uses is that of *war*. It is a “war against your souls,” an inner battle to do the right thing. Putting powerful desires in their right places and times is a battle.

A—Some habits are hard to break, but there is help from God, and the fight is worth it!

**I—So here is the combat analogy: Our army is facing stiff opposition from a determined force of the enemy.** The general stands up and announces, “Troops, this is going to prove to be nothing but blood, sweat, tears, and toil. Since it is going to be so hard, I suggest that we just quit and give up. Maybe we can all get O.K. jobs cleaning toilets and crushing rocks with hammers, once the enemy marches in. We couldn’t possibly win, anyway.”

What would that do for the morale of the troops? Kill it.

There is little difference when a so-called expert stands up at the front of the school health class and says, “Keeping yourself from sexual involvement before marriage is not such a bad idea, but no one really expects you to remain sexually chaste—abstinent!?!—until you get married.” And then she stands as the students leave and hands each of them a packet of condoms and the phone number for the local Planned Parenthood office.

It is no help if after the Alcoholics Anonymous meeting, the place where the meeting is held opens the bar and the person leading the meeting offers free drinks to the AA members in attendance. “Being sober is just fine,” he says, “but no one expects a true alcoholic to go without a stiff drink.”

Or says the warden to the prisoner who is just being released from a five-year term for robbery: “Fast Eddie, I realize that a straight and honest life is best for everyone, but I’m sure that isn’t possible for you. I will keep your cell open until you get back. See you in about six months!”

OK, so it’s hard to overcome sexual indulgence or alcohol addiction or a life of crime. We might say it’s impossible—*apart from the grace of God in Jesus Christ*. He alone can change our hearts and give us power from the inside to live a new life. Then He builds us into the Temple of Christ, the Church, where we give and receive encouragement to live that new holy life to its fullest.

We may feel outgunned by the world, the flesh, and the devil, but we are not. We do, however, need each other. We need most of all the Holy Spirit of God.

### **III. AS SOJOURNERS ON EARTH, OUR LIFESTYLES MUST REFLECT MORE THAN SELF; THEY MUST REFLECT THE PRESENCE OF GOD.**

1. *As Christians, we are called to practice essential goodness.* What is it that makes us good? It is not just the absence of bad qualities. That creates a sterile vacuum that cannot last. Something must fill the void in our lives. It will be either good or bad, but it will be something.

What we need is the presence of *the Holy Spirit who produces goodness* working in our hearts.

A—Our lives must be full of goodness, not just empty of badness. A life of mere “don’ts” is an empty and sterile life which does not please God any more than a life filled with evil.

**I—You remember the comparison Jesus made about the man possessed by an evil spirit who gets free from that spirit for a time?** Here is how He told it, hoping to issue a wake up call to that generation: <sup>NIV</sup> **Matthew 12:43-45:** “*When an evil spirit comes out of a man, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. <sup>44</sup> Then it says, ‘I will return to the house I left.’ When it arrives, it finds the house unoccupied, swept clean and put in order. <sup>45</sup> Then it goes*

*and takes with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that man is worse than the first. That is how it will be with this wicked generation.”*

Jesus confronted the religious people of His time with their emptiness. They were not full of evil, but they were not full of goodness either. This is the problem with Christians who *merely abstain* from evil actions but do not allow the Holy Spirit to *fill their lives with good* actions. It is not enough to avoid sexual sin, pornography, greediness, and hatred. We must pursue righteous and healthy relationships based on self-giving love. We should actively place our values on what really lasts and what really counts for eternity. These are the important replacements for that from which we are abstaining.

2. *As Christians, we are called to rise above slander.* The greatest way to do that is to prove their slander wrong. Paul says that we can expect the people of the world, who are outside of God’s saving grace in Christ, to have something evil to say about Jesus’ people. How are we going to prove them wrong? By the way we live, by the choices we make, by the attitudes we adopt. How will others know we are not evildoers? They will see the good attitudes and actions of our lives, as well as the humble repentance of our hearts, and they will become ashamed (at least in The End).

A—What Peter is calling us to is the cultivation of godly *character*. We can’t always control our *reputation*—what others think or say about us—but we can always control our *character*.

**I—What really matters is not our status as a human among humans, but rather our status as a child of God.** “William Carey was the great missionary pioneer to India. When he was on his deathbed, he was visited by a young man named Alexander Duff who greatly admired the famous missionary. After a long visit, Carey asked Duff to pray with him. Following the prayer, when Duff turned to leave, he heard Carey’s feeble voice calling him back.

“Mr. Duff,’ said Carey, ‘you have been speaking about ‘Dr. Carey, Dr. Carey.’ When I am gone, say nothing about Dr. Carey. Speak about Dr. Carey’s Savior.’”<sup>4</sup>

3. *As Christians, we are called to point to God by how we live.* Peter says that when even those who speak evil against us see our true character and the *works* that come from that true character, they will glorify God in the End. He is the One Who empowers us to live above slander. He is the One Who is truly good. When His Spirit courses through us as the sap courses through the tree, the fruit that comes forth is goodness (see Galatians 5:22-23).

A—Are we allowing God’s Spirit to transform our inner selves to make us fit as citizens of heaven? What will our vision throughout eternity be?

**I—Steve Saint told a story of transformation in an article in *Christianity Today* magazine back in 1998. Steve is the son of Nate Saint, one of the missionaries who were killed in the jungles of Ecuador in 1956.**

Steve described a secular tour group that came to Ecuador, in which were thirty-four students from the University of Washington and Western Washington University. The students were visiting a Huaorani camp. [the Huaorani were called “Auca,” *savage*, by Ecuadorians]. The group traveled by canoe and a fourteen-hour trek on a jungle trail, led by three Huaorani guides, to reach the camp. One of the students asked where the “savage Huaorani” were that he had

---

<sup>4</sup> Lee Eclov, Vernon Hills, Illinois; source: F. W. Boreham, “William Carey’s Life Text,” *Wholesomewords.org*.

read about. Steve explained that the very people they had been traveling, eating, sleeping, and hunting with were, in fact, these “savages.”

At Steve’s prompting, the students asked the tribal people where their fathers were. Each in turn told a story that ended with “Having been speared, he died.” One woman pointed to an old man in the circle and said, “He killed my father and almost all of the rest of my family, too. Living angry, he speared them all.” That shook the group up a little.

He reported, “Our visitors looked genuinely stunned.” Finally, the question came, “What changed these people?” the answer was given by the Hourani tribal members. They described how they all had lived as each wanted. They threw babies away when they weren’t convenient to care for. People begged to be buried alive “so their spirits wouldn’t wander without solace when freed from their decomposing and unburied bodies.” And much more.

Then, they explained to these “highly educated young people ... that the Man Maker sent his son to die for people full of hate, fear, and desire for revenge. “Badly, badly we lived back then,’ [one of them] said. ‘Now, walking God’s trail which he has marked for us on paper [the Bible], we live well. All people still die, but if living you follow God’s trail, then dying will lead you to heaven. But only one trail leads there. All other trails lead to where God will never be after death.’” Then, she put the question to the group: “Have you heard me well? Which one of you wants to follow God’s trail, living well?” Finally, after a dramatic pause, one lone hand went up among the group.

The woman speaking clapped her hands and said, “Now I see you well... Leaving, we will still see each other in God’s place some day.’ Then she looked around at the others. ‘Dying, I will never see you again if you don’t follow God’s trail. Think well on what I have spoken, so that dying, we will live happily together in heaven.’”<sup>5</sup>

Take it home (applications).

I. Do we have the power of a changed life? Have we come to God through faith in Jesus Christ to allow Him to make us new from the inside out?

II. What does it take? Simply, *get off the wrong trail and get on the right one.*

1. *Repentance*: we must admit we have sinned and turn away from our sin.

2. *Faith*: we must believe in Jesus Christ, His death and resurrection, and receive Him into our lives as Lord and Savior.

3. *Obedience*: we must trust and follow Him by the power of the Holy Spirit.

---

<sup>5</sup> “Stephen E. Saint, “The Unfinished Mission to the Aucas,” *Christianity Today* (March 2, 1998, pp. 42-45.