

This Exiled Life – Part 4

Gospel Playbook: Be Armed with Christlikeness

1 Peter 4:1-11

Mark Vroegop

¹ Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, ² so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God. ³ For the time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry. ⁴ With respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you; ⁵ but they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. ⁶ For this is why the gospel was preached even to those who are dead, that though judged in the flesh the way people are, they might live in the spirit the way God does. ⁷ The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. ⁸ Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. ⁹ Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. ¹⁰ As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: ¹¹ whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. 1 Peter 4:1–11 (ESV)

Soon after we completed our facility expansion, and after we retired our debt, our Pastors and Elders began thinking and praying about what our church's role in the city should be. For many years, we had a significant impact in global missions and reaching unreached people groups. Then we started, and have continued to have, a thriving urban outreach in the Brookside neighborhood.

But there were two questions that were plaguing me: First, what is our church's role in reaching unsaved people in the Indianapolis area? Second, how do we mobilize our people toward this mission of reaching their neighbors?

That was the impetus behind our Next Door Mission – our vision to launch campuses that would become self-governing churches. The aim was to multiply healthy churches by mobilizing our people. And it has worked marvelously. We now have three unique congregations at North Indy, Fishers and Castleton. Over Good Friday and Easter we had 8,300 in our services, with over 600 at Fishers and 160 at our Castleton incubator. And we have a vision for more campuses and helping other churches in the Indianapolis area.

As we've seen the Lord's blessing in our Next Door Mission, I've also started asking some other questions:

- What can we do to serve our community even better?

- What are the needs in the lives of our neighbors that could be open doors for evangelism?
- Is there a way for us to build more bridges of grace in the suburbs like we've done in Brookside?
- As we listen to the "groan" of our city and culture, how does the gospel offer hope?

In other words, what is the Lord's playbook for our church as we move forward?

To answer some of these questions, our Pastors and Elders are beginning a process to develop a two to three-year ministry plan. This strategic plan is designed to help us discern the Lord's direction for our church as we seek to know how to be good stewards of the gospel in terms of global, urban, and local outreach.

I have a number of burdens on my heart that I'm praying about. For instance, could we double or triple our Pastoral Residency Program, could we launch another campus in the next two years, can we see even more people head to the mission field, can more people move into Brookside, can we do more to help hurting churches in Indianapolis, and is there anything we can do about the addiction crisis that is ravaging the northern suburbs? Those are my questions and burdens.

Part of the way that we discern the Lord's will is by hearing from you. We believe that the Lord leads our church through its leaders but also through its people. To that end, we will be sending out a short survey in the next week, and we'd ask you to take some time and help us discern the Lord's will. I'd like you to ask yourself what needs and opportunities you see. What is our church's playbook in the city? That's the question.

Exile Playbook: Let the Gospel do its work

1 Peter is written to help believers know how to navigate the world in which they live, especially when the culture begins to turn against them. Last week Joe walked us through a complicated but important text that helped us understand the beauty of salvation through Jesus ("the just FOR the unjust"), the beauty of being brought near to God ("THAT he might bring us to God"), and the present victory connected with Christ's ascension ("who has gone into heaven").

What follows in 1 Peter 4:1-11 is a series of verses that help us know what the exiled life is supposed to look like at a personal level. In the midst of an increasingly hostile culture, there is to be this gospel-affected culture in Christian exiles. The playbook for Christian exiles is to let the gospel do its work – in our hearts, in our lives, and in our community.

Now I don't want to make any assumptions with my use of the term "the gospel." If we do not understand this, the text will not make any sense. By the gospel I mean the good news that Jesus died and rose again in order to grant forgiveness and a new life to those who would turn from their sins and put their faith in Him. It is what we heard in 1 Peter 3:18

¹⁸ For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit . . . 1 Peter 3:18 (ESV)

The point is connected to Easter Sunday. Jesus was raised from the dead, and He keeps giving life to people. The resurrected Christ is resurrecting me.

So, how do we allow the gospel playbook to affect our lives while we are living in this exile? This text, along with many others in the New Testament, help us to see the basic elements of following Jesus. There are things that we must **think**, things we must **stop**, and things we must **do**.

As I think about the Christian life, it seems to me that you could almost summarize the whole of what it means to follow Jesus with think-stop-do. Let's see how that works itself out in this text

Think

How does or should the gospel shape our thinking? What attitudes and perspectives should shape our lives? What should be the lens through which we look at ourselves and the world? How should we think about our church and its role in the city?

Now verse one begins with the word "since." That is an important word because it connects what follows in this verse with what was said in the previous verses. Do you remember what was there?

Chapter three ended with a statement about the ascension and victory of Jesus. It reminded us that the end-game for Jesus was resurrection and a position of victory. Verse 22 says, ". . . is at the right hand of God with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him."

The ascension was the moment when Jesus was physically taken from earth in a glorified human body to a place of victory. Psalm 110:1 is a verse often quoted by New Testament authors when talking about the ascension of Christ¹ – "*The LORD says to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool."* Psalm 110:1 (ESV) Notice that His enemies are so subservient to Him that they serve as "footstools." Jesus is figuratively propping up His feet on those who used to be hostile to Him. It is quite an image!

However, Peter references the ascension here not merely to make a statement about Jesus' victory. The point is related to suffering. The ascension shows us that Jesus' path to ultimate triumph led Him through mistreatment, being maligned, and even death. Peter shows us that the process by which God exalted His own Son involved suffering – even the kind of suffering where it would seem that the enemies of Jesus had won.

Peter returns to a basic biblical principle that is a part of God's playbook for the followers of Jesus: **Suffering is the pathway to victory and exaltation.**

There are a number of other places in the New Testament where this principle is communicated:

⁵ Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself

¹ (Mt. 22:44; Mk. 12:36; Lk. 20:43; Acts 2:35; Heb. 1:13; 10:13)

by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.⁹ Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, Philippians 2:5–9 (ESV)

let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,² looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.³ Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. Hebrews 12:1–3 (ESV)

And in order to be a Christian exile, and in order to navigate your way through our broken world, you have to know this principle and rehearse it often in your heart. This way of thinking is not the natural leaning of the human heart, and yet it is the path that is connected to the gospel and the life of Jesus.

We see this clearly stated in 4:1: “Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh arm yourselves with the same way of thinking . . .” Notice that God’s playbook here involves more than just knowing the story and the facts about Jesus’ life and exaltation. Christian exiles are to “arm themselves” with the same way of thinking.

That’s an interesting phrase, isn’t it? Peter could have said “Since Christ suffered in the flesh, follow His example or imitate Him . . .” But Peter uses a term with a battle nuance. Christian exiles are to take the example of Christ and arm themselves with same kind of thinking.

I love the fact that Peter uses this kind of language because it reminds us that thinking biblically in the midst of our Christian exile is often a battle. It is not easy. We are in a war, so if you are feeling the struggle today to think biblically about the struggle and challenges that you are in – just know that the Christian life is usually marked by battle and struggle.

But I also love this idea of “arm yourselves,” because it points to the fact that the followers of Jesus have to continually be battle-ready. Being armed with Christlikeness and thinking biblically must be something that we prepare ourselves for. Arming yourselves for Christlikeness involves reading the Scriptures, memorizing Fighter Verses (notice the title!), seeking God’s face in prayer, worshipping together, and doing life in community with other believers.

Arming yourselves requires a kind of discipline that continually makes investments in the soul so that when suffering or persecution happens, you have already trained your heart where to go. Generals and coaches know this. They are constantly training and practicing so that when the moment comes, they’ll be ready. The glory of ultimate victory doesn’t come without training, discipline, and practice.

Exiles are called to have the same kind of thinking that Jesus had. We are to have the same attitude, the same purpose (NASB) and the same intention that He had. Verse 2 indicates that this mindset involves living for God’s will and not for human passions. It is the mindset that says, “let this cup pass from me, but not my will but yours be done.” In other words, a Christian exile is marked by the kind of thinking and attitude that is driven by the will of God. It defines everything about them.

And this kind of thinking that leads us through suffering, serves to confirm that we are the “real deal.” When verse one says, “whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin,” it doesn’t mean that

believers are sinless. Rather, it means that the control of sin's domain has been severed in their lives. It means that they have repented – a change of mind has happened.

The gospel playbook – how you live as an exile – starts with our thinking, our attitude, and the direction of our lives. So, can I ask you a few questions about this? What is your attitude like this morning? Does it reflect the mind of Christ? Are you living for the will of God? Are you making regular deposits of the Word through corporate worship and through being in community with other people?

The gospel playbook involves thinking like Jesus and helping others to think like Jesus.

Stop

This gospel playbook, however, also involves particular actions that need to be stopped. There are actions that no longer fit with the follower of Jesus, and part of the way that an exile is an exile is by his unique lifestyle in the world.

Verse 3 tells us that “for the time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do.” The ESV is not as entirely clear or as pointed as it probably should be. The idea is captured well by the NIV, and it picks up the nuance of regret for the past: “For you have already spent enough time doing what pagans choose to do.” Do you get the sense?

Peter is trying to motivate them to make a break from their past lives by reminding them about how much time and energy they had already spent pursuing the wrong things. This text invites us to look back, regardless of how colorful your past was, and be reminded about what that past involved. Part of the motivation for not going back to former sin patterns is to be reminded of what a waste it was. When it comes to your past, you should view it through a “been-there-done-that-not-good” lens.

Don't go back to the old you! You live for the will of God now, not for human passions.

And to make that even more poignant, Peter give us a sin list. These are the kinds of things that are associated with the old life. These are the things that should be stopped, and it is interesting how connected this list is to sexuality, drunkenness, and social gatherings or parties. The combination of immorality, alcohol, and parties was as common in Peter's day as in ours. Notice the following words:

- Sensuality – unrestrained behavior and attitudes about sexuality
- Passions – lustful, evil cravings and desires
- Drunkenness – the excessive use of alcohol
- Orgies and Drinking Parties – the kind of group gathering where immorality and consumption of alcohol were out of control. One dictionary called these binge parties.
- Lawless Idolatry – a summary term for the godless orientation of these gatherings

Now it is important for you to understand that these sin issues were often connected to large social gatherings and were sometimes related to national holidays. Think of it like celebrating the 4th of July. And by not participating in these sin issues or even the holidays themselves, the exiles were making themselves really stand out from the rest of the culture.

In fact, this is what verse 4 explicitly says. They were surprised when the exiles do not join in, and the result was some kind of ill treatment. Perhaps they made fun of them or spoke to them with condescending tones, saying, "Do you think you are better than us!?" Sometimes the guilt of someone not joining in can create a very negative response in those who are carousing. I'm sure that some of you know exactly what I'm talking about. Maybe it was during college or at a work gathering or with neighbors who don't understand what you do or don't do. But you feel the ostracism.

Verses 5-6 are given as an encouragement. Peter reminds us that there is a coming day of accountability before God. Judgment is coming, and exiles live with that future day in mind – for themselves and for others. Exiles can endure the temporary shame of not going along with others by looking to a future day when God is going to make all things right. The key is to live for that day.

And verse 6 simply reminds us that the reason why the gospel was preached, even to those Christians who have already died, was so that new life – now and in the future – could be a part of their story. The purpose of the gospel is to redeem people from destructive sin issues and to give them new life.

The gospel playbook not only involves thinking like Jesus, it also involves repenting from sin issues and behaviors that characterized our former lives. I've seen the pendulum swing on the issue in my lifetime. When I was in high school and college, there was a heavy emphasis on being separate from the world. But after college, it seemed like the focus shifted toward cultural integration. I'm sure that the separatist movement was too extreme, but I also think that the church has lost something with a focus on being accepted by the world. There is a balance that we need to find.

Being an exile means that we are different. The gospel playbook is a decisive commitment to live in such a way that people notice that there is something different about you.

In light of that, let me have you consider two things:

- 1) Is there anything in your life that fits too closely with the list that we just reviewed or with something from your past that you know is a part of the old you? Are you still messing around with your former lifestyle or dabbling in areas that you know don't fit with the gospel?
- 2) When it becomes clear to people that you are different, can you embrace the potential ridicule, the social awkwardness, or the feeling that you are not part of the "in crowd"?

The gospel playbook involves a certain kind of thinking, and it involves a moral compass that is different from the ebb and flow of culture.

Do

The playbook for gospel living also involves a unique culture in the lives of the exiles and inside the church. Thinking like Jesus and turning from our former lives is part of the equation, but so is creating a unique culture within the church.

Verse seven has an element of urgency to it. With the ascension of Christ, the last days began. The arc of human history is pointing toward a coming day of judgment. Part of the reason why there is

material in the Bible about the future is so that there will be a seriousness and intentionality as we live even now.

That is why we see admonitions to be “self-controlled” and “sober-minded.” These two terms are nearly synonyms designed to remind us about the importance of having spiritual and moral clarity as we make our way through our lives as exiles. We need to realize the seriousness of what is on the line in this lifetime, and we need to be committed to not living aimlessly or foolishly.

This affects your prayer life. Rather than being cavalier or freaking out, exiles are called to pray. They are encouraged to seek God’s face for the sake of people and problems around them. For some of you this could be a great inroad for gospel conversations with those near you. It may be that God will open a door for you to be the person who prays for others when they are in a crisis.

A church that understands the gospel playbook in the world is a church that prays!

But there are still other things that are to characterize this exile culture. Verse eight calls us to foster a culture that is marked by Christian love. The church is to be marked by a heart-felt concern for one another, and this affection is significant enough that it actually covers “a multitude of sins.” This means that we are able to overlook offenses and inconsiderate acts of others because we love them.

Hopefully you know what this is like in some kind of relationship. You’ve done enough life with someone, and you’ve spent enough time together, that you genuinely love the person. In fact, you love them so much that when small disagreements or inconsiderate actions happen, you are able to overlook them or they don’t even bother you. Why? Because your love for them eclipses the shortcomings and mistakes. Now Peter is suggesting that this kind of relationship should characterize the culture of the church, so try not to leave today without finding some way to love on someone and grow in love for the people of your church.

Further, they are to express that love, according to verse nine, in how they show hospitality to one another. In Peter’s day that likely meant opening their homes for people who were traveling, because of the dangers and temptations that travelers faced. And Peter calls Christians not only to be hospitable but also to not grumble about it. They should be willing to be inconvenienced out of love for one another and the gospel.

What’s more, we should be willing to use our gifts in order to be an encouragement to one another. According to verse 10, these gifts do not come in the same form, but they generally fall into categories of speaking or serving. These gifts have been given to the church in order for them to be used for the benefit of one another.

Therefore, a healthy body of believers are loving one another and serving each other through the gifts that God has given. And through the use of those gifts, we see the strength of God being poured out on people and on His body. So, please, be sure that you are using your gifts. Don’t allow them to not be used for the purpose for which God gave them. Central to the gospel playbook is the way in which gifts are expressed for the spiritual benefit of others.

And finally, this entire culture is designed to ultimately point one direction – to the glory of God!

The gospel playbook, which involves the unique expressions of Christ's church, is to demonstrate the beauty of God's glory and to result in praise to Jesus.

That's the goal of our thinking, our repentance, and our actions – "To him be glory and dominion forever and ever, Amen."

And we want to see that in each other, in the church, and even in our city. We want to let the gospel do its work – everywhere.

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