

Think straight, love well, trust God \* 1 Peter

June 23, 2019 \* Langford Community Church \* Graham Gladstone

I can hardly believe it, but here we are at the end of our time in 1 Peter, thinking about what it means to be followers of Jesus in everyday life. I hope that it has been helpful for you; I've certainly enjoyed learning from Peter and thinking about what it means to be a disciple.

Now when you talk about discipleship, it can be a little difficult. 'Discipleship' is a pretty abstract concept and there really isn't anything else like it in the world to compare it to. It's a bit like an apprenticeship I guess, where you are modeling yourself after a mentor, but where an apprentice learns skills, a disciple learns values. Where an apprentice learns to DO certain things from his master, a disciple learns to BE more like their master. And so it can be kind of hard to get a handle on discipleship.

Which is one of the reasons that I like 1 Peter. Peter takes the abstract idea of being Jesus' disciple and lays it out in real world terms. Discipleship means being rooted in and motivated by a hope that will never fail; discipleship means being holy as God is holy; it means suffering for Jesus and still doing right and it means bearing witness in both word and deed.

Now those are all ideas that Peter takes a handful of verses to explore in detail, but there are some other things that Peter just says without really taking time to explain or explore. He just kind of says them and moves on to the next thing.

And that might lead you to believe that they're not really important, but the truth is – they really are. And I know that they are important because he keeps coming back to the same ideas, again and again. He repeats certain themes to highlight just how important they are. He's like the teacher who's taking their primary class to African Lion Safari who says – ok class, I want you to remember to keep your hands in the windows when we go by the lions, you need to make sure you stay hydrating and have a buddy and definitely keep your hands away from the lions and when we go to the llamas you can pet them but for goodness sakes, don't try to touch the lions. That's just how language works – we repeat the things that are really important.

So what I want to do today is gather up some of those repeated instructions and put them together as a kind of final overview of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. And so that means that we're going to explore three commands – think straight, love well and trust God.

So – the first one – think straight.

Now, I assume that you know that repetition highlights important ideas, but I want to do a little exercise just to drive it home. So here's a poem - what point does Shel Silverstein make when he says –

There's too many kids in this tub  
There's too many elbows to scrub  
I just washed a behind that I'm sure wasn't mine  
There's too many kids in this tub.

What does Shel Silverstein want you to know? There's too many kids in this tub. You're good at this. Here's another – what the main idea?

Hey, I just met you and this is crazy  
But here's my number, so call me maybe  
It's hard to look right at you baby  
But here's my number, so call me maybe  
Hey I just met you and this is crazy  
But here's my number, so call me maybe  
And all the other boys try to chase me  
But here's my number, so call me maybe

What's Carly Rae Jepsen asking us to do? Call her maybe. One more:

~~13 Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed. (1Pe 1:13 NIV).~~

~~7 The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray. (1Pe 4:7 NIV).~~

8 Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour (1Pe 5:8 NIV).

What do you think - what does Peter want us to do? He wants us to be self-controlled and sober-minded. He wants us to think straight.

Peter knows that our tendency as human beings is to lead with our emotions, to let fear get the best of us, to blow things out of proportion. He knows how easy it is to take a simple situation and imagine all the worst-case scenarios that could unfold.

The problem with that way of thinking though is that it leaves God entirely out of the equation. Sure, you may be facing a difficult situation, but the God of the universe is on your side. Yes, someone may have cut you down or insulted you, but the God who loves you unconditionally is there to build you up and remind you that you are valuable because you are His.

And this is why Peter tells us to be self-controlled and sober-minded in our thinking, so we will see the word as it really is, intentionally evaluating all of our circumstances in light of the hope that we have in God.

We get ourselves into a lot of trouble when we as Christians react emotionally or irrationally, or without much thought to how God's power and love changes a situation. Instead, we need set our hope fully on the grace when have in Jesus and let the knowledge of who God is shape our every thought.

Let me give you a really personal example. When I learned that dad had cancer, my first response was almost entirely emotional. My thoughts were reeling. And go figure, right? It was a real shock. And I cried. A lot. And there's nothing wrong with that.

But before long, I started thinking carefully about what I was doing. I got thinking 'this is how I'm reacting – but is this reaction consistent with what I know about God?' It's natural to feel a degree of fear and uncertainty, but that fear and uncertainty does not have the last word in my life. God does. And He will never fail us or forsake us. His plans are to prosper us and not to harm us. When I reined in

my thoughts and feelings, when I started to think straight, those truths about God started to reshape how I thought about dad and this cancer. It took effort, but before long, I started to think about it all in view of God's sovereignty and mercy.

Sure, any trial can be scary if we face it alone. But we don't face it alone. We have the Creator of the universe, the One who tenderly created us, who loves us and gave His only Son for us – He will not leave us alone. When we see things in light of Him, it changes everything.

And what's more, when we think straight, we are able to actively invite God into our circumstances. Look at that second verse – 4:7 – Peter says – 'Be sober-minded, so that you can pray!' I have to admit that in the past, when I've let my thoughts get out of control, the last thing I think to do is pray – which is a real problem, because prayer is our number one way of reaching the ONE person who could do anything about our circumstances.

And then Peter takes it a step further in 5:8– the devil would LOVE for you to forget about God – as you're dealing with difficulty – he's prowling around like a lion, but when we exercise self-control over our thought lives, he goes hungry and WE commune with the most high God. We need to actively slow down our thinking and let the hope that we have in God define what we are facing. We need to think straight.

We need to think straight; we also need to love well. Here's what Peter says about that -

22 Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart (1 Peter 1:22).

~~23 For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.  
(1Pe 1:22-23 NIV).~~

8 Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble. (1Pe 3:8 NIV). And then 4:10

8 Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. (1Pe 4:8 NIV).

It's clear from these verses that discipleship involves loving another doesn't it? And I think we could summarize it by saying this – we need to love one another as God has loved us – deeply and forgivingly.

Let me show you why I say that. Look at verse 22 - Peter says – listen – disciples of Jesus, you need to love one another deeply, from the heart... "Because – v. 23 - 'you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.'

This call to love others hangs on the fact that God loved us first. Because He loved us, He caused us to be born again by the will of God. Yes, Peter recognizes – when we believe and when we do the work of obeying the will of God, then we are inevitably going to become more pure and more loving, but it all traces back to the reality that God loved us first. And if we are going to live in light of that love, then it just makes sense that we would love others the way that God has loved us – deeply and forgivingly.

That idea of loving deeply is captured neatly in the other words that Peter uses to describe love – love that is sincere, love that is from the heart, love that is sympathetic and compassionate and genuine.

Peter says that if you are a disciple of Jesus, there is no room for hypocritical love (= 'sincere love' of v. 22) that pretends to care but really doesn't. If God has loved you, then you should love others fully and completely and without reservation.

And one of the ways that we can tell if our love is indeed full and complete and without reservation is by asking whether or not we are willing to forgive. God loved us DEEPLY and God loved us forgivingly. He chose not to hold our sins against us but to forgive us and embrace us as beloved friends. Do we love others like that?

1 Peter 4, verse 8 – Peter says – Above all, (like – if you don't remember anything else, at least remember this) love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sin. Though sin may be big or small, insignificant or life-changing, there is no sin that love cannot be overcome.

Jesus asks us to deal with sin in the way that He did; not with opposition or vengeance, but with forgiveness and love. He asks us not to harbour bitterness towards others or hold grudges against them, but to instead break the cycle of anger and retaliation and extend the love of God to those who have wronged.

We love the way that God loved us – deeply and forgivingly. We are called to love well.

And I think it's really interesting how 1 Peter 3:8 is structured – in the NIV, it says, 8 Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble. (1Pe 3:8 NIV).

Those are all commands and it's reasonable to understand them as commands for disciples who have experienced God's love – but here's the thing. When Peter wrote them down – he wrote them as adjectives – as descriptive words.

So in a sense, they are commands, but they're also standards by which to measure ourselves. Am I prone to living in harmony with others, or do I find that I'm more often than not at odds with others. "It's just more fun to pick a fight? Am I sympathetic to others, really entering into their joy or their pain, or am I really doing my best to keep my distance? Am I more likely to love someone like a brother, so that I feel real familial connection with, or clinically with a sense of detached interest? Am I compassionate deep down in my bones? And am I humble, willing to put the interests of others before my own?

That's what it means to love well.

So as disciples, we think straight, we love well and finally we trust God.

Now, admittedly, Peter doesn't repeat this idea the same way that he does the other two, but it's a really important idea, not just to 1 Peter, but faith generally, and so I wanted to include it.

Look at chapter 5, in the middle of verse 5 –

All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

6 Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.

Now at first glance, it may seem that Peter is focused on humility here, but at the heart of this passage, there's an even deeper question – who do you trust in life? Who do you lean on?

There are a lot of people in this world who lean entirely on themselves. They don't give a whit about what God says but instead believe that they know best. They're the centre of their own universe, the most important person in the world, and they act as though they need help from no man and no God.

They call that 'self-sufficiency' but God calls that 'pride.' They are rejecting the help and wisdom of the God who gave them life and as a consequence, God opposes them.

I guess technically you could argue here that this is where the repetition comes in – that 'God opposes the proud' part is actually from Proverbs 3:32; James says the same thing in his letter (James 4:6) and Jesus Himself says something very similar - For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted (Matthew 23:12).

God will humble the proud, but exalt the humble.

In other words, God opposes those who trust themselves, and lifts up those who trust in Him. He humbles the proud but exalts those who humbly admit their need for Him. And that's us as disciples, isn't it? We acknowledge that we don't have all the answers, that we DO need help – and we trust that God will do right by us, in light of His love and wisdom.

Peter takes that reality and applies it in two ways – trusting God, we to humble ourselves before each other and before God.

Look at verse 5 – Since God gives grace to the humble... All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another...

Peter knows how easy it is for us to get caught up in our own hype and to think we're better than others, and so he shares with us a lesson that he learned as Jesus' disciple – trusting God to take care of your needs, humble yourselves to take care of others. Literally he says 'Clothe yourself with humility' and I expect that Cranfield was right when he said that Peter was thinking here of the last supper. He saw Jesus 'clothe Himself with humility' – tying on a towel and doing the work of a servant; Peter says – just as Jesus did that, you act with humility towards others. That will go a long way towards loving others well – as we saw in the last point.

So, trusting God, we humble ourselves before each other, and in addition to that, we humble ourselves before God. We refuse to manipulate our circumstances. We lean not on our own understanding. We humble ourselves under God's mighty hand knowing that in His good time He will lift us up.

And all of this ultimately leads to verse 7 –

7 Cast all your cares on him because he cares for you (1Pe 5:5-7 NIV).

I remember the first time that I really felt the power of that verse. I was in France, fairly early in my stay, and starting to feel a little overwhelmed. There I was in another country, in another language,

trying to find a job and starting to feel homesick – not at my wit’s end, but almost there – And then in my Bible reading I came across this verse.

Cast all your cares on Him, because He cares for you. God cares for you. You are a treasure to Him. In Jesus’ death on the Cross, He has already proved how fully and completely He cares for you – you can cast your cares into His capable hands – resisting the urge to grab them back – knowing that God is deeply invested in your well-being. When I realized that, I felt my burden lighten – not just because I knew that God would take care of me, but because I realized just how much God cared for me.

Friends you are beloved by God, a treasure to Him – cast all your cares on Him because He cares for you.

We think straight, we love well and we humbly trust in our gracious God.

When I began this series six weeks ago, I had a couple of goals. First, I wanted to help you to think about what a disciple is. What does it mean to be a disciple? What does a disciple do?

I hope that this time in 1 Peter has helped with that – to understand in real life terms what it means to be an everyday disciple. Looking back over 1 Peter, I think we can say that a disciple of Jesus is born again to a living hope, committed to holiness as God is holy, willing to suffer for Jesus and still do right, eager to show and tell the goodness of God, fixed and focused on thinking straight, loving well and trusting God. That’s what a disciple does - and helping you to think about what a disciple of Jesus is was my first goal.

My second goal was this – to help you to think about yourself as a disciple of Jesus.

We all wear a lot of hats in our lives; we’re moms and dads and husbands and wives and employees and employers and retirees and coaches and counsellors and neighbours – but the one identity that should shape all the rest is your identity as a disciple of Jesus.

If you are a committed Christian, then you are a disciple of Jesus. There’s no two tier Christianity – like, the all in option, or just Sunday morning - if you are a believer, then you are a disciple of Jesus – Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday... God has given you new birth into a living hope which will never fail. God is keeping you through every storm of life so that you will one day stand before Him and dwell with Him forever.

Let that motivate all that you do in this life, knowing what a treasure you are to God.

Think straight. Love well. Trust God.

## BENEDICTION

NIV 1 Peter 1:1 Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To God's elect, strangers in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia,

2 who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance.

(1Pe 1:1-2 NIV).