



UNITED BY HOPE – Part 5

The Passionate Life

If you have a Bible—and I hope you do—let me invite you to open up it to 1 Peter 2:11-12. I have been looking forward this particular text because it so powerfully and clearly aligns.

If you're memorizing the first chapter of 1 Peter, we plan to do some memory review next week, when we'll be through 1 Peter 1:1-12. So keep memorizing there. Today I want to dive right into 1 Peter 2:11-12. So let me invite you to read this out loud with me:

¹¹ Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. ¹² Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

I want to show you two realities in the world, based on what God just said to us in His Word, then I want to urge you in two ways, based on what God just said to us in His Word. Urge is the right word here because there's a note of urgency in these verses: *"I urge you..."* Even the language of passion is here. There's a lot of emotion in these two verses. I want you to feel these two realities and soak in these two urges. We'll actually see one reality and an urging that flows from it, then I'll show you a second reality and the second urging that flows from it.

Reality #1 – We live in a world that wars against your soul.

First Peter 2:11 says there are passions in your flesh that are driven by the world and its ways which wage war against your soul. Are you hearing this language from God right now? There is a battle waging in this world right now against your soul. Feel the urgency here. Your soul, wherever you are right now, is in danger of being destroyed. Please hear this; I'm speaking to you right now. Actually, I'm not speaking—this is God speaking. God is saying to you, "There is a war waging right now for your soul."

There are passions, desires, thoughts, ways in this world that are working to destroy your soul little by little—on TV, streaming on line, your phone, social media. In the world of business, school and home—everywhere in this world—this war is inescapable and it is intentional. Think about it. There are so few things on TV or streaming on line that are designed to nourish your soul's passion for God. App developers

for your phone—the engineers behind Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok— are not thinking, “How can I nurture people’s passion for God?”

Whatever news outlet you choose has an agenda. I’m not just talking about a political agenda. I’m talking about a spiritual agenda to show you good and evil that are often contrary to the Word of God. So I’m urging you: don’t be foolish. This world is not neutral. This world is inundating you with messages every moment of every day, all week long, saying that money, acclaim, entertainment, sex, drink, drugs and success are what you need.

Don’t buy it. Open your eyes. There is a battle. The word God uses is “war” waging at every moment in this world to pull you away from God, to pull you away from His Word, to pull you away from what matters most in this world. This is why Jesus said, “*For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul?*” (Matthew 16:26). Did you hear that? Your soul can be lost. And when the soul is lost, there’s no way to get it back. When the war for your soul is lost, it’s lost forever.

The Bible teaches very clearly that when you die your soul continues on. You and I will enter into either everlasting joy with God or everlasting judgment away from God. You say, “Everlasting judgment? I thought God was loving.” Yes, God is loving. He loves you so much that although you and I deserve judgment before Him for our sin against Him—turning from Him which we’ve all done—He sent His Son Jesus to die on the cross to pay the price for your sins, to endure the judgment you deserve in your sin, so that when you trust in Jesus to save you from your sin, to save your soul by simply trusting in Him and His love to save you, God will forgive all your sin and give you eternal life with Him.

God loves you so much that He has brought you at this moment to hear this reality, so that if you haven’t already, you might turn from your sin and trust in Jesus as the Savior of your soul right now, today. I urge you to trust in Him today. God is urging you to trust in His love for you today. Don’t let another moment go by without trusting Him. That’s what God is urging you to do for the salvation of your soul. The Bible is saying you can gain the whole world. You can have everything and still lose your soul. What matters most is not what you have in this world. On the day you die, the only thing that will matter is if you have Jesus. So I urge you to trust in Jesus today.

Urging #1 – Resist the world.

In light of the reality that there is a world that wages war against your soul, I urge you, based upon God’s Word, to resist the world. First Peter 2:11 says, “*...abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.*” Abstain from those passions and desires. Actively resist them.

As I’ve studied this text, this is where I am driven to prayer, because I’m burdened for so many of you in this church. There are so many of you who are professing to be Christians, but you’re sleeping through the middle of a war, living for this world. It’s like you don’t realize you’ve forgotten that you’re

sojourners and an exiles. Remember, the team named for followers of Jesus is the Elect Exiles. Strangers in this world. This means we don't live for what this world lives for. We don't live for what advertisers are selling and social media is offering, such as pride, fame, money, sex and success that the world issues as lures. We don't live for the things of this world. We resist the lures of this world. This means we must be on guard when we're watching things, listening to things, hearing things, reading things.

Don't scroll through your phone mindlessly. Don't listen to or read the news mindlessly. Guard your mind, your thoughts, your emotions and your subsequent words and actions. Don't think like the world thinks. Don't feel like the world feels or desire what the world desires. Don't speak like the world speaks. Don't act like the world acts. Why? Because we're exiles here. We're living for a whole different world. It's not like we're just foreigners in a country. We're from another planet, in a sense. We live for another world, an altogether different world. That changes everything.

First Peter 2:1 says we are to put away all malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy and slander. We resist all those things. We don't tear down people in this world. We are to love our enemies. That's our posture. We pray for them. If you spend more time despising people in your mind than praying for them, then you are living for this world and losing the battle. We're sojourners and exiles. That means we think, talk and live differently.

God, help us hear this, particularly today when there's so much animosity toward other people—people we know, people we don't even know, and particularly people with whom we disagree.

Verse 12, says, "*Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable...*" The reference here to Gentiles is a figurative way of saying those who are unbelievers, those who do not know God. The Bible says, "Honor God with your conduct." Show that there's another way to live. Resist the luring temptations of this world, the temptations to sexual immorality in a world that has so skewed God's design for men and women, for marriage. We are to live differently according to 1 Corinthians 6 and 1 Thessalonians 4.

Resist temptations to anger, disputes and dissension in a world that thrives on fighting and quarreling (James 4). No, live differently. Resist temptations to love money and hoard resources in this world. Live differently. We sacrifice money. We give away resources for people in need in this world (1 Timothy 6).

I spent this last week with a brother and sister who started a business in their 20s and have made hundreds upon hundreds of millions of dollars. From the start, they have capped their salary to live a simple lifestyle. They've never gone above it. They keep giving everything above it away for the spread of the gospel in the world. Their lives shout that they're not living for this world. They're actively resisting this world.

That is what God is urging you to do today. Resist this world. Abstain from the passions of the flesh. Live for other passions, better passions. This is where it gets really good. You might read this verse and think the Bible is calling us to a passionless life—emotionless, empty, hollow, boring, avoiding all the good stuff this world has. No. I’ve titled this sermon “The Passionate Life.”

It’s interesting that Peter 2:11-12 are two sentences in English, but it’s actually one sentence in the original language here. They go together. In these verses, God is calling us to a life full of passion, full of emotion, full of zeal for that which really matters and that which really fills. We’re going to see it clearly in the second reality.

Reality #2 – We live in a world that wants to belittle God.

Remember the first reality: we live in a world that wars against your soul. The second reality: we live in a world that wants to belittle God. When you get to 1 Peter 2:12, the Bible says, “*Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that...*” This means there’s a purpose here. What’s the purpose? “*...[S]o that when they speak against you as evildoers...*” Here’s what will happen: “*...they may see your good deeds...*” Then do what? “*...and glorify God on the day of visitation.*” So the end of all this is ultimately for the glory of God in a world that does not glorify God.

Please listen very closely here. This is the major problem in this world, therefore it’s the major problem in every one of our lives in this world. The major problem in this world is that God is not being glorified. If you look around you in the world, you’ll see the world saying there are all kinds of other problems that are more important. But here the Bible is saying very clearly that the major problem in this world is that God is not being glorified. We need to reorient our thinking.

We live in a world where God is ignored. Just look at your news app. Watch TV. Stream on line. Scroll through social media. Listen to the national conversation. The fear of God is nowhere to be found. Not just in the world, but God is also ignored, belittled and I fear even patronized by people in the church. Scores of people in the church check off a box by attending a service, either in person or more easily on line these days, then ignore His Word the rest of the week. They’re silent about Him throughout the week. They offer routine, patronizing prayers maybe before a meal, but never falling on their faces before Him in awe-filled worship.

In so many ways, we’ve built our lives not centered not on God, the majestic, mighty and supreme authority over all. Instead, we live in a world and we’ve constructed a church culture in which we have built our lives centered on ourselves. This is the reality. We live in a world that wants to belittle God, to minimize, ignore and not make much of God.

Urging #2 – Engage the world for the glory of God.

So what do we do then in this world? Make the connection. Urging number one was we resist this world. We abstain from the passions of the flesh and the ways of this world that are belittling God. Now, the second urging, we live with a different passion. Everything we do now is filtered through a different passion—a passion for God in this world.

Now you ask, “Does the way I’m spending my time or money, does the way I speak or post, does the way I work, does the way I relate to my spouse, my kids, my family, my friends, my coworkers—do these reflect passion for God? Are my words, postings and relationships shouting passion for God and for His glory in the world?” We resist this world on the one hand, then we engage this world for the glory of God. That’s what 1 Peter 2:12 is calling us to do. “*Honor God with your conduct, so that when they speak against you as evildoers...*” Now, that’s a really interesting phrase. What does that mean? It means when you think, believe, desire and live different from this world, with passion for God, you will be spoken against by this world.

Notice this verse says “when,” not “if.” We know this, don’t we? Let’s just bring this text straight into 21st century America. Let’s just put all the cards on the table. As followers of Jesus who believe the Word of God, we have some very different views than the world around us, some very unpopular views, even offensive views that would be labeled evil in our culture. Think about it. We believe God creates all people wonderfully and beautifully as either male or female (Genesis 1:26-27). This foundational truth from the first chapter of the Bible is labeled evil, discriminatory, unloving in our culture.

We believe marriage is designed by God for one man and one woman together (Genesis 2:24). That is a belief that our country has labeled bigotry. We actually believe that any sexual activity of any kind outside of marriage between one man and one woman is sin against God (1 Corinthians 6, 1 Thessalonians 4). We believe that a husband is leader of the home, just as Jesus is Leader of the church (Ephesians 5). We believe abortion is the murder of an innocent life being formed in a mother’s womb (Psalm 139).

I could keep going on and on with the list of beliefs that we have, based on God’s Word, that are completely contrary to the culture around us. I haven’t even gotten to the really crazy ones. We believe that a virgin gave birth to a baby and He grew up and never did one thing wrong His entire life. Then He died and three days later He walked out of His tomb. Then He flew up to heaven without a jet pack. And one day He’s going to come back on a horse.

So let’s just put the cards on the table. If you trust God and His Word, you believe some things that are very different from this world, things that would lead to mockery, insult, slander and will lead you to be ostracized in this world. We believe things this world labels evil, wrong, harmful and dangerous. When the world thinks like this—not if, but when—we need to ask if we are we going to hold fast and trust in God’s Word. That’s a major issue facing the church today and facing your life today.

Are we going to hold fast to trust in God's Word or are we going to compromise our beliefs for the sake of acceptance in this world? God, help us not to compromise. Church, we have a choice to make. Christian, you have a choice to make, right where you're sitting. Are you going to trust this world or are you going to trust God's Word?

Teenagers, college students, young adults—I know, you're getting so much pressure to see God's Word as antiquated, outdated, offensive, even evil. You are tempted every day by messages all around you in this world to leave it behind and trust in this world. I'm urging you today—don't do it. Don't trust this world—the latest trends or the newest, most popular accepted way of looking at things. The essence of sin is thinking you know what is true and right better than God does. Don't do it. It leads to death. It leads to destruction of your soul. Trust God's Word.

This is not just with teenagers, college students or young adults. Every single person in this war who wants to belittle God and criticize His Word—I urge you, trust His Word no matter what it costs. In your life, work, friendships, influence—trust His Word. Don't lose your soul.

Then, follow this. The Bible is saying, "Live such honorable lives, filled with good deeds, that when others think, 'Those people are not loving,' your lives actually tell a different story." Live so that when they attack and slander and speak against you, they will look at you and see good deeds that bring glory to God. In other words, don't just resist this world, engage this world with good deeds.

This is not a passionless, emotionless, empty, hollow life. This is a life that is full, showing the world how good God is, so that when they think, "Those people are close-minded and arrogant," they will look on your property and see Jill's House over the course of ten years serving children and families with special needs, and just getting started. They'll see a church every week with intentional ministry to children and families with special needs. You show the goodness and the love of God to families have unique challenges.

When they think in light of what you believe about abortion—when they think you don't care about women—you show them love for women by all the time you spend at the Pregnancy Care Center. You show them selfless love by coming alongside moms who don't know what to do with their pregnancy and you say, "We will help you in every way you need." You show them.

You start an adoption and foster care ministry that's serving kids and families. You show them God's love for children and their moms and dads. When they're tempted to think, "They have an offensive view of marriage and family," you show them what it looks like for a husband to lay down his life to serve, cherish, nourish, love and build up his wife. When marriages break down, you show them how the church comes alongside single parents, kids without a mom or a dad, and fills in the gaps.

When they are tempted to think, "It's just a bunch of religious people in a prudish bubble," you show them a congregation of people going to the nations, caring for orphans in Ethiopia, rescuing children

from traffickers in Nepal. You show them right here in Washington DC, fanning out around the city in the middle of a pandemic, giving five million pounds of food to people who are in need. When they see your good deeds, it's not so they'll think you're great or McLean Bible Church is great. That would miss the whole point. We're not living for ourselves. We're living for our God, so they will "*see your good deeds and glorify God...*"

In a world that belittles God, you will point to the glory and goodness of God. Live with passion to do that. Let that affect the way you speak, think, post, live and relate to other people. Filter everything through this lens, asking, "How is what I'm doing glorifying God? I just want to glorify God with everything I do."

Then show that you're an exiled stranger here, living for that which matters forever on the day of visitation. Peter reminds us—the Bible reminds us—there's coming a day when it's all going to be clear that this world and all it offered was not worthy of your trust. On that day it will be clear that God and His Word were 100% worthy of your trust. You will not regret trusting God and His Word.

There's a day coming when it will all be clear. So live for that day in your own life. Guard your mind and your desires. Abstain from the passions of the flesh. Resist this world. Engage this world, but not just with good deeds. The picture here is even deeper than that. Yes, do good things—all kinds of good things, including the examples I mentioned. But in the middle of those good deeds, proclaim the God Who loves this world so much that He gave His Son to die on a cross for their sin. He did this so that when they stand before God on that day, they will be ready to glorify Him because they will have been brought to trust in Him.

You've heard Joe share about Jill's House, saying, "We want to love, care for and serve families, but ultimately we want to point people to Jesus." That is their heart. Yes, we want to distribute food all over the city during this pandemic. At the core though, we want to introduce people to Jesus. We want to rescue children from trafficking. We want to care for orphans in Ethiopia. Through it all, we want to point people to Jesus, so that people will be ready on the day of visitation, so that they will know when they stand before God that they have eternal life with Him. Prepare people for that day. Live your life with passion, preparing people for that day, even as you fight this battle in your own heart, so that your soul is prepared for that day.

With that, I want to ask you to bow your heads with me. Wherever you are, bow your heads quietly right now. I ask you to do that so you will not be distracted, because I know not everyone is ready for that day. I just want to ask if you are ready to stand before God. Are you confident you have eternal life with God? If you were to die today, do you know for sure you'd go to heaven?

I asked an Uber driver that question this past week and he said, "No, I don't know." He talked about his fear of that day. Do you know for sure, if you were to die today, that you would have eternal life

with God? If not, I want to invite you today to put your trust in Jesus, to turn aside from your sins and this world, saying to god, “I need You to save my soul.”

Just call out to Him in your heart right now. Say, “God, I know I have sinned against You. I know I’ve turned from Your ways to my ways. Today I turn from my sin and myself; today I put my trust in You. Jesus, please save me from my sin. Please lead me as Lord of my life.” The Bible says everyone who calls on the name of the Lord in this way will be saved (Romans 10:13). Your soul will be saved through faith in Jesus as Savior and Lord of your life.

O God, I pray that even right now in this moment You are bringing about this kind of faith in hearts.

God, I pray for every single person who knows You as Savior. I pray that You would help us to resist this world. Help us to be alert. Keep us from being asleep in war. Help us to be on guard. Help us to live differently. Help us to not be conformed any longer to the pattern of this world. Help us to be transformed by the renewing of our minds, so we might think and desire and live differently—not for the sake of being different, but because we want Your glory and we want ultimate good in our lives.

God, keep us from living according to the world’s definition of good, from the world that belittles Your glory. We pray You would help us to abstain from the passions of the flesh that wage war against our souls. I pray this over every single person listening right now. Help us keep our conduct honorable, so that when the culture around us speaks against us as evildoers, they may see our good deeds. Through that, may they see Your goodness and love in our lives and glorify You on the day that matters most. Please may it be so, we pray. We praise You for what You’ve done in Jill’s House. We pray that You would multiply that ministry and cause many more ministries to be multiplied for Your glory in these fights. For Your glory, we pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

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