

Resilient Hope // Grace and Growth

We're in the third week of our study through the book of 1 Peter where the apostle Peter is writing a letter to persecuted believers scattered throughout the Roman Empire. So far, Peter has emphasized that despite the intense suffering these persecuted Christians are facing, they have a "living hope" and an eternal inheritance through Jesus Christ.

And the reality for all of us who would hear this letter, whether you are a first century Christian being oppressed in the Roman Empire, or a follower of Christ navigating the complexities of living a life of genuine faith in 21st century America, the reality is that this world is not our home. Our hope is not in the security of our nation, or our world, or our finances, or anything we have in this life on earth. Our hope is in Christ and this hope is a resilient hope because it isn't just wishful thinking or blind optimism. It is a confident assurance that God has already raised Jesus from the dead and will continue to do what He has promised to do. He will rescue us from the fallen state of this world, redeem every broken part of our story, and bring us to our true home with Him if we're willing to trust Him. Because of who God is and what He has already done, we have hope in the waiting.

1 Peter 1:22-2:3, "Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; for

'All flesh is like grass
and all its glory like the flower of grass.

The grass withers,
and the flower falls,
but the word of the Lord remains forever.'

And this word is the good news that was preached to you.

So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander. Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation— if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good."

DNA is fascinating. If it's been a while since you were in your high school anatomy class, DNA stands for deoxy-ribonucleic acid. Just like you follow a recipe for making a meal, DNA is like a recipe book for your body. Just like a recipe that tells you how to bake a cake or prepare lasagna, DNA contains the instructions for making all the parts

of you—like your hair color, eye color, and even how tall you grow. Every living thing has DNA, and it helps all living things pass down traits from parents to their children

My son has my DNA. Physically, he possesses a part of my nature that has given him life and helps determine everything about him physically. This is a reality that every living thing experiences, and Peter, along many other authors in the Scriptures, use this physical reality to help us understand the spiritual reality that we are all living in.

All throughout chapter one, Peter has been talking to Christians who know Jesus and love Jesus. These people are literally on the run because in Rome they were being killed for their refusal to deny their faith in Jesus and their allegiance to Jesus Christ as their Lord and God. These people love Jesus, and for any of us who know and love Jesus, you know that life apart from Him is empty and futile. Life apart from Jesus can look cute, and feel good, and have all the pleasures of the moment, but at the end of the day, it can never satisfy. It cannot fulfill, or sustain, or hold the weight of what it means to be a human being.

And Peter, didn't just make this up on his own. Peter followed Jesus, he walked with Jesus, and lived with Jesus for three years, and is now full of God's Holy Spirit as he's writing this letter that says this life can never fulfill that eternal void in your soul because everything born in this life is perishable.

The DNA, the code written into the structure of this reality we are all living in, has been corrupted. There's a problem within the DNA of every living thing, and Peter says the problem is that it's fading. Just like we all have a physical DNA that we are born with, we all have a spiritual DNA written into the very fabric of our souls that we didn't have a choice over when we were born. You didn't choose to have brown eyes, or blonde hair, or a short stature. You inherited those things. In the same way, you didn't choose to inherit a perishable life. You didn't choose to be born sinful. You inherited it. It's just true

The reality is that when you are born into this world, your spiritual DNA is fading. It's all fading from perishable seed. Just like a large oak tree grows from a tiny acorn, or a human being comes from two tiny cells joining together, so everything in our lives spiritually begins from a point of perishable seed I can't help but wonder if when Peter was writing this letter, I wonder if he thought back on different things he heard Jesus say and saw Him do? I wonder if Peter, when he was writing this section we're studying today, remembers hearing about Jesus' meeting with Nicodemus.

John 3:1-6, "Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, 'Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with Him.' Jesus answered him, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.' Nicodemus said to Him, 'How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?' Jesus answered, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.'"

Nicodemus, the "teacher of Israel," had it all- knowledge, morality, wealth, influence. And Jesus essentially looks at this powerful man and says none of that matters. You're going to lose all of it. So often we think that it's our morality or our success that will get us into the Kingdom of heaven, that if I'm just a pretty good person, surely God will accept me. And Jesus says, look, you don't understand. The thing that gets you in or keeps you out isn't what you've done...it's who you are.

Whose DNA do you have? Whose kid are you? Are you a child of God? Or a child of something else? The perishable seed is the seed of sin that says *"I'm god. I get to decide right and wrong or what's good and what's evil. I get to decide happiness and success for myself."* Some of us have sinned so much in our lives that we're ashamed and feel behind. But Jesus says *no! It's not about your track record...You must be born again!* Some of us have led a good life and feel like we're ahead. No! You must be born again! Something I've learned is that every birth is different. Some are quick and easy; some are long and painful. Some are peaceful, some are scary, some are intense, some are beautiful. Babies all come into the world in different ways, but when they celebrate their first birthday, is one of them more or less born than the others? Of course not! The miracle of birth is not a game of comparison about how wild or pleasant the process was. It's the fact that there was once no life, and now there is, and it's a gift.

Imagine the people you know who love Jesus. Imagine if those people who are so strong in their faith were killed because they refused to be quiet about the Gospel. Imagine if you had to pack up and leave everything just to survive. You're heartbroken, angry, confused, displaced, and you get to a new church in a place where you're safe. And some of the people who escaped the suffering are there with you. As time goes by, people start to complain about the service, or they get upset about the way the music sounds, or they don't like the decisions that are being made by the leadership, or even though you went out of your way to love on them every

single week, they quit going to church because they didn't feel very loved. Suddenly, it would start to feel like all of that suffering you faced back in Rome wasn't really worth it and now everyone around you is just the worst. It'd be easy to get cynical, and jaded, and bitter toward all these people who are supposed to be your "brothers and sisters" in Christ.

1 Peter 1:22, "Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart..."

Eugene Peterson describes Peter's sentiment here by saying, "Love one another as if your very lives depended on it." 1 Peter is all about the fact that we can face suffering and be refined by it instead of destroyed by it. Tim Keller once said, "The same sun hardens the clay and melts the wax." It's not the suffering that ruins a person. It's the internal structure of the clay or the wax that determines what happens to each thing. Peter's point is that there's a way to process suffering that will actually soften you, not harden you. Peter has made the point clear so far that people with the internal structure of holiness...that holy DNA... that new birth Jesus spoke of... it will make them able to embrace difficult circumstances, and become better, and love others. He's not just saying these things to be cute. He's telling us what reality is like.

In the same way you inherit physical traits from your biological parents, so you can inherit a character of love and resilient hope from your heavenly Father. So far, Peter has said that suffering can make you better, but you've got to be holy to be able to become that kind of person. But who can possibly get there!? Who can possibly be holy as God is holy? It sounds nice, but it's impossible. Have you ever tried to be holy? I fail miserably when I try out of my own strength! But Peter tells us how we can become holy.

1 Peter 1:23-25, "...since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; for 'All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains forever.' And this word is the good news that was preached to you."

Peter says that if we want to experience life as we were really meant to live it, we must be born again. Without that, everything else is in vain. Nothing matters without that

reality. It's all grass. If my son isn't born, I cannot raise him. I cannot lead him, guide him, or enjoy him without his birth. In the same way, we must be born again into new life with our Heavenly Father! If you aren't born again of the Spirit, you cannot really live. You can't really know and enjoy God without being born again.

When we are born at the beginning of our lives with this perishable seed – “the flesh” as Jesus calls it– if we try to become like Jesus in our flesh without this new birth, we land in condemnation. The harder we try to become like Him, the more we realize we are utterly different than He is. Without new life, we are hopeless and dead, consistently falling short of the life we're called to and made for. But when you're born again, you begin to experience eternal life. This is Jesus' whole point in His conversation with Nicodemus. God doesn't want us to perish!

John 3:16-17, “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him.”

The Gospel isn't just a message of pardon. It's not just forgive and forget. The Gospel is power! It's power over sin. It's strength to say no to the things you couldn't say no to before. It's the courage to say yes to the things you used to resist and avoid. The Gospel gives transformation. And without that transformation, we cannot live a life of love and holiness as we are called to, but after new birth, we can. Peter's point is that Christianity – following Jesus – cannot happen without God giving us new life. And that's not our doing, it's His! You don't choose your birth, you accept it. And just like the gift of life, God wants to give us a new life in His Spirit.

1 Peter 1:22-2:3, “Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, (you have a new DNA) through the living and abiding word of God; for

'All flesh (our old DNA) is like grass
and all its glory like the flower of grass.

The grass withers,
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but the word of the Lord remains forever.'

And this word is the good news that was preached to you. (Good news...you don't have to perish...you don't have to live a futile life that ends in disappointment. Jesus wants to save you and make you new!) So (because you are now something

different...because you're new...your DNA is now holy and eternal) **put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander."**

Peter wasn't sitting up on a holy hill looking down on all of us for the way we mistreat one another. Peter followed Jesus for three years and declared that he would never abandon Jesus only to deny him just a few hours later. If you read through the last few chapters of the Gospels, you see that Peter had malice, and deceit, and hypocrisy, and envy, and slander during his denial of Christ. And even though he missed it, when Jesus rose again, Peter was restored. We're all like Peter from time to time. We all mess stuff up, but until we're willing to put those things away, we cannot experience the real thing. Peter had to put off the old so he could put on the new, and out of his experience he tells us, put off these old things, and...

1 Peter 2:2, "Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk [of the Word], (the simple, pure directions of God's Word and God's character: like babies long for milk and cannot rest until they have it, long to love God and love people...it nourishes the new DNA) **that by it you may grow up into salvation."**

If I were to ask you, "Is our church growing?" what would you say? If someone were to ask me, "Is the student ministry growing?" I think my first thought would be, yes! We have had more students and more volunteers this semester than we've ever had! And it's a great thing! But much of the way we think about growth in church is numerical. How many kids are coming? Peter was devoted to growth, but it was a growth in relationship because he learned this from Jesus Himself. Jesus broke every rule in the book on "how to grow your church." When Jesus fed the 5000, everyone wanted to follow Him! They couldn't get enough of the excitement! But look at what happened when Jesus started telling them things they didn't want to hear, when He began to tell these hundreds - if not thousands - of followers what life in Christ would actually be like...

John 6:60-66, "When many of His disciples heard it, they said, 'This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?' But Jesus, knowing in Himself that His disciples were grumbling about this, said to them, 'Do you take offense at this? Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where He was before? It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. But there are some of you who do not believe.' (For Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe, and who it was who would betray Him.) And He said, 'This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father.' After this many of His disciples turned back and no longer walked with Him."

Jesus has a “church” with TONS of people, and essentially tells them, *“Hey, this is how it is. You can’t do this on your own or for yourself. You need the Spirit to give you life. Do you believe it?”* And they didn’t. They turned away. And in this very moment, Jesus just threw all the numerical growth methods out the window. He turns around...

John 6:67-69, *“So Jesus said to the twelve, ‘Do you want to go away as well?’ Simon Peter answered Him, ‘Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God.’”*

Peter experienced the reality of longing for relationship with God from a pure heart. And he experienced the messiness of growing up into his salvation. We so often think that spiritual growth is just going to be up and to the right! But it’s not! It’s messy. Peter knew the messiness of it. He didn’t grow up perfectly. But he knew something. He said,

1 Peter 2:2-3, *“Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation— if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.”*

Have you tasted the goodness of God? Do you know it? Do you know your identity is not your addiction, or your sin, or your track record of what you’ve done? Do you know whose you are?

Micaiah is my son. Nothing can or will ever change that. There’s a definite event in history where I did not have him as my son, and then I did. And being born again is a supernatural reality of this metaphor. The imperishable seed – the life and love and power of God – has been planted into us who believe in Jesus Christ as our Lord...who believe that God really did raise Him from the dead. Micaiah has my DNA. He looks like me. He possesses my nature. In the same way, until we are born again, we don’t have God’s nature in us. We don’t have the holiness and eternal love of God that produces growth and life and salvation. But once it’s there, once the seed is planted, life begins! Real life.

Life beyond just temporary things. A life of eternal things. A life of knowing and experiencing God’s holiness and goodness. In Christ, you don’t have fading life. You have everlasting life. For the rest of our time here on earth, as exiles, waiting for our true home, we are invited into a life of **grace and growth**. Some people approach Christianity like it’s just a list of dos and don’ts. But Peter is emphatic!! You must be

born again. We can't self-will salvation. We cannot save ourselves! We cannot give ourselves that unfading life.

There are people wondering if God is really even good. How do we know!? The easiest and truest answer is to look at the cross. For the joy that laid before him, Jesus endured it! For you. He gave all for you. So that you don't have to inherit death, and corruption, and futility. So that you would not perish from the perishable seed but that you may be saved and have life! Real life. True life. Eternal life. So that you may know the blessing of the life with God that you were made for.

We need to ask ourselves: "Where am I this morning?" Are you born again? Have you been running from God? Are you walking with Him as a dearly loved child? Are you growing in your salvation? Do you long for Him to nourish every part of your soul? Where are you? What do you need? We all need life.

Colossians 3:1-4, "If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory."

Jesus is the only way to true everlasting life. And until we put to death the perishable seed, that old DNA, and allow Him to bring that new life in His Spirit, we can never truly begin to grow and flourish as God intends for us to as His children. Maybe you've been faithful...give thanks for what Christ has done! Maybe you've been away from God...come home! Maybe you've never truly been born again. Don't fight it. Accept it and tell somebody.