

KINGDOM CITIZENS

A Weekly Guide to Walking in Radical Devotion

Week 2

Scripture - 1 Peter 2:11-17

¹¹ Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul. ¹² Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

¹³ Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human authority: whether to the emperor, as the supreme authority, ¹⁴ or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. ¹⁵ For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people. Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as God's slaves. ¹⁷ Show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, honor the emperor.

Kingdom Citizens Living out a Strong and Gentle Difference

What does it mean to be a Kingdom Citizen in a world like ours? During a moment like ours?

While our moment is extremely unique, especially for those of us experiencing major events for the first time in our history—like global a pandemic—the truth is our world and our moment are not too terribly different from many

moments the Church has lived through. The Church has not simply survived such moments, it has thrived in these kinds of moments. The book of 1 Peter helps us gain clarity on what that looks like for us.

This is not your Home or Hope

The first thing Peter tells us in this passage is that we are not home. He calls us exiles and foreigners. We are here, but no longer from this place. Our citizenship is in heaven. This world is no longer our home in an ultimate sense. What would it look like if we truly believed that? How would we live during moments like ours if our ultimate citizenship was with Christ, in Christ and for Christ?

Peter tells us. It would mean that what is normal here is not normal for us. The desires of the flesh that were once our go-to for life, fulfillment and peace are no longer our go-to. The ordinary sins that seem so normal in this world would be like eating a meal that seems entirely strange to our taste buds and stomachs (I am thinking about Haggis from Scotland here...Google it). You don't have a taste for it, and it kind of makes you gag. That's the trajectory the Spirit has for us. The normal way of violence against enemies and hatred of those we oppose should be becoming bitter on your tongue and sour in your stomach. Meanwhile love and gentleness, which are entirely foreign entrées in our world, should start to become tasty and something we crave.

Peter doesn't stop with sin though. He also calls us to live a "good" life in the

world where we are. What does a good life look like?

First of all, a good life is one that is on display. Peter tells us that others should be able to see it and give thanks to God. Goodness should bring a piece of heaven to earth, and people notice heaven when it shows up.

We are supposed to live different lives in a different way. What I mean by that is Peter describes a WAY of living this difference. It is not by force or might; it is a gentle way.

Yet just because something is gentle does not mean it's weak, just the opposite.

The way of Jesus is the way of STRONG and GENTLE Difference

Miroslov Volf describes the way Kingdom Citizens are called to live like this:

“Peter striving for social change calls us to drop the myth of man-made revolution and do as much good personally and systemically as we can while we are here in the name of God and in the way of Jesus.”

We live our differences not by demanding or imposing God's Kingdom on society; we display it by doing good to all people, as good citizens and neighbors. We submit to human authority and show respect to all people. This is the gentle posture that Jesus lived and called us to.

But it is also strong. We are to fear ONLY God and honor the king. In Peter's day you feared the king above all else. Kings held the power of life and death in their hands. Kings were sovereign and ultimate, but in this new world Kingdom Citizens know that there is one King and His name isn't Caesar (or Biden or

Trump). His name is Jesus, and we fear Him with worship and reverence. We also *can* show honor to kings, presidents and human authority because we know they are not sovereign or ultimate. We know the true King, who for His own reasons has *allowed* them to sit on their temporary thrones.

This is the strong and gentle difference we are called to live. In many ways, this is very subversive. We won't bow down to the fear-mongering tactics of political power, and we won't bite down on that tasty bitter fruit of violence. Instead we will show respect to those in authority even if they live disrespectfully and even if we find very little in their character or policies that we can respect.

I realize that in our political climate, Peter's words sound like pie-in-the-sky wishful thinking. But I want us to remember that THIS IS HOW JESUS CONQUERED SIN, DEATH AND EVIL. The way of non-violence, the way of strong and gentle difference is THE way that God's Kingdom triumphs over evil.

The civil rights movement is a contemporary example of that. (If you have not had a chance to watch Rick's interview with Leroy Haynes, [go watch it](#). It's amazing.) As the authorities and systems oppressed Black men and women, the courageous people in the civil rights movement—many of whom were believers—prayed, sang and marched while they faced beatings, imprisonment and threats against their lives. There was nothing weak about that movement. It was supernatural in its strength, but it was nonviolent. Civil rights activists faced their oppressors with gentleness and respect despite the lack of respect and human dignity they were shown.

While some today might see the continued injustice done to people of color as a sign the civil rights movement didn't work, Rev. Dr. Leroy Haynes would disagree. Though we still have a far way to go, the world he sees now has radically changed. He points to the actual policy changes that came about because of the suffering love and strong, gentle difference modeled after a Jewish Rabbi who lived 2,000 years ago. Courageous men and women of color have followed His example despite the way of violence and hate set against them.

God's Word to us through Peter continues to be THE way for every Kingdom Citizen. We are called to live out the strong and gentle difference and respectful resistance to injustice through suffering love. Now is our moment to walk in the dust of our brothers and sisters who have gone before us as faithful witnesses and stewards of the Kingdom. They lived faithfully so that we might choose to live faithfully to our King and Kingdom right now. This is the way of Jesus, our King, who became victorious through suffering love and by whose Spirit we now love and live the difference.

3. As you compare the lists, consider your own past week. In what ways has the typical Portland/American dream of the good life distracted you from the one described by Peter, offered only in Jesus?
4. Repent together, naming the ways our imaginations, hopes, fears, finances, energy and time have been given over to the things of this world rather than the things of Christ. Bring these to Jesus and ask Him to replace our hearts' desires for the world with the desires for the Kingdom of God. He promises to be faithful. Be honest. Be loving. Be humble. And enjoy the love that God has for you and the world this week.

Discussion and Reflection

1. Create a list of 10 or fewer words you have found the typical Portlander/ American would consider to be included in the "good life".
2. Based on what you read in 1 Peter (read through the entire letter if you can!), how does Peter describe the good life as a follower of Christ?