

1 Peter:

Whole-Life Discipleship

for the

Whole of the Exile

A Discipleship Curriculum for Those

Serving and Leading in the Public Square.

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Video #1 / Introduction [Insert QR]

[Note The videos are separate tools that will review, calibrate, and direct the participant on the journey (5 minutes each).]

How to Use this Study

The mission of Faithful Presence is to provide whole-life discipleship in the whole of life for the whole of the public square. What is “whole-life discipleship”? It is equipping servants and leaders to flourish as they participate in Christ’s mission of making all things new through intentional spiritual, emotional, relational, vocational, Intellectual, cultural, and evangelical formation. This book is written for those of you who are leaders and servants in the public square, whether you are positioned at the highest levels of government or are just starting out. It is also written for churches that minister to people involved in the public square and for congregations seeking the best path forward to engage public life.

The purpose of this 14-week study is not to get us to ask the question, “What would Peter do?” Since, as the Gospels reveal, the answer to that question will typically be the wrong one. Conversely, it is not to get us to ask, “How do we put ourselves on the high side of the earthly power differentials we find ourselves in?” Rather, the purpose of this study is to examine how God, in the process of conforming us into the image of his Son, makes us disciples who live in their true identity as a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, yet also as sojourners and exiles able to proclaim the excellencies of the one who transferred us from darkness into the kingdom of the light.

We might call this whole-life discipleship, in the whole of life, for the whole of the public square. Jesus clarifies that the role of disciples is to interact with the world and culture around them as “salt” and “light” (see Matt. 5:13–16). But this idea is not new; the purpose of God’s people has always been to bless the world. To help bring situational specificity to the roles of servants and leaders, the study’s goal is to connect knowledge and understanding with evangelical (read: missional act of proclaiming the gospel, not a political identity) action.

Perhaps you’ve read Bible studies before that focus on the meaning of Scripture but say little about your current context. Or perhaps you’ve used books designed for spiritual formation but they don’t dig deeply into the Bible. This book has a different format: each lesson focuses on a single segment of 1 Peter, proceeding in order through Peter’s letter, but is divided into seven parts to create a weekly liturgy. The intent is that the repetition across each week, as well as the inclusion of practical commentary that is tied to professional life in the public square, will function as a formative element for all who read it.

Days 1–3 of each lesson will focus on the same single section of Scripture, developing a theme. Each of these daily lessons will involve three to four pages of reading, examining a unique aspect of the week’s passage, followed by two to three application questions specific to that day’s lesson. Each of these lessons should take around 25 minutes to complete.

Day 4 will provide an opportunity for readers to connect their insights from the passage to their own discipleship process. On *Day 4*, readers look for aspects of the passage that speak to their Spiritual, Emotional, Relational, Vocational, Intellectual, Cultural, and Evangelical formation (i.e., their “SERVICE”), with guidance provided via focused questions. The goal here is not to make connections every week to each of the seven facets of whole-life discipleship, though that may happen. Instead, the goal is to ask the Lord to reveal which of those seven facets that particular passage speaks to for the individual. Some weeks it may only be one or just a few, other weeks four or more. Don’t worry if you are heavy in one or two areas at the beginning, as they will more than likely even out by the end. If not, perhaps God wants to really work with you in just a few areas. Regardless, the aim of examining these facets is to allow the Word of God to permeate readers’ hearts and minds more deeply.

Day 5 shifts the focus from internal formation to external application by asking questions that will be uniquely answered in readers' unique contexts. These are the four questions of Faithful Presence:

- What is *good* that requires encouragement?
- What is *broken* that needs repair?
- What is *missing* that awaits creation?
- What is *evil* that demands opposition?

Of course, these questions beg another, even more significant question: "How can we derive knowledge of, let alone a consensus about, the good, the broken, the missing, and the evil?" Hopefully, this study will offer tools for addressing that question as well. Because the primary focus of Faithful Presence is on those serving and leading in the public square and equipping the local church for gospel-centered participation in the public sphere, the illustrations and applications of this study are centered on political life and government-sector vocations.

Day 6 places the reader in the role of a liturgist, combining what is true with what to do and asking God to bless us, protect us, vindicate us, and use us as we participate in his mission of making all things new. The weekly liturgy prompt asks readers to write their own prayers, incorporating what they have learned from the weekly passage, insights from the application questions, areas where the Holy Spirit has done work in the seven facets of whole-life discipleship, or petitions for courage in applying the four questions. Short examples help readers get started, or they can chart their own path.

Day 7, we rest and worship with God's people.

A Biblical-Theological Approach

This curriculum is focused on equipping servants and leaders working in the public square as they participate in Christ's mission of making all things new. Whole-life discipleship is not primarily about improving one's systematic understanding of doctrine, nor deep exegetical work to uncover the true meaning behind the text—though it is certainly centered on Scripture. This curriculum is designed to enhance readers' biblical hermeneutic competency. If those words are unfamiliar, they simply mean cooperating with the author's intent to advance your understanding of what it means to love God and love your neighbor. As theologian Stephen O. Presley says in *Biblical Theology in the Life of the Early Church: Recovering an Ancient Vision*,

"Biblical interpretation is not about mastering methods but about careful catechesis in the patterns of faith and practice within a Christian community."

In pursuing that end, this curriculum is Scripture-heavy and refers repeatedly to the same passages within the whole of Scripture, especially within the epistle of I Peter. This is intended to keep the reader fully centered in the message Peter intended without getting lost in a single passage or verse. By the end of your time in 1 Peter, the flow of thought should be as familiar as specific texts.

Assessing Progress

We intend that over the course of your engagement with this whole-life discipleship curriculum, you have experienced “*the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ*” (I Pet. 1:2) in tangible and measurable ways. Whole-life discipleship takes place over our whole lives. The Christian life, as this curriculum will explore, is a long obedience in the same direction, and, at times, the scenery does not change. During those times, it’s hard to tell if you are making any forward progress. But that does not mean that the process of sanctification does not have an effect.

Faithful Presence partners with Discipleship Dynamics to bring a level of assessment to your investment in this curriculum. As their website states,

“Every question in the assessment is tied to one of five key areas of whole-life discipleship—giving you a complete, actionable picture of spiritual maturity. These dimensions were identified through biblical reflection, pastoral experience, and academic analysis: Personal Relationship with God [Spiritual], Personal Wholeness [Emotional], Relationships with Others [Relational], Vocation and Calling [Vocational], Engagement with the Church and World [Intellectual, Cultural, and Evangelical].

Participation in the assessment is completely optional, and this curriculum in this book is not built around the tool. We do believe, however, that this assessment tool provides beneficial and encouraging insight into the work of God in your life over the course of the next 14 weeks. The assessment tool is taken once before starting the curriculum and again after completion. The initial and final results are confidential only to you (although you are welcome to share them with us).

We believe in this assessment so much that one of its creators, Dr. Charlie Self, is a member of our Board of Advisors. Additionally, to encourage participation, Faithful Presence has special pricing for those using this curriculum. The QR code [\[Insert QR\]](#) in the side column will take you to an information page.

May the Lord bless your time over the next 14 weeks!

Rev. Michael Langer
Founder & President, Faithful Presence

Part I: The Paradox of Living as Elect Exiles

Lesson 1: 1 Peter 1:1–2 “The Paradox of Our Identity”

Day 1: A Transformed Identity

1 Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ,

To those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, 2 according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood:

May grace and peace be multiplied to you. 1 Peter 1:1–2

In the opening words of his letter, Peter attempts to move people to a place where they appreciate how two things that seem not to go together at all are, in fact, ideally suited together. Christians of the first century and all Christians in every century experience together this paradox: we are *elect exiles*.

The Reese’s Peanut Butter Cup has always been one of my favorite candy bars because, as their old ad says, it combines two great tastes that taste great together—chocolate and peanut butter. When you often experience two things that go great together, everything in the world seems right. But consider your reaction to experiencing two things that don’t go well together, like Cap’n Crunch Crunch Berries and sardines. No matter how much you might like them individually, there is just no way to get to a place where you can say they go together.

Living with a paradox like this—whether trivial or profound!—can be confusing and frustrating.

The Nature of Our Paradox

Peter’s audience is “*the elect exiles of the Dispersion*,” a people trying to figure out how these two realities go together. If they were the elect, then how could they be exiled? If they were exiled, were they really elect?

Even though Peter’s letter had a specific audience at the time of writing, its message is timeless. It is timeless because, for those of us who are Christians living in the West, we are beginning to experience our Christianity much more as cultural aliens in exile than has been the case for quite some time. While that results in us feeling increasingly uncomfortable, it also reminds us that we are indeed aliens, not just culturally, but as people living in two kingdoms. As we come face to face with the reality of being *elect exiles*, we find ourselves either living in confusion and frustration or in grace and peace.

Although an initial question might be “*How could this be?*” the better question is perhaps “*Why must this be?*” This question is critical to our lives as Christians because until we understand why we are elect exiles and why these two realities go together, we will spend most of our lives living in confusion and frustration—a far cry from the grace and peace that is ours in Christ.

As elect exiles, we have been given a transformed identity. When Peter uses the word *elect* to address his audience, he is making an earth-shattering statement because he is addressing both Jews AND Gentiles—two other groups that, in the ancient world,

were assumed *not* to go together. Peter is calling the Gentile converts from Rome the *elect*. He is putting them on the same footing as the historic covenant people of God. For the original hearers, this too was an affront to their expectations and could be received either with consternation or gladness.

The Trinity at Work

Addressing these *elect exiles*, Peter then brings the total weight of the Trinity to bear to make his point. He first announces that their new identity comes “*according to the foreknowledge of the Father.*” When we talk about the foreknowledge of God, we are not talking about God looking out and knowing what will happen; instead, we are talking about God appointing what will occur. These people are elect because God intended it. This exact phrase is used in Acts 2:23, where Luke records Peter’s sermon explaining how Jesus Christ ended up being crucified. “*This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.*”

Peter continues by highlighting that it is not just the Father who has a role in establishing this new identity; the Holy Spirit also plays a part. He writes that they are elect “*by the sanctification of the Spirit.*” This mirrors what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6:11: “*And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.*” Peter wants them to understand that the Holy Spirit of God has set them apart and made them the Holy People of God. That is their new identity!

More than just the Father and the Holy Spirit have established their new identity; it is also established by the Son. Peter writes that they are elect “*for obedience to Jesus Christ and the sprinkling of his blood.*” This is language that is strongly evocative of covenants, such as the words of Exodus 24:

And Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and half of the blood he threw against the altar. Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it in the hearing of the people. And they said, “All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient.” And Moses took the blood and threw it on the people and said, “Behold the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words.” (vv. 6–8)

Jesus Christ has sprinkled all of them with his blood. Therefore, they are all his covenant people because these are the people for whom Jesus gave his life as an offering to set them free from their sins.

This framework of the Trinity shows that the way that we move from confusion and frustration and towards grace and peace in our lives as elect exiles is to embrace the new identity that has been given to us (1) *according to the foreknowledge of God the Father*, (2) *in the sanctification of the Spirit*, (3) *for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood*. This identity isn’t transient or uncertain: it is grounded in and grows from the work of our eternal, faithful God.

Identity and the Public Square

So, in effect, Peter starts his letter by saying, “*Now hear this: You are chosen. The Father chose you, the Spirit has made you a holy people, and the Son has sprinkled you with his blood.*” This means that we can live in our current cultural moment and every other moment as people who are valued, loved, and forgiven. When a culture, your colleagues, or your friends tell you that you are not loved, they are wrong. When the voice inside your head tells you that you are dirty and unworthy and cannot be forgiven, that is a lie. When the election results appear to say no one cares about you and that you are unwanted, that is false. No matter what anyone communicates to you, your identity is that of an elect exile, loved by the triune God.

The implications for the public square are as weighty as they are widespread.

Peter's words expose our temptation to place secondary identities (perhaps titles such as Congressman, Secretary, Chief of Staff, Legislative Director, and Program Manager, or other aspect of our reputation) above our primary identity. Through Peter's opening words, we are reminded that elections and appointments are transitory and subject to dismissal based on shifting demographics.

Elected officials are often reminded that they won because of who they marketed themselves as and what they promised to deliver. In ironic similarity to Exodus 24, elected officials promise "to do all that I have said I will do." Here, they find themselves briefly on the God-side of the covenant-making ceremony. However, their fate is inevitably the same as it was on the other side—failure to deliver on *all* they have promised! Here, exile can mean losing office or being relegated to a powerless committee position.

Appointed officials are reminded that they were chosen because of their resume and who they knew. Yet, as soon as the administration changes, they will be summarily exiled back to where they came. Even those within Capitol Hill offices understand what it is like to be exiled to some position where you are simply being "kept around." The same is true for someone appointed to lead a certain project or team.

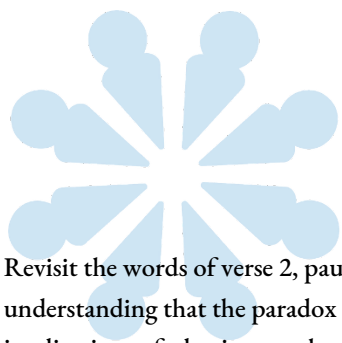
Even for the electorate, we can become over-identified with our own party affiliation to the point that we think our candidate losing is a referendum on us and what people think of us, and perceive that we have been exiled to the margins of society. Even though the voting results are a referendum on the preferences of the American people for particular political positions, which we may hold, they are never a referendum on our value in Christ. This is where being an exile—already, regardless of election results—can actually be an advantage. When we recognize and embrace our identity as exiles from this world, we know how to live within other forms of exile.

Thankfully, we are predestined by the Father out of his love for us, not because of what we have done or how we can make him look.

Application Questions

In what sense do you experience “exile” in your daily life? What is the difference, specifically for you, between being exiled in your current position and being an exile “*according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood?*”

How does reflecting upon election in the public square versus election by God shape how you think about yourself? Where does this expose places for growth in your spiritual formation?



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Revisit the words of verse 2, pausing to consider what Peter is communicating about each person of the Trinity. How does understanding that the paradox of living as an *elect-exile* is superintended by the Trinity impact the way you think about the implications of elections or the professional dynamics and challenges you are currently facing?

Day 2: A Transformed Perspective

1 Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ,

To those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, 2 according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood:

May grace and peace be multiplied to you. 1 Peter 1:1–2

Back in 2015, Cecilia Bleasdale posted something on Facebook that caused millions of people around the world to question the very nature of reality. Ms. Bleasdale was looking for social media assistance on a dress she was considering purchasing for her daughter's wedding. So, she took a picture of the dress and posted it to Facebook to get people's perspectives on the dress.

However, what followed came to be known as [The Great Dress Debate](#) [Insert QR]. Rather than receiving yes and no votes, the question quickly spilled over from Facebook to Tumblr, Twitter, and Instagram and produced the trending hashtags #whiteandgold and #blueandblack. Somehow, in either an optical oddity of computer screens or a fantastic algorithm, people saw the dress as different colors. The perspective she sought was, in fact, complicated by people's perspective on the nature of the dress itself.

As we lean into the paradox of our identity as *elect exiles*, we realize that our transformed identity comes with the consequence of a transformed perspective on the very nature of reality.

A Transformed Perspective

Let's briefly return to what we considered on Day 1 about our status as *elect exiles*. Very real questions might arise when we grasp the reality that God has chosen us, yet we live in exile: *"Why am I exiled? Why am I not with God right now? Why am I living in such a messed-up world? Why isn't everything around me awesome and uplifting?"* Those are great questions that sometimes lead to even deeper, more personal questions. *Should we understand our exile as punishment for something that we have done? Is God mad at us?*

The book of Genesis reveals that we live in exile from a perfect relationship with God because of the Fall. But we should not understand our current exile as punishment in the same sense as the Exile that God's people experienced in Babylon. Our exile is simply the reality of the church as we await the return of Christ. Peter wants his readers to know that their exile is just as much a part of the foreknowledge of God as their being elect. In fact, it says that it is for our obedience to Christ. Speaking grammatically, the words *elect*, and *exile* are adjectives in apposition, not opposition. That means that they are to be considered parallel concepts. As we read this opening passage, *elect* and *exile* should be understood together.

The movie E.T. is part of Americana (if you are under 40 and your parents did not prioritize this film in your adolescent formation, then you might ask them why they did not value your cultural formation.) In the Spielberg classic, a cute and very merchandisable alien is "left behind" on Earth—forgotten, accidentally. The movie is spent with the resident alien realizing he was not meant to live on earth and journaling a group of teenagers' efforts to help him "phone home" so they can return to take him to the planet where he could flourish. The plight of E.T., a story of accidental abandonment, is not how we should understand our exile.

Peter wants the reader to know they have not been forgotten or abandoned by God. In fact, this passage is about shifting the reader's perspective from one they may have reluctantly adopted to one that will *change* how they live in *the world*—because they are embracing it with joy and hope.

Encouraging his readers to embrace a transformed perspective on their identity is another part of how Peter moves the reader from confusion and frustration to a place of living in grace and peace. He wants them to welcome this new perspective on their present situation. It is okay to ask “why” when it is intended to communicate to God, “I am finite, and I do not understand why this is the case.” It is *not* okay to ask “why” when it means, “How dare you?” The latter perspective moves God out of the seat of Creator and us into the position of judge. That’s a perspective we have struggled with since the Garden.

Our present situation, whatever it is, exists “*according to the foreknowledge of the Father, and the sanctification of the Spirit, and for obedience to Christ.*” In all situations, we are both elect and exile. This is not a punishment, but a gift.

Perspective and the Public Square

How might this apply to a challenging job environment? It is one thing to say, “Lord, I do not like this position that I am in. I do not understand the position that I am in.” You might even say, “I am suffering in the position that I am in.” However, when we don’t think there is any rhyme or reason to our situation, we often respond by acting out of confusion and frustration, perhaps even anger. When we act out of confusion and frustration, situations rarely improve, and the church’s testimony is diminished.

In the United States, elections are always behind us and before us. In recent years, elections have often engaged by Christians in America who believe that the culture has exiled them rather than God. Many of those same Christians believe that our cultural exile is occurring because we have not done enough to honor God’s commandments in this country. Some move from that conclusion to the belief that we need to “win this nation back,” and the election is where that can happen once and for all. Other Christians think that this approach is at best naïve and at worst myopic or self-serving. They may resist the idea that elections really matter or that the public square is where the church should engage. Or, they choose to resist elected officials who don’t align with what they regard as Kingdom values.

The reasons for the decline of American morality and Christians’ cultural exile are as many as they are profound. Yet regardless of one’s perspective on national politics, a primary response to addressing that issue (and I believe the best one) is for the church to recommit itself to *whole-life discipleship*. Discipleship that takes seriously spiritual, emotional, relational, vocational, Intellectual, cultural, and evangelical formation. Christians in America would feel less anxiety, frustration, and confusion, and be more equipped to live in godly wisdom, if they were centered on the truth that they are elect (chosen) “*according to the foreknowledge of the Father, and the sanctification of the Spirit, and for obedience to Christ.*” As it turns out, that is the same reason we are experiencing exile.

We must also distinguish between our current cultural exile and the exile that Peter writes of—the fact that his readers are not currently with God and that what has already been promised has not yet been experienced in its fullness. Both types of exile are difficult and produce suffering.

Peter wants readers to understand that their present circumstance is according to the foreknowledge of the Father –a Father who loves them so much that he gave his only Son for them that they might not perish but have everlasting life. In our present situation, we must rest in the reality that it is in the sanctification of the Spirit that we live each and every day—no matter how confusing or frustrating it may seem. Finally, we must have the mindset of learning obedience to Christ, who does not call us to

change the world but to change how we live in the world. And by the sprinkling of his blood, we are equipped to do so.



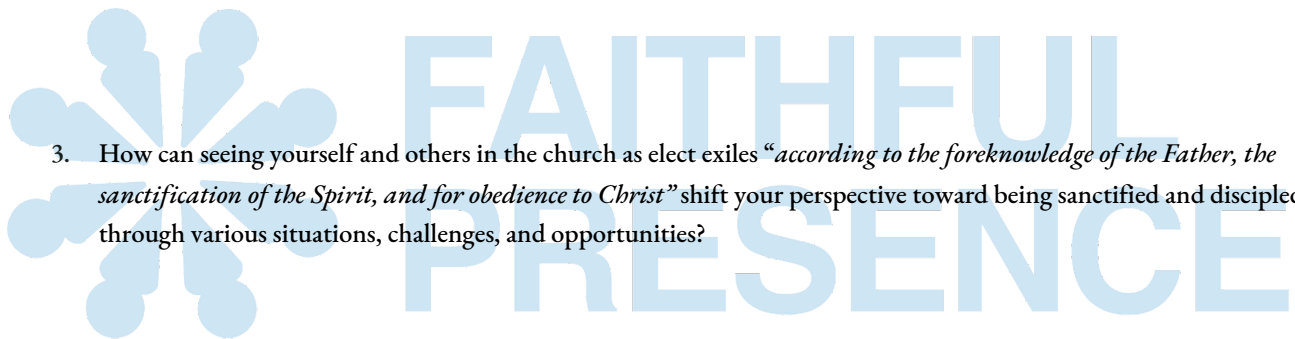
FAITHFUL PRESENCE

Application Questions

1. What kind of connotations (feelings, attitudes, ideas, etc.) do you associate with the word “elect”? What about “exile”? Try to list at least three associations for each, whether in church or other contexts.

2. What situations do you find yourself viewing from the perspective of *elect*? What situations do you find yourself viewing from the perspective of *exile*? What tends to differentiate how you see those situations?

3. How can seeing yourself and others in the church as elect exiles “*according to the foreknowledge of the Father, the sanctification of the Spirit, and for obedience to Christ*” shift your perspective toward being sanctified and discipled through various situations, challenges, and opportunities?



Day 3: A Transformed Mission

1 Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ,

To those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, 2 according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood:

May grace and peace be multiplied to you. 1 Peter 1:1–2

Peter names the first paradox of the early Christians of Asia Minor—their identity as elect exiles—to lay the foundation for the rest of his letter. Their perspective on this new reality is critical for them to understand and embrace their new mission.

Peter’s goal is to ground his hearers in the understanding that their present circumstance is “*according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ.*” We, too, must rest in the fact that our present and future situations are “*according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ*”—no matter how confusing or frustrating they may seem.

Questions and Answers

Now that he’s laid the groundwork, Peter is ready to answer the money questions of life: “Why am I here?” and “How shall we then live?” Put more succinctly, “What is my mission?” The answer Peter gives is at once simple and complex. The mission of the church is what it has always been: to experience and extend the grace and peace that come to us through the life-changing love of Jesus Christ.

If we, like the Christians of the first century, are elect exiles “*according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience*” to Jesus Christ, then obedience to Christ becomes missional for us as well. We must have the mindset of learning obedience to Christ, who calls us to experience and extend the grace and peace that come to us through his life-changing love.

If that statement is correct, then we are saying that our mission is not *to change the world* but *to change how we live in the world*. This is a critical shift in perspective and one that we must embrace if we are going to properly participate in Christ’s mission of making all things new. Peter’s greatest desire is for the church to be both the primary *recipient* of grace and peace *and* the primary *extender* of that grace and peace to those around them!

As Christians, we are called to receive and multiply grace in our lives, in our churches, and in the communities in which we have been placed. The phrase “grace and peace” may seem like it’s only serving as an opening salutation—language that is just serving a social function. But I do not think that is what Peter has in mind for the reader. As we have already stated, the purpose of his letter is to move the elect yet exiled readers from lives of confusion and frustration to lives centered on grace and peace. In fact, Peter is quick to say, “*Grace and peace be multiplied to you*” because, for the mission that they are called to, they will need grace and mercy in abundance.

Peter calls the church to experience the transformation that he experienced when he more fully grasped the grace and mercy of Jesus, which moved him from sword-wielding showboater to pastoral leader. Despite frequently outshining the other disciples

in his willingness to venture into unknown territory, Peter always managed to follow his successes in obedience with increasing levels of failure. Hours after declaring that he would never allow Jesus to be taken and that he would never deny him, Peter follows up by slicing the ear off of Malchus with a thrice-repeated emphatic denial of even knowing who Jesus was.

Denial is the last thing that Peter does to Jesus before watching him die a horrific death. But because Peter's life is unfolding *according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ*, three days later, the resurrected Jesus restores Peter by asking him, "Do you love me?" and then charging him with the mission of feeding his sheep (John 21:15–17). It is at this moment that Peter must have experienced the phrase we have only touched on so far: "and for sprinkling with his blood."

The Gospel Road to Faithful Presence

It is this phrase upon which everything rests, because this is the gospel proclaimed. Peter is reminding the elect exiles of "*the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia*" that they have been "*sprinkled with his blood.*" To make his point, Peter uses the covenant ceremony of the rescued and redeemed slave from Egypt in Exodus 24. On Day 1, we considered verses 6–8, and here we zoom out a bit to include the surrounding verses:

Moses came and told the people all the words of the Lord and all the rules. And all the people answered with one voice and said, "All the words that the Lord has spoken we will do." And Moses wrote down all the words of the Lord. He rose early in the morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel. And he sent young men of the people of Israel, who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to the Lord. And Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and half of the blood he threw against the altar. Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it in the hearing of the people. And they said, "All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient." And Moses took the blood and threw it on the people and said, "Behold the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words." (vv. 3–8)

This passage proclaims our need for the gospel because it reminds us that our promises of obedience can never be fulfilled by us. When Moses sprinkles the people with blood, he is binding them together as a people and foreshadowing their redemption through the blood of Christ, which is the gospel. Peter, perhaps more than any of the disciples, due to his hyperbolic promises followed by epic failures, understands the magnitude of this passage.

When we grasp the gospel, we approach our mission of experiencing and extending the grace and peace that comes to us through the life-changing love of Jesus Christ in the manner we are supposed to: as elect exiles rooted in our new identity and seeing others and the world through our new perspective. As a result, we embrace our mission not as *the church belligerent and judgmental* and not as *the church fearful and withdrawn*, but as the church engaging through a posture of faithful presence.

What does it mean to live in a posture of faithful presence? It means that we have embraced our transformed perspective and are rooted and growing in our identity as the elect people of God. It means that we understand that we are not exiles because we are forgotten or because some part of God's plan has failed. Instead, we take comfort in our exile to this earth because it is by the foreknowledge of the Father. As such, we should take our cue from Jeremiah's words to the exiles in Babylon that we are to seek the welfare of the city in which we have been placed, and in seeking their welfare, we will also find ours (Jer. 29:7). Our faithful presence comes from living as Christians in the small, dark corners of our lives *and* in the whole of the public square.

With another election always on the horizon, an increasingly polarized country, and a church that is widely seen as irrelevant and extreme, the pull toward frustration, confusion, anxiety, and fear is strong. These emotions can easily lead to belligerence,

hostility, or isolationism. But each of these responses undermine our ability to *experience and extend the grace and peace that comes to us through the life-changing love of Jesus Christ*. This is precisely why Peter offers what the gospel offers: “*Grace and peace be multiplied to you.*”

In the rest of this letter, Peter will unpack what faithful presence looks like and apply it to every area of our lives. This faithful presence will give direction and encouragement in the midst of difficult times and unending cultural pressures, and it will become the basis for our relationship with other believers, with outsiders, with our families and bosses, with authority, with culture—and, yes, with the public square.



FAITHFUL PRESENCE

Application Questions

As you consider difficult situations in your life, do you typically find yourself tending towards frustration, confusion, anxiety, and fear, or towards grace and peace? What types of situations are hardest for you to rest in grace and peace?

How does this passage impact your thoughts about state or national politics or election results? What about your perspective on your own professional calling?



What are some ways in which you could experience and extend the life-changing love of Jesus in your present context? What are some concrete steps you could take to initiate or support these actions?

Day 4: Considering the Seven Facets of Whole-life Discipleship (SERVICE)

As you apply this passage and this lesson's study materials to your personal and family life, community life, vocational life, and public square engagement, choose at least three of these facets and dig deeper in reflection or in prayer. For in-depth discussion of these facets, see pp. x-xx (explanation in introduction or appendix to come).

Spiritual

- What does this passage reveal about spiritual formation?
- Where does this passage expose areas for growth in *your* spiritual formation?
- How does this passage encourage *your* spiritual formation?

Emotional

- What does this passage reveal about emotional formation?
- Where does this passage expose areas for growth in *your* emotional formation?
- How does this passage encourage *your* emotional formation?

Relational

- What does this passage reveal about relational formation?
- Where does this passage expose areas for growth in *your* relational formation?
- How does this passage encourage *your* relational formation?

Vocational

- What does this passage reveal about vocational formation?
- Where does this passage expose areas for growth in *your* vocational formation?
- How does this passage encourage *your* vocational formation?

Intellectual

- What does this passage reveal about Intellectual formation?
- Where does this passage expose areas for growth in *your* Intellectual formation?
- How does this passage encourage *your* Intellectual formation?

Cultural

- What does this passage reveal about cultural formation?
- Where does this passage expose areas for growth in *your* cultural formation?
- How does this passage encourage *your* cultural formation?

Evangelical

- What does this passage reveal about evangelical formation?
- Where does this passage expose areas for growth in *your* evangelical formation?
- How does this passage encourage *your* evangelical formation?



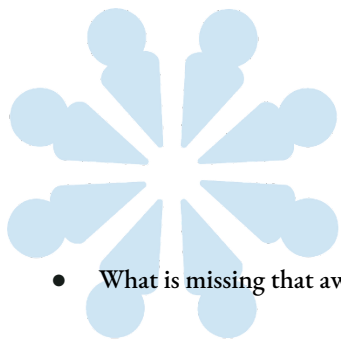
FAITHFUL
PRESENCE

Day 5: Asking the Questions of Faithful Presence

As you apply this passage and this section's study materials to your personal and family life, community life, vocational life, and public square engagement, what does it look like to practice faithful presence?

- What is good that needs encouragement? What could you encourage?

- What is broken that longs for restoration? What could you restore?



FAITHFUL
PRESENCE

- What is missing that awaits creation? What could you implement or create?

- What is evil that demands opposition? What can you oppose or eliminate?

Day 6: Written Liturgy

Based on what you have gleaned from this lesson on Days 1–5, write out short sentences or a longer prayer that will direct your mind and heart to these truths and to the God who reveals all truth. You may find it helpful to focus on your professional life, the public square, or your role in family life or a local church.

Sample starter sentences:

Father, it is according to your foreknowledge that I am an exile ...

God, I confess that I often focus more on the fact that I am elect/in exile than that I am in exile/elect. Help me to ...



FAITHFUL
PRESENCE

Day 7: Rest & Reflect

PART II: Navigating Power Differentials

Lesson 6: 1 Peter 2:13–17 “Navigating Power Differentials with the Government”

Day 1: Adopting a Different Attitude

“Be subject for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.” 1 Peter 2:13–17

Peter’s entrance into recalibrating and reapplying the “household codes” for the first-century elect exiles of Asia Minor as guidance for living in a posture of faithful presence (see 1 Peter 3) begins with a discussion of navigating the earthly power differential that exists between the government and the citizen.

It’s important to remember the context of this letter. There are no voting rights because there is no voting. There is no system of checks and balances because this is an empire, not a constitutional republic led by the consent of the governed. There is no Bill of Rights, Emancipation Proclamation, Civil Rights Act, or Department of Government Efficiency. Peter is writing to newly converted Christians who have most likely fled persecution in their also-Roman-governed homes in Rome, or possibly Jerusalem. These are people trying to figure out what it means to live as citizens of the Kingdom of God under the rule of Jesus Christ, the “Son of God,” and as citizens of Rome under the authority of Caesar (who was also known as “the son of god,” as contemporary writings show).

Whatever is said about this passage must have application to the 4.25% of the world’s population living in the 21st-century United States, yet also to Christians in 21st-century Thailand, Kenya, Iran, Argentina, Russia, and Iceland. We might also consider how it could have informed life during the Crusades, African Christians living under the colonial rule of 18th, 19th, and early 20th-century Europe, and, of course, in 1939 Germany. So we should be alert to the fact that Peter’s words will not always and in every context apply in the same straightforward way.

Peter’s guidance is that living in a posture of faithful presence with the government would be marked by different attitudes, different motivations, and different methods than those typically demonstrated by people operating out of their natural inclinations.

Attitude 1: Be Subject!

The opening imperative call to “*Be subject ... to every human institution*” must have been challenging to make sense of for people largely on the weak side of an earthly power differential who are also citizens of the Kingdom of God. God’s Kingdom is ruled

by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as

the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs. (Heb. 1:2–4)

Yet, Peter's words to the heavily Jewish churches of Asia Minor are unsurprisingly similar to the words of Paul to the predominantly Gentile churches of the same region:

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed. (Rom. 13:1–6)

Both apostles are instructing Christians to “*Be subject!*” The reason is simple, yet challenging to apply: Christians are called to live as Christ lived, and Christ lived as one subject not only to the government (for instance, in refusing the power offered him during his temptation at the hands of Satan and in not attempting to subvert his own unjust execution) but also in subjection to his Father:

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Phil. 2:5–11)

Even today, these two passages are hard to reconcile. Jesus is God. He is the “*exact imprint of his nature*” (Heb. 1:3), yet he humbled himself to the will of his Father in going to the cross for a people who found it difficult, if not impossible, to “*be subject*” to anyone. It seems that humanity's struggle with subjection goes all the way back to the Garden:

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made.

He said to the woman, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’” And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.’” But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths. (Gen.3:1–7)

Since the beginning, we have struggled with subjection. We want to be in charge. We want autonomy. We want what we want, when we want it, how we want it. Our leaders are our leaders as long as we do not feel they are holding us back from our self-

defined concepts of flourishing.

Genesis makes clear that we cannot say that our issues with subjection only appear under unrighteous and corrupt rulers. This is evident, for example, when the people who had just been miraculously rescued from brutal slavery in Egypt loudly pledged subjection to God and his covenant mediator, Moses, only to spend the next forty years grumbling, ignoring, subverting, and disobeying. Even after David united the kingdom, it was lost within two generations due to the people's unwillingness to live according to the will of God.

Peter is not offering Pro Tips for life in the Roman Empire; he is stating an imperative rule of life that requires heart conformity and intentional practice.

Attitude 2: Live as People Who are Free!

Our gut response to this phrase is probably the same as that of the original readers. How can Peter ask us to *be subject to every human institution* and then say to live as people who are free? Once again we come back to the paradigm of paradox: two things that would not typically be seen as going together (and might even be seen as mutually exclusive) are somehow, in the economy of the gospel, brought together to make beautiful music.

Here, Peter cannot be speaking of “sovereign citizens” who delusionally believe that, although they physically reside in the United States, some obscure reading of the Constitution makes them an autonomous nation in and of themselves. Instead, he means that our freedom—the freedom of every Christian living in any system of government and any place—comes from knowing that what he has already said is true:

[God] has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.” 1 Peter 1:3–5

In other words, the burden of securing our salvation and flourishing does not fall on us but is borne by the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. We have nothing to fear from the government *or* the culture. We are free to live in subjection to the institutions instituted by mankind as long as we do not transgress the Law of God, because it costs us nothing to do so. We are called to live as Joseph did in Egypt and Daniel did in Babylon, even when we disagree with the policies enacted by the administration. As Amy Sherman's recent book title states, we are “Agents of Flourishing” wherever we reside.

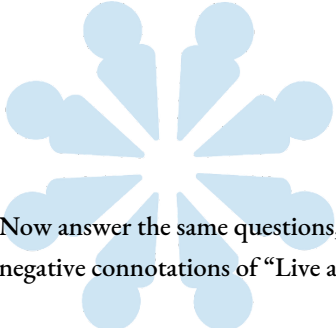
For servants and leaders in 21st-century America, then, proclaiming, “not my president” is not only wrong but rebellion against the instruction to “be subject.” For us to freely navigate the earthly power differentials with the government in a posture of faithful presence, we must start with a change in our attitude.

But we must not stop there.

Application Questions

Make a list of *your* negative connotations of the phrase “be subject!” What reasons or experiences do you have that have informed these perceptions? What role do they play in your navigation of the earthly power differentials that exist within the public square?

Make a list of *your* positive connotations of the phrase “Live as people who are free!” What reasons or experiences do you have that have informed these perceptions? What role do they play in your navigation of the earthly power differentials that exist within the public square?



Now answer the same questions, but with the roles reversed: start with your positive connotations of “be subject!” and move to negative connotations of “Live as people who are free!”

FAITHFUL
PRESENCE

Day 2: Motivations for Life in the Public Square

“Be subject for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.” 1 Peter 2:13–17

Motivation is a requirement for success in almost every aspect of life. Raw talent certainly plays a role in achieving our goals, but without motivation, our gifts will be underutilized. While the importance of motivation is easily established, the actual nature of our motivations can be a complicating obstacle to flourishing..

Motivation is often dependent upon the situation and the person. Immigrants may seek citizenship in the United States motivated by a desire for life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Children may be motivated to get a job so they can have spending money. In complex professional situations, certain people may find motivation in a desire to gain recognition from colleagues or the public. Some may even find motivation in revenge or a desire to “stick it to the man.”

As we stated on Day 1 of this lesson, Peter’s guidance is that living in a posture of faithful presence with the government should be marked by *different attitudes, different motivations, and different methods* than we would naturally exhibit. Knowing that people have situationally dependent motivations, Peter addresses the nature of *motivation* as it relates to adopting an *attitude* of faithful presence, which includes another paradox: being subject and living as people who are free.

While all citizens living within a nation are called to an *attitude* of “*being subject*,” Peter intends to point his Christian readers towards different *motivations* for arriving at that attitude. For those navigating the earthly power differential of relating to “*human institutions*,” he offers motivations not prone to damaging toxicity or insufficient empowerment to persevere.

Worship as Motivation

Peter’s response to the “Why?” of how we respond to the earthly power differentials we experience with government is this: we act in particular ways “*for the Lord’s sake*.” Before we embrace what that *does* mean, we must begin by discarding what it *does not* mean. First, this cannot mean that things will go badly for the Lord if we do not behave ourselves as citizens. God is not dependent upon us for anything. Second, this also cannot mean that Peter is instructing his readers to worship Caesar alongside God in some form of culturally accommodating syncretism. The Ten Commandments start with “*You shall have no other gods before me*” (Exod. 20:3), clarifying that God alone is to be worshiped. Instead, the apostle is stating the simple reality that, as Christians, our attitude of subjection to the government brings honor to God. Bringing glory and honor to God is the primary motivation that Peter asks his first-century readers to draw upon.

Paul says something unsurprisingly similar in the lead-up to his treatment of house tables in Colossians 3:12–17, stating the indicative of their identity before moving to the imperative of their mission:

Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of

Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Both apostles' instructions ground motivation in acting *"for the Lord's sake"* and *"in the name of the Lord."* In other words, obedience in the form of good citizenship is worship. Their readers' existence on the weak side of the earthly power differential was not likely to change within their lifetime. As we will see in the tenets of the house-table instructions for husbands and wives, masters and slaves, and other people experiencing earthly power differentials, the assumption is that these differentials are enduring. To maintain a faithful presence in *"being subject"* in an enduring earthly power differential, people need a deep and powerful motivation that enables perseverance. The motivation Peter recommends is bringing glory and honor to God.

Witness as Motivation

Peter spent three years as a disciple—apparently motivated by a desire to convince Jesus that he was the best wingman the Son of God could ever ask for. Maybe he hoped to gain status in a movement he believed would soon be bursting at the seams.

During those three years, Peter had successes and failures. In many situations, Peter seemed motivated by outshining the other disciples. And as much as Peter may have enjoyed the successes, the failures must have fueled eye-rolling from his fellow disciples and friends. Now on the other side of the resurrection, leading an evangelical mission to new converts living among people who thought Christians were crazy losers but charged with the mission to *"Feed my sheep,"* Peter offers another motivation for enduring on the weak side of the earthly power differentials: *"putting to silence the ignorance of foolish people."*

The language here is similar to that of the previous passage, in which Peter stated that the overarching motivation for living in a posture of faithful presence as elect exiles and dual citizens of the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of Rome is, at its core, evangelical. The motivation offered by Peter in verses 13–17 is building upon, not replacing, the motivation of *"so that"* mentioned in verse 12:

Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. 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. (1 Pet. 2:11–12)

So, Peter first says that Christians are to behave in such a way that their actions will bring people to glorify God when he returns. This additional clarification, *"to put to silence the ignorance of foolish people,"* raises the question of who the foolish people are and what they are saying.

Why Motivations Matter Today

Christians living in the United States in 2025 have much more in common with the original readers of 1 Peter than those living in the same location only a generation ago. Almost ten years ago, the book *"Good Faith: Being a Christian When Society Thinks You're Irrelevant and Extreme"* (by David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, Baker Books, 2016) revealed that most non-Christians have a decidedly negative view of Christians. As the subtitle suggests, we are seen as contributing to the problem rather than the solution.

Some of these perceptions come from the simple fact that, as our culture continues to unmoor itself from the Enlightenment and Christian virtues broadly accepted at our founding, Christian values are increasingly out of sync with the culture around us. We are experiencing the back side of what Peter's readers experienced on the front end—a world whose values were premised

upon an entirely different worldview.

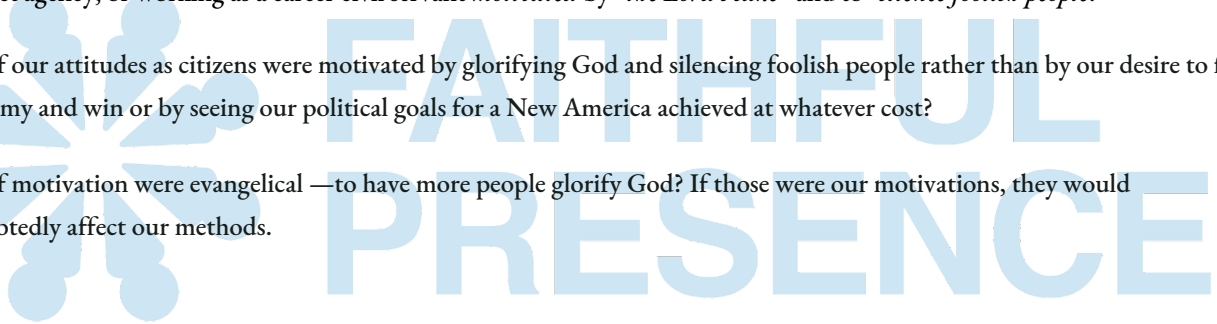
In every age, the gospel is inherently offensive to skeptics—all by itself. We are not culpable for the dissonance between our values and the world's. What we are culpable for is our actions that lead people to conclude that we are irrelevant and extreme—aside from just the baseline offense that the gospel will give. When those perceptions of others are grounded in our actual ignorance, disinterest, belligerence, or self-appointment as mercenaries intent on undermining the “*human institutions*” we find ourselves living under, Christians are called to repent and adopt a posture of faithful presence motivated by silencing the critics of our faith.

Because the public square is wherever we find ourselves talking about matters of policy and government, perhaps our modern-day calling begins with aiming to understand the policy issues properly rather than allowing social media to form our opinions, entering into conversations with people of other political views with the *motivation* of having them believe that we care about them as people created in the image of God, and looking for ways to work for the common good of our local neighborhoods *so that* criticisms are outweighed by appreciation.

Some are motivated to engage in the public square as an institution. That includes running for office, working or volunteering at city hall or the local VA hospital, proposing and advocating ordinance changes in their community, taking an appointment in a cabinet agency, or working as a career civil servant *motivated* by “*the Lord's sake*” and to “*silence foolish people.*”

What if our attitudes as citizens were motivated by glorifying God and silencing foolish people rather than by our desire to fight the enemy and win or by seeing our political goals for a New America achieved at whatever cost?

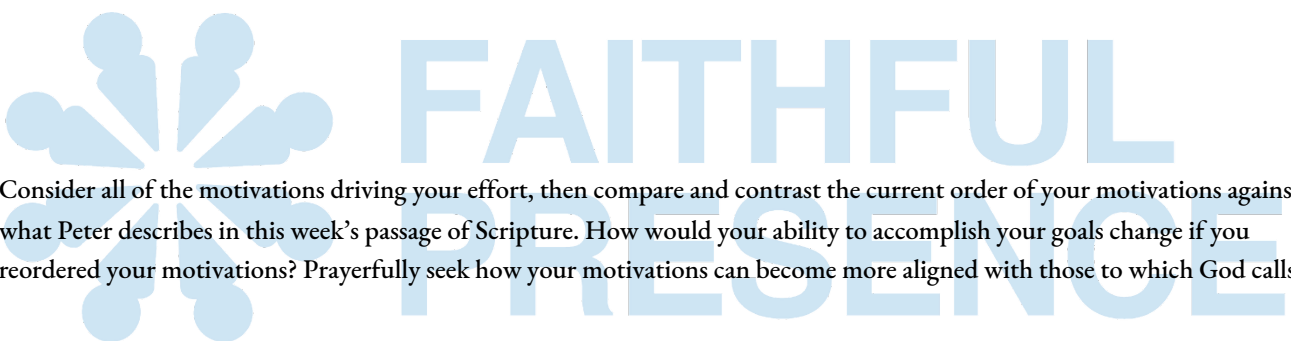
What if motivation were evangelical—to have more people glorify God? If those were our motivations, they would undoubtedly affect our methods.



Application Questions

What is the most amazing thing you have ever accomplished? What was your motivation for pursuing that goal?

Are there specific initiatives within the public square that you have a voice and agency in accomplishing? What are your motivations—strong or weak—to take on or to avoid getting more involved?



Consider all of the motivations driving your effort, then compare and contrast the current order of your motivations against what Peter describes in this week's passage of Scripture. How would your ability to accomplish your goals change if you reordered your motivations? Prayerfully seek how your motivations can become more aligned with those to which God calls us.

Day 3: Employing Different Methods

“Be subject for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.”

As we approach the final aspect of navigating the earthly power differentials within the public square, it’s helpful to remember that our resonance of Peter’s words comes from the increasing dissonance our culture has with the Christian worldview.

Damaging Methods

Recently, a politically progressive pastor in Chattanooga included the following statement [Insert QR] in his sermon:

No one likes violence, but sometimes violence is necessary. Elon Musk forces his way into the United States Treasury and threatens to steal your personal information and your Social Security check; there is the possibility of violence. Sometimes, the Devil will act so ugly that you have no other choice but to get violent and fight. Well, someone will say, “Reverend, you know you shouldn’t be talking about violence; this isn’t the Christian thing to do.” Well, I say, why not talk this way because Jesus did.

During this past summer, another pastor said [Insert QR] to their politically conservative crowd:

You’ve got to get to the point where you realize that when they smack you in the face, you smack them back two times harder,” and “the Bible says the violent take it ... and we take it by force.

Both these statements made the rounds on social media, gathering millions of views due to the “nut-picking preference” used by Meta, Google, and TikTok to increase their ad revenue. Their algorithms intentionally give preference to out-of-context, inflammatory, or just plain “nutty” posts due to their high engagement rates; these companies care about profit, not discipleship.

The struggle of the church with the use of violence to achieve political ends is not new. In the 1960s, Christian leaders on both sides of the Civil Rights movement had to acknowledge and deal with the sad reality that “there were bad people on both sides” who advocated for and participated in violence. Space does not allow for consideration of the many other examples throughout American and world history where Christians have embraced violence as a means of responding to the earthly power differentials that exist within the public square. Yet, there is one that may be particularly helpful to remember:

So Judas, having procured a band of soldiers and some officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees, went there with lanterns and torches and weapons. Then Jesus, knowing all that would happen to him, came forward and said to them, “Whom do you seek?” They answered him, “Jesus of Nazareth.” Jesus said to them, “I am he.” Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them. When Jesus said to them, “I am he,” they drew back and fell to the ground. So he asked them again, “Whom do you seek?” And they said, “Jesus of Nazareth.” Jesus answered, “I told you that I am he. So, if you seek me, let these men go.” This was to fulfill the word that he had spoken: “Of those whom you gave me, I have lost not one.” Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest’s

servant and cut off his right ear. (The servant's name was Malchus.) So Jesus said to Peter, "Put your sword into its sheath; shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?" (John 18:2–11)

As we have proposed in earlier lessons, despite three years of instruction from Jesus on what it meant to follow him, Peter's response to the seeming end of "Make Israel Great Again" was to utilize his sword as the way forward in the face of an uneven earthly power differential. Jesus's response to Peter is critical to understanding how attitudes and motivations direct our choice of *methods*.

Adopting an *attitude* that does not combine the call to "*Be subject*" with the *motivation* of doing so "*for the Lord's sake*" is likely to result in Peter-like responses to situations that *appear* to be setbacks, which occur at the direction of human institutions.

Another area that requires examination is our eschatology (or expectations about the endgame). Readers with some level of theological training may now anticipate a discussion of the nature of Christ's second coming and views on the millennium. But whether we subscribe to a *biblical* eschatology regarding the premillennial, amillennial, or postmillennial return of Christ is less impactful on methods used in the public square than giving primacy to a particular *political* eschatology. When we make political visions for the future, the central goal of our engagement with the public square, we effectively guarantee that our attitude, motivations, and methods will all be contrary to those that followers of Christ are commanded to embrace.

Different Methods

Peter's methods are straightforward yet complex:

Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor."

By living "*as people who are free,*" servants and leaders in the public square reflect the belief that our participation in Christ's mission of making all things new means that we trust in Christ, not ourselves, to ultimately accomplish his goals. This frees us from panic, confusion, and fear, which can fuel our choice of methods, especially when we are under pressure.

As servants of God in the public square, we can again ask the Four Questions of Faithful Presence:

- *What is good that requires encouragement?*
- *What is broken that requires restoration?*
- *What is missing that awaits creation?*
- *What is evil that demands opposition?*

With these questions as a guide, servants and leaders in the public square can engage in legislative advocacy, policy-making conversations, regulative implementation, and, yes, even political conversations with their neighbors. They can do so without the methodological hijacking that comes from placing political ideology over the Christian worldview. They are freed to offer their work as worship, with the approval and authorization of people from their districts who do not share a Christian worldview.

Real-world examples include the work of unheralded Christian servants and leaders opposing discriminatory practices of landlords receiving federal funding, improving unemployment insurance application and compliance, and protecting investment through issuing patents and copyrights. It also includes the work of churches to coordinate care for the homeless population, a business owner calling her representative to explain the potential unintended consequences of proposed legislation, or just not showing up at a political event that is likely to turn nasty.

One excellent tool for evaluating our methods is not their short-term or apparent success in the political kingdom but the fruit they bear for the Kingdom of God. In his treatment of navigating earthly power differentials with the government, Peter envisions not acquiescing to popular political-cultural narratives but offering foretastes of the coming Kingdom. Paul gives us a lens through which our methods can be assessed:

But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another. (Gal. 5:16–26)

Finally, as we “*Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor,*” we are simply living out the Levitical instruction on worship given by God through Moses for the people of God just rescued from slavery: “*Love your neighbor as yourself (Lev. 19:18).*” In adopting this approach, we cannot help but notice that the two groups we are eager to honor, love, and fear (respect) are bracketed by the two that we might prefer not to—at least not without a policy platform litmus test.

To be sure, the different methods that Peter (and Paul) advocate are not guaranteed to result in positive cultural or public square feedback—or even positive feedback from others who claim the name of Christ. To that end, we would do well to recall the crucified and resurrected Jesus’s direction to His disciples, who were scared to death to unlock the doors of the upper room and enter the public square:

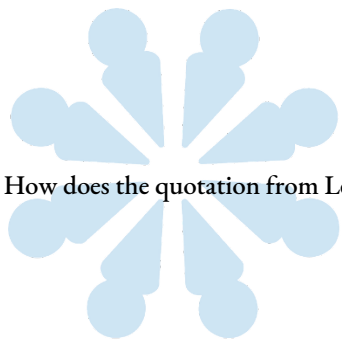
On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then, the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.” (John 20:19–20)

Whereas the disciples were fearful of the Jews who wielded power, we might be afraid of the electorate, our competitive colleagues, or a faction in our congregation. But just as Jesus was recalibrating the *attitudes, motivations, and methods* of Simon the Zealot and Matthew the Corrupt Tax Collector in navigating the earthly power differentials of the public square, so Peter is for the elect Exiles of Asia Minor and for us.

Application Questions

In what public square setting are you most likely to adopt *damaging methods* rather than the *different methods* encouraged by Peter? What are the implications for others when that happens?

How are you using *different methods* to encourage the good, repair the broken, create the missing, and oppose evil?



FAITHFUL
PRESENCE

How does the quotation from Leviticus 19:18 impact how you navigate the public square?

Day 4: Considering the Seven Facets of Whole-life Discipleship

As you apply this passage and this section's study materials to your personal and family life, community life, vocational life, and public square engagement,

Spiritual

- What does this passage reveal about spiritual formation?
- Where does this passage expose areas for growth in *your* spiritual formation?
- How does this passage encourage *your* spiritual formation?

Emotional

- What does this passage reveal about emotional formation?
- Where does this passage expose areas for growth in *your* emotional formation?
- How does this passage encourage *your* emotional formation?

Relational

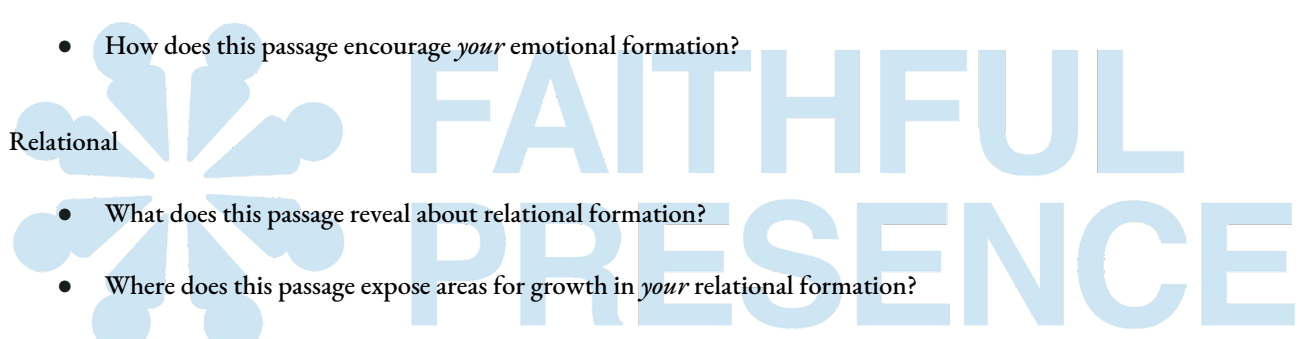
- What does this passage reveal about relational formation?
- Where does this passage expose areas for growth in *your* relational formation?
- How does this passage encourage *your* relational formation?

Vocational

- What does this passage reveal about vocational formation?
- Where does this passage expose areas for growth in *your* vocational formation?
- How does this passage encourage *your* vocational formation?

Intellectual

- What does this passage reveal about Intellectual formation?
- Where does this passage expose areas for growth in *your* Intellectual formation?
- How does this passage encourage *your* Intellectual formation?



Cultural

- What does this passage reveal about cultural formation?
- Where does this passage expose areas for growth in *your* cultural formation?
- How does this passage encourage *your* cultural formation?

Evangelical

- What does this passage reveal about evangelical formation?
- Where does this passage expose areas for growth in *your* evangelical formation?
- How does this passage encourage *your* evangelical formation?



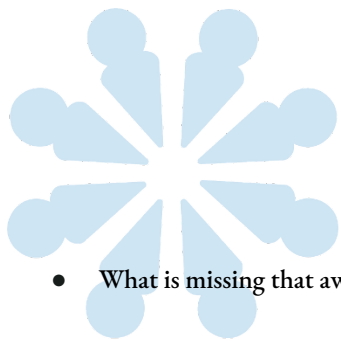
FAITHFUL
PRESENCE

Day 5: Asking the Questions of Faithful Presence

As you apply this passage and this section's study materials to your personal and family life, community life, vocational life, and public square engagement, what does it look like to practice faithful presence?

- What is good that needs encouragement? What could you encourage?

- What is broken that longs for restoration? What could you restore?



FAITHFUL
PRESENCE

- What is missing that awaits creation? What could you implement or create?

- What is evil that demands opposition? What can you oppose or eliminate?

Day 6: Written Liturgy



FAITHFUL PRESENCE

Day 7: Rest & Reflect
