

# Relationships in Exile

## Introduction

Good morning everyone, it's good to see all of you this morning. If you've got a Bible with you, go ahead and turn to the book of 1 Peter. We're going to be spending our time today in chapter 1 verse 22 through chapter 2 verse 3. If you don't have a Bible with you, there should be one in the seat in front of you or under your seat and if you're using one of our Bibles, the page number is going to be up on the screen. Also, if you don't personally own a Bible, please feel free to take one of those with you. We would love for you to be able to have access to one and that is our gift to you.

So really quickly, my name is Eric and I am a pastor in training here at City Church. I get to see a lot of your faces most weeks since I'm usually up here doing music, but I know I haven't had the chance to meet some of you and I would love to get to do that if you want to come talk after we're done today or anything like that. If you've been coming around for a little bit, you'll know that we are a few weeks into our series going through the book of 1 Peter. 1 Peter is a book all about how followers of Jesus relate faithfully to the people, systems, and structures in our world and what it looks like to live a life in exile as followers of Jesus. The first week, Kent talked about what it means to be in exile: living in a place where we don't always belong or fit in. And then he gave us this phrase that sums up how we should live in exile: that we should be a distinctive, influential presence. Then in week 2, Marcus spent some time talking about the hope that followers of Jesus have and then Kent touched last week on what holiness in exile looks like. In this section of the passage today, Peter now turns to talking specifically about *how* we should be that "distinctive, influential presence" in how we as followers of Jesus interact with other followers of Jesus.

So let's jump straight into the passage and then we'll spend our time today unpacking what the author is trying to communicate to their readers. We're going to look at chapter 1 starting in v. 22:

*[22] Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, [23] since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; [24] for*

*“All flesh is like grass  
and all its glory like the flower of grass.  
The grass withers,  
and the flower falls,  
[25] but the word of the Lord remains forever.”*

*And this word is the good news that was preached to you. [1] So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander. [2] Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation— [3] if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.*

## **Pivot**

So like I said just a second ago, this is where Peter gets really specific about how our **relationships with one another** are one way we should be a “distinctive, influential presence.” This is one of the pivotal ways we grow in maturity as followers of Jesus. He draws a straight line in these verses between our relationships with one another and our spiritual maturity. Now, that’s different than the way a lot of people think about spiritual maturity. Whether we would say it or not, I think a lot of us view spiritual maturity more as a sort of “personal piety”: how much a person reads the bible, prays, how spiritual they act or talk, how expressive they are in worship. And sometimes those are helpful too. But here, Peter is going to say that **spiritual maturity must necessarily work itself out into our relationships, or else it isn’t true spiritual maturity at all.** A person who is extremely spiritual in every way, but can’t seem to navigate their way through deep, meaningful, relationships in a healthy way, is not actually as spiritually mature as they let on. Hyper spirituality is far too often confused as spiritual maturity. Hyper spirituality is when people rely on spiritual-sounding language and actions to communicate maturity instead of letting the Holy Spirit shape their hearts to be more aligned with Him. Very different from spiritual maturity. Another way of looking at this is to think that the “vertical,” our relationship with God, always impacts the “horizontal,” the way we interact with one another. And similarly, the “horizontal” areas of our life always *reflect* the “vertical.” Our relationships with other followers of Jesus, or lack thereof, is a very telling litmus test of the genuineness of our relationship with God.

So it's not just that Peter makes a *big deal* out of this, it's that Peter *insists* that the way we navigate relationships with other followers of Jesus is one of the ways that the world will discover who God is. Jesus Himself says in John 13 that one of the primary ways people will know we are disciples of Jesus is *how we love one another.*

If Jesus Himself saying one of the primary ways people will see Him is the way His followers *love one another* is not enough of an emphasis on our relationships with one another, I don't know what is. So when we look at this passage, we see that the author is communicating 3 main ideas in this section. They are talking specifically about *what* followers of Jesus should do in relationship to one another, *how* we should do it, and then finally *why* we should do it.

## What?

The thing Peter wants us to do is found in v. 22: that we are to love one another sincerely and purely. The author says we have purified our souls by obedience to the truth *for a sincere brotherly love*. The greek word used here is *philadelphia* which basically translates to “the love of brothers.” And that's also where they got the idea to name the city in Pennsylvania, despite the fact that I think most of us know there didn't seem to be much brotherly love expressed in *West Philadelphia*, specifically by a couple of guys who were up to no good... (and started making trouble in my neighborhood). If you don't get that reference, feel free to look it up later and also you're welcome. But bringing things back, we are told this love described in 1 Peter is a natural and consequential outflowing of what we've experienced in our lives as believers.

Then the author commands us to “love one another.” Now, I think we've gotta talk here for just a bit. I'd say in general, most people think of love as an emotion: we love parents, we love sports ball. We love kids, we love coffee. We love jobs, we love hobbies, we *love* carbs (can I get an amen). I love my wife, I also love Indian food. The current Bachelor, Pilot Peter, just *loves* all 3 of the final women. But if you think about it, that wouldn't really make sense in the context of this passage. You can't command someone to have a certain emotion. I can't stand up here and say stuff like, “everyone feel happy! Now everyone feel sad.” That's not how emotions work. Life would be way easier and counselors would make way less money if you could command emotions that way.

When we see the command to “love one another,” it's not an emotional or warm fuzzy feeling we get around someone. I think a lot the time we *wish* that's what scripture means when it says to love other people. It would make it a lot easier to know who does and doesn't deserve our time and affection. No compatibility or warm fuzzies with this person? Move along to the next group of people. Difficult time relating to someone based on our preferences? Thank you, next. But that's not at all what this command is in

scripture. In fact it's the exact opposite. It's not a command to seek out easy, low-barrier relationships. It's a command to *prefer* relationships with other followers of Jesus.

It's an entirely different word in scripture. Peter isn't commanding an **emotion**, he's commanding an **action**. The word "agape" here is a command to *prefer* someone. A command to *deliberately* and *consistently* put others before yourself. The author is calling followers of Jesus to *actively* and *intentionally* and *selflessly* pursue this love of one another and depth of relationship with one another.

But Peter doesn't just stop at "love one another"—he says we should love one another "sincerely" and "earnestly." And these words are really important for us to get in order to understand where he goes in the rest of this passage. So the author is not just saying we are called to love one another. He is saying this should be sincere and unhypocritical. He's putting a ton of emphasis on the way followers of Jesus should love one another.

This depth of relationship probably sounds a little odd at the least, and the simple response is that's because honestly it is. So this is something that should make followers of Jesus *distinct* like Kent talked about in week 1. If you take a step back and look at the world in general, there's usually at least a thin layer of "fakeness" going on in interactions. Pretty much everyone tends to be just a little less than honest about who they are and about things in their life. There's generally some underlying insincerity. But in 1 Peter, followers of Jesus are being called to buck that trend and intentionally pull back that veil in our relationships with one another. Our relationships with each other should contrast with many relationships in the world around us.

## How?

So we know *what* the author is calling followers of Jesus to do, so that leads us to the question of *how* are we going to do this? What needs to take place in order for this to even be possible in our lives? On one hand, we need to put away or avoid all the things that are *opposite of* sincere brotherly love. Namely, the things in chapter 2 verse 1:

*So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander.*

Simple enough, right? Put this stuff away and we're Gucci. No problem! Just go ahead and stop using all of the things that feel like our most natural responses to protect and preserve ourselves and make us feel better about ourselves. Earlier we have the

command to love one another *without hypocrisy* and with *sincerity*. So in order to do that, Peter says, we need to “put away” everything that just reeks of *insincerity*.

I want to try to run through each of these quickly just to make sure we have some clarity on the kinds of things the author is talking about putting away or getting rid of and how they are all different manifestations of insincerity. Malice is basically defined as a strong distaste for a person, even when it's not outwardly expressed. So if you've ever been in a place where you can't stand to be around another follower of Jesus, but instead of confessing that and dealing with it, you just pretend to be fine with them and act super fake around them, that's malice. . Next he says deceit. It has the connotation of setting a trap for someone, or baiting them into a certain behavior. It's when we know a person's tendencies, we know what will set them off or hurt them, and we deliberately choose to lead them into that with our behavior. Then he says hypocrisy. I think a lot of us generally know what this means and it can show up in a lot of ways, but one way I think this comes up specifically as it relates to sincere relationships with other followers of Jesus is pretending to not be struggling when you are. Or what we call *partial confessions*. Or even saying things like, “I'll be praying for you,” and then you definitely don't. Those things are hypocrisy. Then he says to put away envy. This one is pretty sneaky and I think a lot of us have a tendency to wade into this at times without realizing it. Have you noticed that a lot of times we'll see something really good happen in someone else's life and we'll jokingly say stuff like, “I'm so jealous,” but we actually are? And we'll openly talk about how we wish we had the things in other people's lives, but we rarely bring it up as a confession. Sure, some people might actually just mean “I'm happy for you,” but I would encourage you to examine if there might be some envy in there. I also want to throw this out for this one in particular. Social media is an envy *machine*. Instagram wouldn't have a business model without it. Now, hear me say this: I'm not saying social media is inherently wrong or to not use Instagram. I use Instagram. I just think it's something to pay close attention to. Okay, I know this has been a lot and here's the last one he talks about: slander. This is when we say something about someone who isn't there with the goal of tearing that person down. When we try to color the way a person sees someone else in a negative way. You'll know this is happening when you feel yourself thinking the “win” in the conversation is that you've gotten someone to think about another person the same way you think about them. If you talk to third parties about a problem with someone's character more often than you talk to that person, that's slander, and it's insincere.

Now, I went through all those in detail because I think it's helpful for you to be able to spot them in yourself and in others. But before we get too lost in the weeds, here's the

point that Peter is making. He's simply saying that all of these things are examples of *insincere* behavior. He less wants you to go through your life with a checklist of these five things, and more wants to give us examples of *the types of things* that prevent sincere, brotherly love for one another. They're all examples of insincerity.

So the idea in the passage is that we are *putting off* something and we are *craving*, or *longing for*, something different instead. The author goes on to say it in verses 2 and 3:

*Like newborn infants, long for spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation--if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.*

So as graphic as newborn infants longing for milk is, I think it's actually a really helpful picture for spiritual maturity. I don't know if you've ever spent any time around an infant, but when they are hungry and longing for milk, make no mistake about it, they will let you know. Inconsolable is the word that comes to mind. But they want the one and only thing that will satisfy them: milk. If you put a delicious lobster dinner in front of them, they will continue crying. If you make funny faces at them to try and make them laugh, they will keep crying. If you do anything except give them the milk that they want, they will keep crying. But if you give them the one thing they want, they will stop crying. There's a certain "single-mindedness" about a hungry infant. They want one thing and one thing only. In the same way, we are told as followers of Jesus that our growth and maturity is contingent on our craving and consumption of this spiritual milk.

And there's one critical point to take away from this section that you absolutely cannot miss. Do you know what happens when you only give an infant milk once a week for an hour and a half? Do you think health and growth and maturity occurs under those circumstances? It sounds like lunacy when you carry out the analogy of an infant, but when you talk about our relationship with scripture and intimate relationships with other followers of Jesus, it sounds a lot like the average American Christian. We'll carve out a little time on a Sunday morning, maybe a couple hours for something extra midweek, and we'll try to act like that's what following after Jesus boils down to.

Here's a problem that I've seen. We've made a category in the South where you can be a "Christian" and not have a desire to spend time with or crave growth in relationship with Christ. To be completely blunt with all of you, I don't think that category exists in the Bible. This passage in 1 Peter is extremely clear in saying that "like newborn infants, [followers of Jesus should] long for spiritual milk." The author gives an incredibly helpful and convicting qualifier directly after, though. Look back at what he says. He says you

will *long for* or *crave* these things if, what? *If indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.* I want everyone to take a second and really think about that line. He's saying your life will be marked by wanting to do these things because as a follower of Jesus, you have tasted that He is good. But what I especially don't want anyone to miss is that he is also implying the opposite. If your life isn't marked by wanting to do these things, if you don't *long for* or *crave* these things, it's most likely because you haven't tasted it in the first place. It's far more likely that the created category we talked about just a second ago is more of a reality. But for followers of Jesus, we *crave* those things and grow in spiritual maturity through craving that spiritual milk.

## Why?

Now we've spent plenty of time talking about *what* this passage is calling followers of Jesus to do, and we've spent time talking specifically about *how* it's done, and those are both admittedly relatively straightforward. We should love sincerely, pretty direct. We should put away these things that reek of insincerity, that makes sense. These commands and lines of logic have been pretty clear. Kind of boils down to a  $1+1=2$  situation, you know? Straightforward, logical equation. That being said, I want to be very upfront in saying this next part feels a lot less clear and can be downright confusing. I will admit, this line of logic coming up is one of the most difficult parts of the passage to understand. Peter throws a bit of a curveball. Now that you understand  $1+1=2$ , let's talk real quick about some vector calculus. That being said, I'm going to try to make it as clear as possible so we can helpfully work through this together. Let's take a look back at the passage in chapter 1 verses 23-25:

*[23] since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; [24] for*

*“All flesh is like grass  
and all its glory like the flower of grass.  
The grass withers,  
and the flower falls,  
[25] but the word of the Lord remains forever.”*

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

A lot to work with there. So here's what we see: Peter says us loving one another honestly and earnestly, and inversely “putting away” all these various forms of *insincerity*

we talked about earlier, comes from knowing we have been born again, from an *imperishable* seed. He then reinforces that idea with a quote from Isaiah. This quote from Isaiah brings up this word “glory.” Glory is this idea having meaning, or significance, or importance. So any time we exaggerate or lie or bend the truth—any time we are insincere—it is almost always because the lie or the exaggeration makes us look better than the truth would. If I lie on my taxes, it’s because the lie makes me come out better than the truth might. If I lie on my resume, it’s because a potential employer might think better of me because of it. If I lie in my social media bio, it’s because people might think I’m better or more interesting than I am. These lies bring us *glory* that we wouldn’t have otherwise.

But there’s a big problem with that glory we’re seeking out and working towards: it *fades*. That’s exactly what Isaiah was talking about. He said, “all flesh is like grass, and *its glory* like the flower of the grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls...” That glory will never last. And hear me say this: if your primary goal in relationships with other people is to get glory from them, you will quickly find those relationships are going to be enormously shallow and fleeting. There will be no depth, because there is no vulnerability. **You can either love people, or you can use people, but you can’t do both.** It is not a glory that will last or be satisfying. Jesus talks about this kind of glory in an interaction with some of the religious leaders in John chapter 5 verse 44:

*“How can you believe, when you receive glory that comes from each other, rather than the glory that comes from the only God?”*

He goes straight to pointing out that we exchange the glory that comes from the only God for fleeting glory that comes from others. So the implication for all of this is if our relationships with each other are for the purpose of us receiving *glory*, and therefore built on insincerity, slander, hypocrisy, deception, all those things we talked about, it will take almost nothing for those relationships to crumble. The moment it feels like we aren’t able to get glory from someone, they become useless to us. The moment we are confronted on our sin for our good and growth or the second conflict arises, the response will just be to run. Instead of doing all that, followers of Jesus are called to something completely different because of who we are in Christ. So here’s a bit of an illustration to try to make this flow of logic we just talked about a little clearer. We’ll put it on the screen.

**Path #1:** Desire for “glory” from people → insincere, deceptive behavior → shallow, fleeting relationships



**Path #2:** God's acceptance through Jesus → sincere, brotherly love → lasting, fruitful relationships

So instead of pursuing this glory through insincerity in our relationships with others, we can build our lives on this “pure spiritual milk” that is our acceptance by God through Jesus. Through Jesus, God the Father looks at us as His children too. He sees us covered in the glory that we could never earn and never achieve outside of it being given to us in love. **Our awareness of our acceptance through Jesus has to be stronger than our desire to be accepted by others.**

Now, I know we've talked about a **lot** this morning. And maybe you're a bit overwhelmed by it all. Maybe you want to pursue these types of genuine, sincere relationships with other followers of Jesus, but you're not quite sure where to start.

The good news is that the Scriptures give us one, very straightforward way to begin pursuing honest and vulnerable relationships with each other: **confession**. One way to supercharge our relationships with sincerity is to begin regularly, consistently confessing our sins and our shortcomings to one another. Confession is the God-given way to cut out all deceit and hypocrisy from our lives. Confession shrinks the gap between who we pretend to be and who we are. And Jesus makes this all possible. We see this clearly in 1 John chapter 1, and I want to end here today. 1 John 1:7 says:

*But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his son cleanses us from all sin.*

Jesus' sacrifice on the cross made a way for us to be restored in right relationship with God. And through our relationship with God being restored, we now have the freedom to be restored to right relationship with one another without the need to seek out fleeting glory through insincerity. We have the freedom to put Christ's love on display through the way we *sincerely* love one another.

So I want to end with a question for you think on. And that's this: is your life marked by these things? Is your awareness of your acceptance by Jesus stronger than your desire to be accepted by people? If Jesus is precious to you—if the cross isn't just one place you get your value, but the place, then that will change how you live. It will change the way you love and pursue relationships with other followers of Jesus. It will be the motivating factor in putting away malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, slander. This will be one of the primary ways our city and our world will see and experience the love of Jesus.

## Passage:

*[22] Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, [23] since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; [24] for*

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