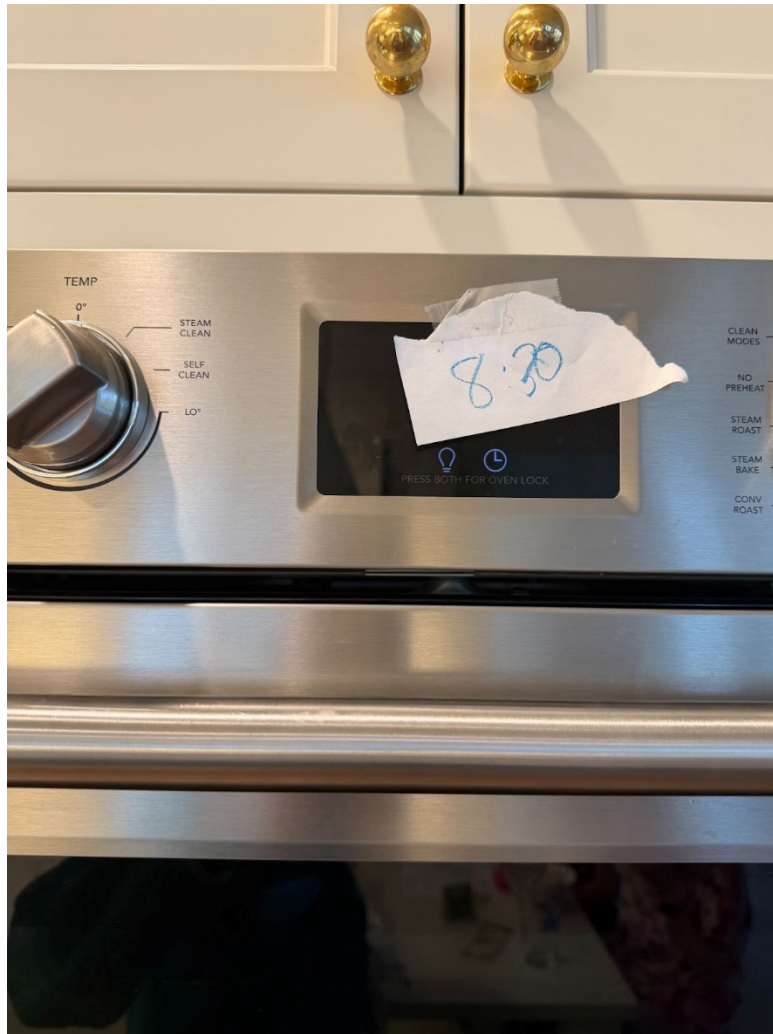


1 Peter
4:1-11 Building a Resilient Faith in a Hostile World

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Last week my sister-in-law, a home-school mom, sent our family a text describing her morning to us. Every morning at exactly 9:00, she starts school for her three elementary-aged children. When it was about time to begin that morning, she looked at the clock and found this.



When it comes to living the faithful Christian life, we don't want to be hitting the snooze button! We want to be ready for action. That's what our passage is about today. If you have your Bible, open with me to 1 Peter 4. This passage is all about how we can have the mindset of Jesus and build a resilient faith in a hostile world.

Arm Yourself

The first step, Peter tells us in 1 Peter 4:1-2, is to *arm yourself*. "Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because whoever suffers in the body is

done with sin. As a result, they do not live the rest of their earthly lives for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God.”

Peter begins this chapter by reminding us that Christ suffered in his body. He wants us to think about and recall all the suffering and hardship Jesus faced. He was

- Rejected by his family,
- Undermined by leaders,
- Betrayed by a friend,
- Abandoned in crisis,
- Mocked in court,
- Beaten by soldiers, and
- Crucified as a criminal.

In other words, this is what Jesus endured. He suffered relationally, socially, culturally, verbally, physically, and spiritually. Peter says we must remember this, we must think about this, and we must realize what it means for us! If you are following Jesus and his life included hardship and suffering, guess what that means? Expect hardship and suffering in this life! Following Jesus is not life on cruise-control. It’s not non-stop promotions, endless open-doors, and zero opposition. That’s not biblical Christianity! Jesus suffered in his body and Peter says, “Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude.”

The word Peter uses that is translated “arm yourselves” is the Greek word that was used to describe infantry soldiers putting on full military gear: shield, helmet, sword, breastplate—dressed from head to toe and prepared for battle. It is a picture of a soldier fully prepared for intense, aggressive, up-close-and-personal combat. Peter says this needs to be your attitude when you think about Christ. You don’t put on armor for a picnic; you put on armor for a battle.



Sometimes when we picture what we want following Jesus to look like we picture an idyllic beach vacation, but God calls us to this [view online sermon to see photo]. Sometimes when we picture what we want following Jesus to look like we picture a mansion with luxury cars, but God calls us to this [view online sermon to see photo]. Sometimes when we picture what we want following Jesus to look like we picture a day at a spa being pampered, but God calls us to this [view online sermon to see photo]. That must be our mentality and attitude! Most of us don't wake up wanting to be soldiers; we want to be comfortable! But our faith isn't a hobby we fit in when the weather is nice; it's a helmet we put on because there is shrapnel in the air! Think about the US soldiers deployed in the Middle East right now, with the escalated conflict with Iran. Think about the shift in mindset from a few months ago during peacetime to last week during wartime! A change of mindset changes how you operate.

Two years ago, Curt Cignetti became the head football coach at Indiana University. In two years, he took one of the worst teams in the country to one of the greatest seasons in history. He was asked repeatedly how he made this change in two years: "When you take over a program, the number one thing you got to do is change the way people think." New mindset, new results. Peter says if we want to build a resilient faith, the first step isn't to try to change our behavior; it's to arm ourselves with a new attitude and expectations. It's to change the way we think!

Separate Yourself

Peter says the second step to building a resilient faith in a hostile world is to separate yourself. He tells us to put serious distance between our present way of life as a Christ-follower and our former way of life before we knew Jesus.

As a result, they do not live the rest of their earthly lives for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God. For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do—living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry. They are surprised that you do not join them in their reckless, wild living, and they heap abuse on you. But they will have to give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. For this is the reason the gospel was preached even to those who are now dead, so that they might be judged according to human standards in regard to the body, but live according to God in regard to the spirit. (1 Peter 4:2-6)

Peter is speaking practically in these verses about how Christians can distance themselves from their pre-Christian lifestyle. Remember, these people weren't brought up in the church. They were living lives 100% for themselves and their own pleasure, and then they heard about Jesus and made a change. When it came time to confess their sins, it wasn't the sanitized version of sin you get at the Christian homeschooler convention: "I gave in and let my kids watch thirty minutes of non-educational screen time." "In a moment of weakness, I bought my kids white bread at the store. It was non-organic!" The people Peter was talking to, like a lot of us, were real sinners. They were "living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry." But that was before Christ, before they knew any better, and Peter says, "You have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do." No former felon looks back and says, "I sure am glad I spent all that time in prison, I wish I could go back!" No recovered addict says, "All that time on crack was so rewarding. I wish I could go back." Once you've found freedom, you never want to

go back. Peter says that's the approach we should all have with our foolish past decisions. Make a clean break!

I want to personalize this with a targeted question, no matter what your past may look like: what are the greatest ways you have wasted your time?

- **Any and all sin**—Nothing profitable ever comes from sin, only pain and regret. Tim Keller says you don't commit sin, sin commits you.
- **Social media scrolling**—I don't know about you, but I've had nights where I look at the clock and think, "How is it already 11:45!" Then I realize I just spent an hour and a half watching people power wash their driveways on Facebook.
- **Binge-watching shows**—"Just one episode" turns into five episodes and you've lost half your day!
- **Online debates**—People are online screaming in all caps but never once change anyone else's mind.
- **Obsession with gaming**—Some people live in a fantasy world rather than the real world.
- **Obsession with sports**—Some people know more about their fantasy football team than their spouse.
- **Obsession with news**—The news cycle is intended to hook you. People watch three hours of news a day when they could have gotten it all in three minutes. News outlets catastrophize something every single day to hook your attention and financially profit from your focus.

These aren't simply bad habits; they are expensive distractions! How many of you have been on your computer, looked up, and realized you have forty tabs open? Sure, you are looking at one, but all the others are on in the background, draining your battery, slowing down the processor, and making everything lag. Many of us are trying to live for God while keeping the 'tabs' of our old life. Peter is telling us to close out those other apps. You need all your processing power focused on the will of God.

Give Yourself

We don't empty our lives just to create a vacuum; we separate ourselves to live a life of purpose! We build a resilient faith by arming ourselves, separating ourselves, and giving ourselves. Peter tells us the foundational building blocks we can use to construct a life that really honors God.

The end of all things is near. Therefore be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray. Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides. (1 Peter 4:7-11)

Everything in this section is built around two commands: give yourself to God in focused prayer and give yourself to others in loving service. We should strive for connection with God and compassion toward others!

Giving ourselves to God in focused prayer

Let's begin by talking about prayer. The battle for your heart and mind, the battle for your integrity, the battle for your marriage, the battle for your children and your family, the battle for the lost, the battle for our church, our community, and our culture is won or lost in prayer!

Think about the way Jesus engaged in prayer. Jesus

- Prayed to begin his ministry (Mark 1),
- Prayed to begin his day (Mark 1),
- Prayed when making major decisions (Luke 6),
- Prayed before serving people (Matthew 14),
- Prayed when needing rest (Mark 6),
- Prayed during important events (Luke 9),
- Prayed for his own needs (John 17),
- Prayed for the needs of his followers (John 17), and
- Prayed before and on the cross (Matthew 26-27).

In other words, Jesus knew that battle was won or lost in prayer. Jesus told his disciples to watch and pray so that they would not fall into temptation. When Jesus was praying in the Garden before his arrest, he told his disciples to pray, too. Every time he came to them, rather than praying, they had fallen asleep. Because they were sleeping rather than praying, when the hour of trial came, they ran away and hid rather than rising to the occasion. Peter tells us, “Be alert and of sober mind—so that we can pray!”

I have found this to be true in my life again and again and again. The days I feel closest to God are the days I center my mind and heart around prayer. The days I am the best leader at home, the most loving to Keren and my kids, are the days when I have devoted myself to prayer. On the days when I am the best friend, the best leader, the best pastor, the best preacher, the common denominator is always prayer. In every area of my life, the quality of my leadership never rises above the depth of my prayer life. Peter says the first thing we need to give ourselves to is prayer. And if you are looking for a time and place to do it, we are in a 21-day, 24/7 prayer time right now. This week, sign up for one hour. Commit to it today. Come to our prayer room or pray at home. Let's give ourselves to God in focused prayer! Prayer moves the hand the moves the world. But we must do more than just pray! When we stand up off our knees, God has assignments for us!

Giving ourselves to others in loving service

Our overarching orientation to others is love. Peter says, “Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.” The Greek word translated “deeply” means “at full stretch.” A good friend told me about a time someone she knew was in need. She responded by saying, “I’ll see if I can help you out a little bit.” She obviously wanted to be kind, but also wanted

to be guarded, measured, and self-protected. She said, “The moment I said, ‘I’ll see if I can help you out a little bit,’ I heard God whisper to me, ‘Joy, what if, when you were in need, I said, ‘I’ll see if I can help you out, a little bit’?”” God didn’t love us just a little bit, he loved us at full stretch, arms pulled as wide as they could and nailed to the cross. This is not love like a shallow pond but love as deep as the Mariana Trench. Because God loved us deeply, we love others deeply.

Love like that covers over a multitude of sins. Everyone you will ever interact with in life has flaws, weaknesses, and areas of sins. Love determines how you respond to those imperfections. You can put certain filters on your phone that will adjust the appearance of your face. You can find some filters that will exaggerate every imperfection—every wrinkle, every blemish, every asymmetrical feature is highlighted and blown out of proportion. There are also filters that cover over imperfections. One makes you look like Quasimodo while the other makes you look ready for your red-carpet debut. Which filter do you hope other people have turned on when they look at you? Do you hope they bring out the scrutinizing magnifying glass to call attention to and highlight every area of weakness, judging, condemning, and shaming? Or would you hope they would look at you through the lens of grace? I know how God in his infinite love has treated me. I know how I would like to be treated by others. So I know what I am called to do for others

One of my kids is struggling with a few things in his life right now. Keren and I have keyed in on a couple of areas that need work. As a dad, when I see those imperfections in my child, do I kick him out of the house? Do I shame him? Do I yell at him? Do I freeze him out emotionally and distance myself from him? No! Out of deep love, rather than pulling away, I draw closer in. That’s what love requires.

To wrap this section up, Peter says, if you are praying and loving others, if you are staying connected to God and caring for people, your life will be characterized by four specific behaviors:

- **Extending hospitality with joy.** God has called us to the mission of hospitality. “Hospitality” is from the same root as “hospital.” Showing hospitality means to love strangers, love foreigners, love people in need. When I was in college one of my mentors used to tell me that people are a lot like smoke alarms—when the batteries are low, they chirp. He meant if you have open eyes, open ears, and an open heart, you can easily discover if others are in need—Are they new to town and without friends. Are they in a new season of life, maybe newly married, new parents, or newly widowed? There are so many opportunities to have open eyes and open ears, to have an open heart and an open home, and joyfully serve others.
- **Sharing your God given gifts.** Peter says whatever gift you have received from God, you should share it with others because that’s why he gave it to you! God wants you to be a steward of your gifts and share them with others. If God gave you \$10,000,000 today, would you be strategizing all the ways you could spend it on yourself, or would you begin strategizing ways you could use it to bless others? Every gift you have in life was given to you so that you can share it with others!
- **Speaking Spirit-inspired words.** If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. That has unique relevance to preachers, but broad relevance to all

of us. When we speak to one another, do people hear God's truth? Are they reminded of their identity, their value, and their love? Are they encouraged, edified, and inspired? There are a few people in my life that, every time I am around them, I feel close to God, seen by God, loved by God, encouraged by God, counseled by God. Wouldn't we all want to have that sort of impact on others?

- **Serving in God's strength.** "If anyone serves, they should do it with the strength God provides!" Serving in your own strength is like riding a heavy bike up a steep hill. You're huffing and puffing and your legs are burning. You're going to quit halfway up. But serving in God's strength is like riding an E-bike. You're still pedaling, you're still doing the work, you're still engaged—but there is a "power assist" that kicks in the moment you start. You find yourself climbing hills you could never tackle on your own. When I get ready to preach every Sunday, the very first thing I do when I walk in the doors of this church is get down on my knees and say out loud, "God, no one needs to hear from me today; they need to hear from you. I freely acknowledge that I don't have what it takes to lead or preach or pastor this church. I am absolutely, 100%, completely dependent on you." We all need a perspective like that every day of our life, for every relationship, every assignment, every task. I want to serve with the strength God provides!

And all of this has one goal. Look at the last section of our passage: "So that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen" (1 Peter 4:11). This is our hope, this is our goal, this is our prize. This is not about building a good life. It's about building a life that makes much of God. Arm yourself, separate yourself, and give yourself, so that when people look at your life, they don't say, "What discipline!" They say "What a Savior."