

# Be holy

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[ 0 : 00 ] Through the living and enduring word of God. For all people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of your field. The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord endures forever.

And this is the word that is preached to you. Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander, earth refined. Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation.

Now that you have tasted, the Lord is good. Thanks, Emily. Good morning, everyone. If we've not met before, my name is Adam, and it's really nice to be with you this morning.

There are lots of lists online with tips about how to live in the UK, particularly if you're from another country. And they might be useful because living in the UK can be pretty strange.

And I think even British people find that living in the UK is a bit strange sometimes. The lists online say all things like this. British people absolutely love queuing. And so if you see a queue, you should join it, even if you really have no idea what the queue is for.

[ 1 : 07 ] Or in all circumstances, carry an umbrella and be prepared to talk about the weather. Or if somebody talks to you and asks you what you're having for tea, they're not actually asking what kind of tea you're drinking, but what you're having for dinner.

But if you have a roast dinner, you have that at lunchtime. It's all very confusing. But it's helpful to have tips like this when we're going into a place that feels unfamiliar or is far away from home.

1 Peter is a little bit like that. It's guidance for people who are living far from home. Peter writes to Christians who he describes right at the beginning of the letter as elect exiles.

Christians living in a mostly not Christian world. God's people scattered throughout the world. The letter is valuable for us because we need help living in a world that feels strange.

How should we live our lives when our values don't necessarily match the dominant culture? How should we live when the things we want to celebrate aren't necessarily what the rest of culture wants to celebrate?

[ 2 : 23 ] How should we vote in the general election in a couple of weeks? How do we live when the ethics of the Bible and of our society seem to clash? In the last two weeks, we've seen how Peter describes our hope and our identity.

Today, we're exploring how those things should shape our lives day to day. How should having a Christian identity shape your day to day life?

Did you notice the very first word in our reading, verse 13, was therefore? And if you know, whenever you spot a therefore, you should ask, what is it therefore?

It's because we have our identity as exiles who are elect in the first half of the chapter. Therefore, it should shape our lives today. How in this strange world should God's people live?

You can make notes on your handout if that would be helpful for you. And we have three points, which are, in this strange world, God's people ought to have holy minds, holy lives, and holy loves.

[ 3 : 33 ] Firstly, holy minds. When you're about to do something difficult, you need to be switched on. Think about those first few moments when you get out of bed in the morning.

Perhaps this was you this morning. It just feels like your brain is running at about 10% of the normal speed. That wouldn't be the moment where you want to go into your GCSE exam or have your important work meeting.

We need a cup of coffee or a shower or something like that to switch us on. Peter's idea is similar. In this strange world, we need to be switched on, thinking straight.

It's like when you're far away from home or in an unfamiliar place. You need to be thinking and alert about what's going on around you. And Peter says in verse 13 that we need minds that are alert

and fully sober.

Our English translation makes that easier to understand. But the original language is literally to gird up the loins of your mind. Now, if you're like me and don't really know what girding up your loins actually mean, I found this strange graphic online, which is somebody girding up their loins.

[ 4 : 47 ] The idea is that you kind of grab the bottom bits of your robe and tie them up so that you're ready for action. You're ready to run or ready to fight. You might be helped by thinking of somebody like Elizabeth Bennett in *Pride and Prejudice*, hitching up the bottom of her dress so she can run across the muddy field.

We're girding up the loins of our mind. Peter says, be ready for action. That's the very first instruction we get in the letter. So far, there's only been descriptions.

But here's the first instruction. Christians need to have alert, sober minds ready for action. And that's so that we're thinking straight that our hope is really placed on Jesus.

And Peter says, with these switched on minds, set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming. If you believe that Jesus is Saviour and Lord and that he will return, let that shape your mind and be the place of your hope.

Peter isn't telling us to be people who are really disconnected from the real world. But that we should be people who are spiritually aware, switched on.

[ 6 : 07 ] Your hope is in the right place. Don't just wander through life mindlessly like someone who's drunk or sleepy. Let your Christian faith shape your mind, your worldview, your thoughts.

Even if you wouldn't call yourself a Christian and are here today, I'm sure you can understand how important it is to have a switched on mind if you want to live well.

If we are to be holy people, God's people, then that starts with our mindset. Our mind needs to be alert and our hope sets on Jesus as the first step of living changed lives.

This means viewing day-to-day situations with a Christian mindset. Letting your faith really shape your approach in a situation.

Or not letting things overtake your mind. We need God's word and God's spirit daily to shape our minds. One way this might be true.

[ 7 : 09 ] In my work with university students, probably one of the top things that lots of them are struggling with is pornography. They want to live as a Christian, but for lots of them it really occupies their minds.

And in some ways that's not surprising. Over many of these conversations, I've encountered lots of bits of advice. One that has stuck with me is from an American pastor who says that those struggling should read good theology books.

And it sounds a bit bizarre or abstract, but I think the idea is kind of the same as Peter's here. Instead of letting your mind be dragged down by something intoxicating and damaging, instead be captivated by something that is good and true.

Have a mind that is genuinely alert and sober with your hope in the right place. If we're living as God's people, the first step of that is to have holy minds.

In this strange world, God's people ought to have holy minds. Secondly, in this strange world, God's people ought to have holy lives. And Peter, all the way through this passage, is pointing out how our identity ought to shape our lives.

[ 8 : 26 ] Verse 14. As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance, but just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do.

Our new identity is as children of God. We have been called by the one who is holy, so our lives ought to change and reflect that. Do not conform to your old evil desires.

Instead, let your identity, your mindset, your lives be shaped by your new things. Notice, importantly, Peter doesn't expect that to be a Christian, you need to have always lived a perfect life.

The reality is, at times, all of us have had evil desires. Desires that didn't reflect the reality that Jesus is in charge. We all carry bits of baggage from old times.

And Peter expects the reality of that. But it's important that we leave behind those old desires and see change that reflects the identity, the hope we have in Jesus.

[ 9 : 37 ] Verse 15. Just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do. For it is written, be holy because I am holy. When God called his people out of Egypt, they received a new identity.

That was an act of his pure kindness. And he gave them new ways to live. And it's the same for us. That's why Peter is quoting that bit from the Old Testament. We're called to God and because he is

holy, we're called to live holy lives.

Becoming a Christian is a little bit in that sense like being a football player who's transferred from one club to another. Think about it like this.

Rather than playing for your old rubbish club, let's call it Snotsbury, you have been called or transferred to play for a new better club.

In the same way, let your identity change shape how you live. When someone signs for a new football club or starts working for a new organization, they need to let the values of that new organization shape their life.

[ 10 : 52 ] When Xavi was the previous manager of Barcelona, he put in 10 rules for the whole team. Things like, players must be 90 minutes early to practice, staff must be two hours early to practice, and so on.

If you've transferred from Snotsbury to Barcelona, it's a wonderful new identity you've been given, but you need to live by the rules of the new organization that you're a part of.

In the same way, God, in his kindness, has welcomed us onto his team, and so let that identity shape your life. The two things, our identity and our lives, should not be separated.

Peter goes on, verse 17, we get to call on God as our father. We have this special relationship with God, but he judges each person's work impartially, so live out your time here as foreigners in reverent fear.

The one who is our father is judge of the universe. Being in God's family is a great privilege, but our lives still matter. I think it's quite a hard verse.

[ 12 : 04 ] What does it mean if we are saved by grace, by God's kindness? Are we then judged by our works? We are secure and saved in the grace of Jesus.

On the final judgment day, anyone trusting in Jesus will face no wrath because Jesus has already faced it on the cross. But, our lives still matter now because God cares about them.

we love our father and so we want to do things that please him. We don't get exemptions to the rules of the whole universe, but rather because we fear him and we love him, we ought to obey him. And we see Peter really spells it out in the rest of the paragraph just how much he has done for us. For you know that it was not with perishable things, such as silver or gold, that you were redeemed from the empty ways of life handed down to you from our ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.

Do you see the immense value on which God has spent for us, for you? A few months ago, online, I saw an advert for this cuddly toy goose.

[ 13 : 25 ] It's pretty impressive. If you saw an advert for that, it's like a five-foot-tall cuddly toy goose. I thought that's amazing. Emma will love it. I must buy it for her.

You know what is even better? It was only three pounds. What a bargain. So straight away, I put it in my basket and bought it. Let me show you what actually arrived.

Here's the goose. It's a lovely goose. I love the goose. I'm sure Emma loves the goose too. But it's hardly what I thought it was going to be. And the reason is because I only spent three pounds on it. If something seems too good to be true, it probably is. If the pictures seem too good to be true for three pounds, it probably is too good to be true.

Here's the thing. If you pay not very much for something, you can probably expect that it will be a bit rubbish. If you pay rubbish, you might just get rubbish.

[ 14 : 25 ] If God has paid basically nothing for us, well then maybe it wouldn't really matter how we lived. But the point is, Peter makes, God has paid so much for you.

The price God paid for you was massive, unfathomably, immeasurably massive. God paid for you with the precious blood of Christ. And think before about if you're transferred to a new football club, then in that context, it was a record-breaking transfer fee paid for you.

If you ever think that you are not valuable or not cared for, remember that God paid the most precious, phenomenal price for you.

God loves you so much and he says that you have incredible value. He paid Christ, his son, who is like a lamb without blemish or defect, i.e.

the absolute best for you. You are not a three-pound cuddly goose off the internet. God paid the top dollar price for us. And so it's only right that we live in worship and reverence of him.

[ 15 : 42 ] How can we resist letting his kindness shape our lives? Peter says we're redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to us from our ancestors.

The redemption is like a transfer out of that empty way of life. Whether you describe yourself a Christian or not, I suspect there are ways in which you feel like the traditions of your parents or your ancestors or society around you are actually quite empty.

Peter invites us as we trust in Jesus to this kind of transfer into a life that has clarity and purpose. Following the ways of God gives you a real distinct meaning and purpose.

It's wonderful to have been born again by his Holy Spirit into a life of holiness. I wonder for you, as we think in this passage about holy lives, it's challenging and it's full of instruction.

What particularly challenges you in living a life of holiness for God? What is it that challenges you as you think, does my life line up with the identity that I have in God?

[17:00] What is it that pricks your conscience? Perhaps, as our confession always says, it's helpful to think both of the things that we have left undone and the things that we have done that we should not have done.

So far in the letter, Peter doesn't really give us any specific things. He's more talking about the general principles of holiness. But the central point is this, and I hope you get it, our identity has changed.

We are now God's people, elect exiles scattered in the world. Therefore, our lives should change and look different. If there are particular ways you think, I would really like to grow in my holiness, can I recommend that you chat with a Christian that you trust in church?

You can chat over text or after the service about the ways in which you'd love God's help to grow in holiness. It's good to have someone who knows what you want to grow in and who can be praying for you and supporting you.

And Peter says that for all of us, we will have had empty evil desires and an empty previous way of life. That's reality. For all of us, there will be ungodly patterns that are deeply ingrained in us.

[18:19] But if you've been transferred to a new football team, we play for the new team. We get to have holy lives now as God's holy people. And finally, in this strange world, God's people ought to have holy loves.

love to love to live. As we live as Christians in a mostly not Christian world, it's crucial that we treat one another well. Think of those who move to another country, expats or foreigners.

It's really significant to find friends, to find a community who are of the same culture or same language as yourself. It means you can support one another in a special way and stick together and enjoy what you have in common.

In the same way for us, Peter encourages us to love and stick with and care for the people who are fellow exiles with you.

Peter says, verse 22, now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth, that's on your identity, so that you have sincere love for each other, that's kind of the fellowship, the familiar love that we have for one another, so love one another deeply from the heart.

[19:37] So as you have this identity, it gives you a kind of familiarity, a kind of familiar love with one another, so lean into that love for each other, because we need each other.

Our English translation, again, makes it easier for us to understand. Perhaps it's like, you know, the stories that people in Greenland have like 20 words for snow, and we just have one.

Maybe it's the same with love. In Peter's original writing, there's two different words for love here, but our English translation just puts it as one, because that's easier. The first is that sincere love is *philia*, which is like the bond of love between siblings or people with shared values.

That's what we already have for each other, he says. And the second word is *agape*. That's a generous kind of love, a choosing to love someone even if you might not get anything back.

It's the kind of love God has for us. Peter says, we do have things in common, we have this kind of familial love already with each other, so really lean into it with a generous love towards one another.

[20:49] as these are people you have things in common with, so really lean into them, embrace them. And he goes on, these are people who you in common with them have been born again of the imperishable seed, and born again by the enduring word of God.

That means Christians around you are going to be people that you spend eternity with. That means it would be a really good idea to get on now and love one another now, because otherwise you've got a really long time together to come.

And Peter does give us some specifics of what it might look like to love one another. He says, verse 1 of chapter 2, therefore rid yourselves of all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of

every kind.

He says, there's no place for the malice and hatred. maybe you're far godlier than me, but I know the temptation to have real grumbliness towards others, the kind of cynical mindset where something that someone has done annoys you, and it builds and builds until basically everything that they do annoys you.

And Peter says we've got to stamp that out in the church, because we need one another. if you will continue humoring the football metaphor, it's the euro, so I think I can get away with it.

[ 22 : 20 ] Take off your old kit that you don't play with anymore, and put on the new kit that is to be generous and humble, vulnerable, and forgiving. And as we love one another, it kind of finishes off with Peter giving us another love.

we ought to love the word of God. And Peter says we've been born again through the living and enduring word of God. That is, as God speaks to us through Jesus, the word, through the scriptures, through the gospel message, as God speaks to us, we receive new life.

As our identity has changed, therefore, again, let our lives be changed by God's word. So, like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation.

The idea is this, we've tasted that the Lord is good as we've been born again, so keep coming back to him through the life-giving word and be grown up each day. Like a baby who cries because they desperately need some milk.

They know what is natural and necessary for them. So, do this each day. Practically, that might look like spending some time in the Bible each day so that your mind is alert and sober and it's what your mind is switched on to.

[ 23 : 47 ] And Peter encourages us to have the attitude of a baby, one who cries out for what sustains them and gives them life. You see, all the way through the passage, Peter says, the identity that you have through God's kindness, let that shape your day-to-day life.

love it, come to it daily so that we may be sustained.

Throughout the whole passage, we see that in a strange world, we ought to live distinct holy lives. We are elect exiles, Christians living in a mostly not Christian world.

So the command is live like you are actually Christians, distinct people to the world around you. If our lives don't match up with our identity, then it's like we're wrenching the whole thing apart.

It really doesn't work. It's really good, isn't it, that we have letters like Peter, which give us guidance in how to live in a world that is confusing and perplexing and uncertain.

[ 25 : 00 ] It helps us to live as foreigners and exiles in this strange world. The instruction is God's people ought to look different. Perhaps this might be helpful to think about for you.

We're to be elect exiles. That both means that we shouldn't just blend in. God calls us to be distinct people, elect, living God's ways.

But we also shouldn't just be those who hide away and kind of retreat into a little Christian bubble.

We are called to be exiles scattered throughout the world. It's God's plan that we should remain, not just be zapped up to heaven.

Peter says be elect exiles, be people who live distinct different lives. Don't blend in to the rest of culture around you, but also don't hide away and do it in a way that means you're scattered and in the world.

if you are one of God's holy people this morning, if you know Christ, well then let that show in your life. Let us be bold and distinct, living holy lives even in this strange world.

[ 26 : 11 ] Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, thank you for the new identity that we have from you.

Thank you that you have given us new birth into a living hope. Thank you that you love us so much that you gave your one and only son for us so that we might be your children, that we might be filled with your spirit.

Please help us to live new lives that reflect that change. Please help us daily to put away our old evil desires and please help us to have holy minds, holy lives, holy loves.

Father, we ask please keep working in us by your Holy Spirit to your glory. We ask in Jesus' name.

Amen. We are going to sing together a song that remembers God's amazing grace and asks him for his help in the days and years to come.

Let's stand and sing. Amen.