

Desires in Exile (4:1-11)

Well hey everybody, glad to have you tuning in to this week's teaching. If you have a Bible with you or near you, go ahead and grab it and turn to the book of 1 Peter chapter 4. It'll take us just a bit to set everything up first, but we'll get there eventually. If this is your first time listening in, welcome—we're super glad to have you with us. Just to catch you up, we've been spending the better part of the past few months working our way through this letter in the bible called 1 Peter. And the letter was intended to instruct some early Christians on how they should relate to the world around them. How they relate to the people, systems and structures around them in a way that honors God and reflects who Jesus is *to* those people.

But today in chapter 4, Peter turns his attention towards two other things. In the first half of the passage, he's going to talk about how we relate to our *desires* as followers of Jesus. And in the second half, he's going to talk about we relate to *other* followers of Jesus that we share our lives with. First half: internal desires, and second half: interpersonal relationships. And what we'll find out by the end of our time is that those things are actually not as unrelated as they may seem on the surface.

But before we dive in, let's set up that first half of our passage: which is how we think about our *desires* as followers of Jesus. You and I carry around with us a whole host of different *desires* with us on a regular basis. We have desires for food, for drink, for sex, for rest. We also have desires for more *intangible* things like friendship and love and acceptance and safety. And then we have desires for even more existential sorts of things like meaning and purpose and significance. We operate with a lot of different *desires* at any given time. And so a very important question to ask is “how should we *think* about, and *interact* with, those desires?”

Now, a lot of people *think* that being a Christian actually means *abandoning* all desire. That following Jesus looks like cutting yourself off or keeping yourself from anything you want at all. **But believe it or not, that's not actually how it works. You see, the bible's perspective isn't that desire is *bad*. The bible's perspective is just that desire isn't *ultimate*.** A follower of Jesus simply believes that our desires should be thought about and evaluated, rather than ruling over our lives. More on that here in a bit.

But even *that perspective*—evaluating your desires rather than letting them *rule over* us—puts us at odds with a lot of our society. Our society sees their desires very differently than that. We hear phrases all the time like “treat yourself.” “Follow your

heart.” “Pursue your dreams.” “The heart wants what the heart wants.” **These are all different ways of communicating that our desire shouldn’t be thought about and evaluated, but rather indulged and followed.** That desire, in many ways, should be *king*. That if there is something we want—that we *desire*—whatever we do, we should listen to that desire. We should chase after it.

Now, if you think about it, nobody *actually* believes that we should respond that way to *all* of our desires. If my desire, every time someone cuts me off in traffic, is to run that person off the road and beat them up, nobody’s making the argument that that’s what I *should* do every single time. If my desire is to eat nothing but double cheeseburgers with bacon for every meal the rest of my life (and let’s just be real—it really might be), nobody’s making the argument that following my every desire is a good or helpful thing for me to do in *that* scenario. So **if we stop to question it just a little, we actually start to realize that this “follow your desires” approach is actually far too simplistic to be helpful in every scenario.**

So that prompts the question, what might a *better* approach to our desires be? It would seem that we need something a little more nuanced, a little more thoughtful than just “indulge them all completely.” And that’s what Peter is getting at in this first part of the passage. So pick it up with me, starting in v. 1:

*[1] Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, **arm yourselves with the same way of thinking**, for whoever has suffered in the flesh **has ceased from sin** [more on that phrase in a sec], [2] so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh **no longer for human passions but for the will of God.***

So first, as he’s been saying throughout this whole letter, our model for how to live well as an exile is Jesus himself. **Whatever our approach to our desires is supposed to be, it is supposed to mirror the way Jesus himself approached *his* desires.** But then he tacks on this little phrase. He says “...*for whoever has suffered in the flesh has **ceased from sin.***” Now that’s an interesting sentence, isn’t it? It reads to us a little odd, almost like Peter is saying that once you suffer, you don’t sin anymore. Which, to most of us who have spent much time in church, just doesn’t sound right at all.

So allow me to clarify, Peter is *not* saying once you endure mistreatment, you literally stop sinning. That word “cease” can also mean to “restrain” or to “hinder.” So what Peter is trying to say is that **when you suffer like these Christians were suffering—when you are mistreated and maligned and excluded—and you respond to it with**

blessing, that indicates that something transformative has happened in you. It means that you have gotten to the point where, on some level, you have learned to start *restraining* your sin, at least in regards to responding to evil with evil. You have *hindered* sin's power over you in that way. You have gained some amount of "mastery" over it. It doesn't mean you don't still sin, it doesn't mean you're perfect—but **it does mean that suffering has begun to *refine* you on some level.**

And Peter says being in that place enables you to "*live [...] no longer for human passions* [or we might say, *desires*]," but rather for the will of God. Now, he says, **as a follower of Jesus, your desires are no longer *ultimate* in your life.** They're no longer what you *live* for. And that doesn't mean that you don't *have* desires, and it doesn't even mean that you *ignore* your desires. But it does mean they don't *control* you. They don't have the final word on what you do and don't do. Rather, what has the final word is what Peter calls "*the will of God.*"

Next, he's going to rattle off some examples of the types of things that *no longer* rule over us as followers of Jesus. Take a look with me in v. 3:

[3] *For the time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies [you know, like ya do], drinking parties [some of you are like "wait—are there other types of parties?"]*, and lawless idolatry.

Now this is obviously quite the list. But if you think about it, there's a common thread that runs through all of them: *indulging your desire*. Every one of these things is what happens when a person just completely *gives in* to their desire and has no ability to say no to it: sensuality, passions, drunkenness—all these things are what happens when people just give themselves over completely to wherever their desire leads them. **These are all examples of what life looks like when desire runs your life.** Peter says "hey, you've done all that for long enough." You no longer have to be *run* by your desires. You no longer have to be *enslaved* to them. **You can now rule over your desires, rather than letting them rule over you.**

And not *only* that, but as a follower of Jesus, **you can leverage your desires as opportunities to grow and mature as a human being.** So let's try to make this as practical as possible. Let's say, hypothetically, the particular desire you are experiencing is the desire for sex. I figure we're a church made up of a lot of 20-and-30 somethings—seems like it could be a relevant example to bring up. Let's say you're a

single, amorous man or woman and you've noticed that for whatever reason, the desire to sleep with someone is *strong* in your life lately.

When you realize that, there are a couple ways you could respond. One way you could respond to that is "I have a desire for sex, so let me invite the boyfriend or girlfriend over, let's put on a movie and see what happens. Or maybe it's "let me hop on Tindr real quick," or to go look at porn, or whatever the particular response is. The line of thinking, though, with all of those is "I have a desire for sex, therefore let me take the easiest route I can take to indulge that desire." That's to operate on the belief that desire is king. That you have no choice but to fulfill your desire. That's as deep as the thinking goes.

But if you're a follower of Jesus, your response looks a little different. It means you have the ability through the Holy Spirit to not just blindly *follow* your desires, but **to zoom out for a second and evaluate why they're there in the first place**. It gives you the ability to evaluate not just what *can* be done about them, but what *should* be done about them. You're able to go "okay, for whatever reason I've got a ton of pent-up sexual desire going on right now—why might that be?" And maybe it's because life just seems boring right now, and it feels like sex will bring some excitement into the picture. Or maybe it's because I feel super *lonely* right now, and it seems like sex will alleviate some of that loneliness on some level. Or maybe it's that life is super *stressful* right now, and sex will bring at least a little comfort or distraction. Or maybe it's as simple as "I've been watching a lot of shows that talk about sex and depict a lot of sex, and it's making me think about sex and want it a lot more often." And all of those things are opportunities for deeper reflection as a result.

So all of a sudden, **you've actually let your desire become a doorway into reflection and transformation. You've let it become an opportunity for growth and character development as a human being, rather than it just being an itch that needs to be scratched**. I would argue that is a far more *helpful*, and far more *enlightened* way to approach our desires.

And I want you to see: that's actually *not* the same thing as *ignoring* or *suppressing* your desires. That's not the same thing as a single person saying "I want sex, sex is wrong outside of marriage, so no sex for me." I think that's how a lot of people *think* Christians operate, but it's actually not. We don't just *suppress* our desires—we let our desires become opportunities for growth with the help of the Holy Spirit. But you've got to first receive the ability through the Holy Spirit to get up *above* your desires and see them from that perspective.

Now, as good as that may sound to some of us, Peter also acknowledges that living *that way* might bring some unwanted consequences. Look with me at v. 4:

[4] *With respect to this they* [those who *don't* live the way you do as a follower of Jesus] *are surprised* when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they *malign* you;

So Peter says **if people around you notice that you don't just instinctively indulge your desires like they do, they might not like it.** They might not be a fan of it. They might be *confused* by it. And as a result, they might mistreat you and *malign* you, because they think you're *judging* them for *their* lifestyle or *their* choices. Now real quickly, I think it's worth clarifying that sometimes, when the world thinks we're judging them, it's because we *are*. Sometimes as Christians we are so guilty of this. We side-eye people, we talk condescendingly to people, we make passive-aggressive comments about "the world." Sometimes when people think we're judging them, *it's because we are*. And those attitudes in us need to be owned and repented of for sure.

But *other* times, you might *not* be judging your friend, or your coworker, or your neighbor *at all*, and they still *feel* like you are. I once knew a guy who had been dating his girlfriend for about a year and a half. They had been living together since early on in their relationship, and everytime the topic of them living together would come up casually in conversation, he would go "and I know you probably think we're sinners going to hell because we live together..." and then continue in the conversation. And it was so weird, because never *once* had I even so much as *flinched* when he talked about them living together. But it didn't matter what I did or didn't say to him about it—he felt judged simply because he knew my ethical framework towards those things was different than his.

And I'm sure a lot of us have experienced something like that. Where someone had that sort of sensitivity towards you, simply because they know you might disagree with them or their lifestyle. Maybe you've been called "holier-than-thou" or a "prude" or "self-righteous" or any number of different terms by people. And again, *maybe* that's because you were *being* one of those things. But other times, it might've been just because people knew you approached things differently than they did. Just because they got a hint that you don't approach your desires quite like they approach theirs. Peter says, that's *going* to happen if you decide to live this way as a follower of Jesus. Don't be alarmed by that.

“But,” he says, v. 5...

[5] ~~but~~ they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.

[6] For this is why the gospel was preached even to those who are dead, that though judged in the flesh the way people are, they might live in the spirit the way God does.

He says “even if they malign you,” they will give an account to the one who judges the living and the dead. Now maybe that sentence sounds rather intense to you. But I’ll tell you, it’s actually one of the most beautiful, practically helpful things for us to know as followers of Jesus. Because about it like this: **if God is the one responsible for judging people at the end of history, that means you and I don’t need to.** You and I don’t have to worry about making sure that non-Christians know we disapprove of them, because that’s not our job—it’s God’s job. So that means you and I can interact with people who don’t know Jesus, *judgment-free*. **When a nonbeliever encounters a Christian who believes in the judgment of God, what they should encounter is an incredibly non-judgmental person.**

So *then*, Peter says, “don’t allow people speaking evil against you to discourage how you live.” Persist in following Jesus, persist in doing what’s right, and let them say whatever they want to say. Peter says “knowing that God will one day set all things right should set you *free*.”

And next he gets in specifically to what it sets you free to do *instead*. Take a look, back in v. 7...

[7] The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. [8] Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. [9] Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. [10] As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: [11] whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies, in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

So Peter says “here’s how you should live, since the *end of all things* is at hand.” So it must be because I’m a pastor, but I have had quite a few people *tell me*, or at least *ask me if* all this Coronavirus stuff is a sign of the end of the world. I guess something about

all this just *feels* a bit apocalyptic, and so I've had several people want to know if it truly is. My *response* to them has usually been some version of, "I don't know...possibly? Probably not?" And I think people are often surprised that I'm that nonchalant about it all. But there's a couple reasons I respond that way. One, is that the Scriptures actually say no one knows (*including* Jesus himself!) when that will happen. So it just seems kind of pointless to me to speculate as if I know something Jesus doesn't even know.

But the other reason is that **repeatedly in the Scriptures, when it describes how we should live when we know the end of the world is at hand, it simply says that we should continue doing the same things we were already doing**, and focus even more on doing them. The bible's perspective isn't that when we know Jesus is coming back, we all of a sudden shift into "phase two" of our operation. Nope, we just keep doing what we already should've been doing in the first place.

And this passage in 1 Peter is a *perfect* example of that. Peter says, "here's how you should live when the end of all things is at hand." Are you all ready for how crazy this is? You should be self-controlled and sober-minded (which the bible says we already should've been doing as followers of Jesus). *And*—catch how crazy *this* is—we should love one another, show hospitality to one another, and serve one another. Not all that crazy, right? So nothing about hiding in underground bunkers, nothing about marching around with AK-47s on your shoulder, no conspiracy theorizing, just "keep loving, keep serving, and keep being hospitable." *That's* how we're called to live when "the end is near."

So let's spend just a few minutes on each of those, to make sure we understand what they are exactly. Especially because for each of them, we might need to do some *unlearning* and *relearning* around what they mean. First, Peter says we should...

Love one another

So as I think we've mentioned at least a time or two before that "love" in the bible is a very different thing than "love" as we often think of it. Love to most of us is an emotion or a feeling. Saying "I *love*" that person or that thing means that person or that thing makes me *feel* a certain way." Love in the *bible*, however, is not so much an emotion as it is a *decision*. It's to *prefer* another person above yourself in tangible sorts of ways, regardless of how you *feel* in the moment towards them.

So when Ana and I were dating, I had an personal goal that I didn't want to say "I love you" to her until I had *proven* that with my actions. I didn't want to say those words until I had shown her that I loved her through serving her, preferring her, and putting her above myself. My goal was that when I finally said "I love you" to her, her response would be "yeah, I know you do." Now maybe to you, that seems like it takes all the fun out of saying "I love you." But that was my way of trying to embody the biblical kind of love, rather than simply the romantic kind of love. And even if that seems less meaningful to you, I'll say this: **one of the biggest problems in marriage after marriage today is that people don't know what to do when the romantic kind of love fades.** People don't know what to do when they don't feel "in love" with their spouse anymore. So maybe we'd all be better served to infuse our romantic relationships with a little more of the *biblical* kind of love. And infuse *all* our relationships with that kind of love as well.

So when Peter instructs these Christians to "keep loving one another earnestly," he's not necessarily telling us to have fond *feelings* towards each other—although that is a great thing. Rather, he's encouraging us to have this unflinching *resolve* towards each other. To have an unwavering commitment of seeking the good of others over ourselves. To look out for them more than we look after ourselves. Then the second thing he says to do is...

Show hospitality towards one another

Now, when you hear the word "hospitality," I need you to do your best to get all things Martha Stewart and Paula Deen out of your head. That might be *southern* hospitality, but it is not *biblical* hospitality. *Biblical* hospitality is pretty simple in theory: it most literally means "love of strangers." So **it's not so much about how good you are at welcoming people you know over to your house, as it is about how persistent you are at welcoming people you don't yet know into your life.**

So imagine a scenario with me. There's a get-together at someone's house (some of you are like "what even is that—it's been months since I've been at one of those." Well, we'll just have to do our best to imagine it.) But there's a get-together at someone's house. And at this get-together, like 90% of the people there already know each other, they're really comfortable around each other, all of that. But then there's this one person, or one couple, or this small group of people, that you can just tell feel like they don't belong. They don't know hardly anybody there, they were just invited because they were a neighbor, or because they knew one person there, or whatever it is. Okay, in that type of scenario, **hospitality is the degree to which you go and take it upon yourself to**

make that person feel like they belong. *That's* biblical hospitality. We've defined hospitality before as making an outsider feel like an insider. The degree to which you make *excluded* people feel *includede*. That's what Peter is talking about here.

And remember: these followers of Jesus were living in a setting where they were being steadily *rejected* by the world around them that didn't understand them. So the type of *hospitality* that created *belonging* among the family of God was crucial. It made them feel like there was one group of people that they were "safe" with.

Okay lastly, Peter mentions that we should...

Use our gifts to serve one another

So most commentators think this is a nod here to the so-called "spiritual gifts." Now, just about a year ago, we did an entire series on the Holy Spirit, and within that series were three whole weeks on the gifts. If you're curious about how they all work and what they look like, you may want to go back and listen to that series. And since we did that in-depth in *that* series, I'm not going to unpack it all in detail today.

But one of the things we mentioned in that series, that Peter highlights again in *this* passage, is *what the gifts are for*. And I think that's worth some review because this is where *so many people* get off in their understanding of the gifts. **The primary purpose of the gifts, according to Peter, and Paul, and according to the rest of the New Testament, is to serve others.** Which means the primary purpose of the gifts is *not* simply to "express them." Now, maybe to you that difference sounds relatively minor, but I can promise you, it's not.

If the primary purpose of the gifts is to *express* them, that means that I have this gift (or gifts), and it is everyone else's job to create an environment in which I can express *my gifts*. In essence, it's everyone *else's job* to *serve me* in that way, by providing that environment for my gifts. *But* if the purpose of the gifts is to *serve others*, then it is *my job* to discern the needs of those around me, and to then use my gifting (or pray for the type of gifting needed) to meet their needs. Do you see how these two understandings of the gifts are actually *very* different? They create polar opposite *postures*. **One asks others to serve you, while the other uses your gifts to serve others.** Far too many people see it as the church's job to orient itself around them and their giftings. But that's not the mindset Peter lays out in this passage. The gifts are given *so that you might serve others* with them.

Which brings us full circle back to where Peter started in v. 7: with the idea of *loving*, or *preferring* others to yourself. That's the thread that runs through all three of the things we just mentioned. **To love others requires putting them ahead of yourself. To show hospitality towards others requires putting those people ahead of your own comfort and preferences. And to serve others requires seeing their needs as more important than you expressing your gifts.** Love is the theme behind all of this. And as Paul puts it in 1 Corinthians 13, love "does not insist on its own way."¹

So in a way, *that* connects us back to the very beginning of this *entire passage*. Because we started off talking about how followers of Jesus relate to their desires. And we said that **instead of always indulging our every desire—instead of “insisting on our own way,” we are called to submit those desires to Jesus and his kingdom.** That's how we respond to our *desires*, and that's how we learn to *love one another*.

And v. 1 says that this all happens through us “arming ourselves” with the same way of thinking that Jesus himself had. So to wrap things up, I want us to look at a passage where Jesus “armed” himself with this way of thinking about *his* desires. I want us to take a look at Matthew 26. In this passage, Jesus is just hours away from dying on the cross, and he has taken his disciples to a garden called Gethsemane to pray. And while the disciples are standing watch, we get a look at the *content* of Jesus' prayer.

So we're just going to look at one verse, v. 39, which says this:

*And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, **not as I will, but as you will.**”*

So what we're witnessing in this passage is a very *honest* moment in the life of Jesus. With his brutal execution just around the corner, he prays with a heavy heart to God the Father, “Father, if there's any other way for us to accomplish what we're accomplishing, other than the cross, let's do that.” So don't miss this: in this moment, Jesus' *desires* are in *conflict*, at least on some level, with the Father's desires. I know that's hard for us to even wrap our minds around something like that, because we know that the Father and the Son's *purposes* are always in unison. But in some way, in this moment, Jesus is wishing that there was another *way to go about* that purpose.

¹ See 1 Corinthians 13:5.

And notice that in that moment, he doesn't just say "well that's my desire, but desire isn't important, so I'll just get over it." That's not his approach. Instead, he says "God, here is my desire—here is my *will*—at the same time, I am submitting that desire to you: not *my will*, but *yours* be done." Do you see how this is a model for how we respond to our desires, and specifically, how we submit them to God? Jesus didn't even exempt *himself* from this approach to desire. He modeled it for us.

And through what he would go on to do on the cross, on our behalf, he has imparted to us the ability to approach our desires in that same way. In moments when *our* desires are in conflict with God's, we have the ability through the Holy Spirit to approach them like Jesus did. Where we can say "God, this right here is what I want. And at the same time, life is not ultimately about what *I* want—it's about what *you* want." And it's through that process that we get to live, in the words of 1 Peter, "no longer *for* human passions, but for the will of God." Just like Jesus said, we get to say "not my will, but yours be done."

Let's pray and ask for his help with that.

Thanks so much for tuning in this week. We pray that today was helpful and encouraging and challenging, and that it helps you set your focus on Jesus this week. If there's anything we can help with or do for you, please don't hesitate to reach out by emailing info@citychurchknox.com. Have a great week.