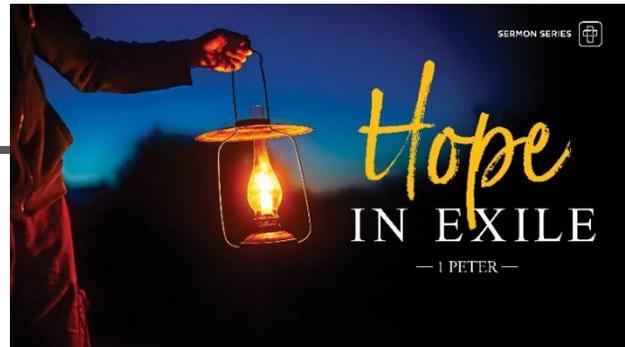


Genuine Love: What It Is, Where It Comes From & Why We Need It

1 Peter 1:22 - 2:3

Joe Jones May 24, 2020



This morning we'll be looking at 1 Peter 1:22-2:3. I believe this is a powerful, important and timely passage of Scripture for us as a church and as a community. I'd invite you to turn to 1 Peter and as you do, I'd like to spend a little time reflecting on the life of Elisabeth Elliot.

I recently read a bit about her remarkable life and many of you are probably somewhat familiar with her story—perhaps in part because of the movie that was released in 2005, “The End of the Spear.” That movie chronicles the life and tragic death of missionary Jim Elliot, Elisabeth’s husband. Jim felt called, along with Elisabeth, to the Auca Indians, a once savage tribe in Ecuador. They felt called to love this group of people and share Jesus with them.

In the process of seeking to make contact with these people, Jim and four other missionaries were brutally speared and killed. What was perhaps most shocking was that Elisabeth Elliot decided to stay in Ecuador with her toddler child as a missionary after her husband was killed. Not only that, she chose to continue to reach out to the Auca Indians. And not only that, she chose to live among them and share Jesus with the very ones who killed her husband. When I hear that, I ask, “How in the world does that happen? Where does that kind of compassion, care, kindness, forgiveness and love come from?” I want you to keep that question in mind this morning.

Let's read 1 Peter 1:22-2:3. This is God's Word.

^{1:22} Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart,

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

“All flesh is like grass

and all its glory like the flower of grass.

The grass withers,

and the flower falls,

²⁵ but the word of the Lord remains forever.”

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

^{2:1} So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander. ² Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation— ³ if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.

Starting at verse 22 of 1 Peter 1, there's a shift in the themes of the book. Up to this point, there's been a heavy emphasis and strong focus on the future hope we have as Christians—truly, the gospel gives us a bright future. Peter says in 1 Peter 1:13 that we ought to set our hope fully on the grace to be brought to us in the future at the return of Christ.

So there is an emphasis on the future, until we get to verse 22 where there is a shift and Peter turns our attention from the future to the present, honing in on what we are called to be and do right now. See, as Christians, we're not too heavenly minded to be of any earthly good. No, we're so truly heavenly minded so that we're propelled into the best kind of earthly good. And the endlessly powerful source of the good we're able to do in the present as Christians is the Word of God. Let's look at three truths, then one practical application, related to God's Word from these verses.

Truth #1 — God's Word is living and gives life.

Look at 1 Peter 1:23 where the Word of God is described as living. That's very straightforward and we should believe this right now: God's Word is living. It's not dead; it's alive. It's not an old relic; it's a living reality. But it's not just living in itself, it also emanates life. It bubbles over with life. It gives life, as this passage says. So as we receive God's Word and the Spirit works through it, we are made alive.

I've seen this truth in 1 Peter 1:23, which says, "*You have been born again...through the living...word of God.*" In other words, the living Word makes people alive who were once dead. We once had no desire for God. Remember that day in your life when you had zero desire for God, but now you love Him?

We once did not cherish Him and His grace and Peter talks about how we now have this love for Christ and this joy in our hearts that is inexpressible and filled with glory. How did that happen in our lives? Well, it happened through the Word of God working powerfully in our hearts. God's Word is living and it gives life.

Truth #2 — God's Word is abiding and gives eternal life.

First Peter 1:23 describes God's Word, not just as living, but also as abiding or enduring. This is the whole point of verses 24-25 where it says, "*All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower*

of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains forever."

Abiding means this Word of God is a message that never changes and is ever relevant. People come and go, rulers come and go, cultures come and go and the messages that go with them come and go, but God's Word means the same. It's forever true and forever relevant.

Because this Word is eternally true and alive, it creates people who will live forever. God's Word is abiding and gives eternal life to sinners. We've been born again, Peter said earlier in 1 Peter 1:4, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled and unfading. You see, Christian, you are going to live forever. That's what God's Word has done in you. You're going to live forever in a new creation that will last forever, in the presence of the God of joy Who exists forever.

So God's Word is living and gives life, but not only that, God's Word is abiding and gives eternal life.

Truth #3 — God's Word is the good news that the Lord is good.

Now we ask what exactly is this Word? What's the content of this Word? What's the content of God's message for the world? God's Word is the good news that the Lord is good. See, the bad news is that we've all sinned, we've fallen short of God's glory and greatness, therefore we deserve God's punishment. But thank God, "*...the Lord is good*" (1 Peter 2:3).

Christ is abundant in grace, mercy and kindness. He's not stingy in blessing sinners He loves. He's infinitely good and pours out His goodness upon us. I want you to hear a couple verses in the book of 1 Peter that speak directly to the goodness of the Lord.

- 1 Peter 2:24: "*He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree...*" When Christ died on the cross, He was bearing the weight and filth of our sins. The Lord is good.
- 1 Peter 3:18: "*Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God...*"—reconciling us, making us in a right relationship with God. This is what the Lord has done for us. He is so good. Jesus not only died for our sins, He rose from the dead to give us this great hope of looking forward to His return to earth when He will renew all things.

You see, all the Lord Jesus does for us is good. He is good and this is the Word of God. God's message to us is all about Christ's death for our sins, His powerful resurrection and His immanent return. This is the central message God has for us. It's a message of good news and grace for all who will accept it.

So do you accept this good news today? Have you tasted that the Lord is good? If you haven't, I plead with you right now to ask God to let you taste that the Lord is good. Or if you're

feeling cold and not really tasting right now that the Lord is good, ask Him to revive your soul for tasting that the Lord is good.

Application — We should long for God’s Word.

Now, what application can we draw from what we’ve learned about the Word of God? The first application the Holy Spirit gives us through Peter is that we should long for God’s Word. Look at 1 Peter 2:2, where it says, “*Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk...*” The Greek word for “spiritual milk” in verse two is *logikos*. It has the same root as *logos*, which is the word used back in 1 Peter 1:23 where it says we’ve been born again through the Word—the *logos*—of God. The same Word of God that gave us new life in the first place continues to feed our souls day by day by day. I was converted in my sophomore year at Taylor University, in the library, reading 2 Thessalonians 1, which is about the return of Christ. God used those verses to make me alive in those moments. He showed me the beauty of Christ through His Word. What I need to remember—and what all of us need to remember—is that the Word of God has the same power today as it did then and as it always has to make us alive when we come to it with soft hearts.

You see, the picture here is of a newborn infant longing for his mother’s milk. But this milk is the pure, nutrient-rich Word of God. There’s not one single Christian living a vibrant Christian life who is not also feeding on the Word of God. Every Christian who is living in the fullness, joy and peace of God’s life is being filled up by the Word of God. Don’t you want to live that kind of life? I do. So we must press into the Word of God.

Now is the time to recommit to reading, studying, hearing, meditating on, memorizing, praying and longing for God’s precious Word. I honestly admit that I don’t have the strength to live in this world as a Christian the way God calls me to. I feel that lack of strength and ability every single day—and I’ll bet you do too. So it’s urgent for us to go back to the Word of God.

Isn’t it amazing how many resources, translations and copies of God’s Word we have? I probably have at least ten Bibles in my home. But let’s not let familiarity breed contempt or boredom. In these quarantined days, Jesus Christ Himself says to you, “Long for My life-giving Word.”

God’s Word doesn’t just produce a general spiritual health or vitality; it produces something very specific and very important for our Christian lives. What Christian quality is of highest importance? What characteristic is the greatest? Is there one that rises above the rest? Should we put joy in that top spot, seeing that the Bible so seriously and regularly calls us to rejoice in the Lord? Or should we put hope in that position of highest prominence? You know, it could be argued that

without hope we cannot even survive as humans. Or should it be faith? After all, it's by faith that we're made right with God and by faith we grow in our relationship with Christ. Faith truly is at the heart of Christianity.

While all these qualities are important for Christians to possess, there's another one that stands above the rest, isn't there? We see this in passage after passage in Scripture and we need not look any further than our passage this morning. In 1 Peter 1:22, Peter says we have purified our souls. Why? What's the point of purifying our souls? Here's the whole point of our being saved according to verse 22: *"for a sincere brotherly love..."*

This quality of love rises above the rest. Peter doesn't say we're purified for hope. He doesn't say we're purified for joy. He doesn't say we're saved for peace, kindness, grace, gentleness, patience or self-control. He says God has made us brand new for one primary purpose: that we would love one another genuinely. The entire Bible rings with this theme: love God, enjoy Him in and above everything else, then love one another, love one another, love one another. This quality of love is so central.

The Holy Spirit through Peter uses a particular word that is very fitting in the context of 1 Peter as a whole. The word he uses is "brotherly love." Let me explain why that is so fitting for this book. In the context of 1 Peter, here's the picture that's emerging. In 1 Peter 1:1, Peter begins his letter by calling Christians "elect exiles" or "chosen exiles." There's this chosen group of people, despised by the world but loved by God, who are away from their home. See, we Christians are strangers and aliens in this world. So according to 1 Peter, the church—we as Christians—has two identity markers.

- We're children loved by a heavenly Father.
- We're brothers and sisters, journeying together toward our home.

When Peter uses the word "brotherly love," the picture we're getting is of brothers and sisters traveling side by side toward their eternal home and the vital factor in their journey is that they love one another as they make their pilgrimage toward home.

I'm reading the kids' version of Pilgrim's Progress with my kids right now. There's a time in the story, if you remember, when Christian is traveling alone, then catches up with and meets this friend whose name is Faithful. So Christian and Faithful are traveling together through all the difficulties of life. They're in Vanity Fair with all the challenges and oppression there, but they're together in it. They're traveling together toward their destination, the Celestial City.

This is a beautiful picture of us traveling together as the church, shoulder to shoulder, to our eternal home as brothers and sisters in Christ. What is of utmost importance is brotherly and

sisterly love on the journey. As we journey together, we must be companions who encourage, spur on and help one another in a genuine and selfless way. We need this. We need one another so deeply. You can sense the urgency in Peter's writing when he says, "...*love one another earnestly from a pure heart*" (1:22).

What then does this look like practically for us? Much of the rest of the letter of 1 Peter is going to flesh out an answer to that very question. However, I have five practical takeaways for us today:

1. **Let's not flatter, but encourage one another.** See, flattery is unhelpful and wrong. It can be defined as "excessive and insincere praise given especially to further one's own interests." We want to stay away from flattering one another, just generally dispensing niceties to one another. Brotherly love does not mean just being nice, but it points out specific evidences of God's grace in another person's life. We ought to do that. I've heard it said that no one is walking around over-encouraged. We're buoyed up in this life so we don't sink through the heartfelt encouragement of one another, especially at a time when many people are feeling depressed, discouraged, burdened and deflated. Now is the time, not to flatter, but to encourage one another.
2. **Let's remind each other of the hope we have in Christ.** When we point each other beyond this life, we lovingly remind each other of two things. First, we're going to need to let go of everything in this world one day. "*Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return*" (Job 1:21). We're going to need to let go of everything one day and we remind each other of that when we talk about the future hope we have. And secondly, let's remind each other that Christ is going to restore to us what we've lost 100,000-fold. So a central way we pilgrims can encourage one another on this journey is by gently remind one another that we don't need to hold on too tightly to the things of earth because we have a great inheritance to come. Very practically, how can you remind another Christian brother or sister of their future hope this week? What does that look like for you this week?
3. **Let's pray for each other.** Let's commit to praying for one another. When we're not together, many of the opportunities for service are stripped away, but we can always pray for one another. Is there a more sincere way to love another person than to pray for him or her? Don't you believe God hears prayer? Don't you believe He answers? You do believe that. So let's pray for one another in the journey.
4. **Let's remember that we need each other.** It's only when we can't meet together that we increasingly feel the true loss of not having one another. We can do video calls and phone calls, we can send emails and text messages, and those things are very important to stay connected these days, but it's just not the same as being together in person. So this unique period of time is teaching us—and let's not miss this lesson—that we need one another. We need the genuine love, care and encouragement that comes from walking this journey, not alone, but together.
5. **Let's love one another through our disagreements.** The emphasis in this passage is on the sincerity, genuineness and whole-heartedness of Christian love. We

see in 1 Peter 2:1 that we are to “*put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander.*” We need to put those qualities away from us and not let them take root in our lives. No, we are to be fully committed to the wellbeing of one another.

In one sense, in a world where Christians are marginalized—as in Peter’s day and as in ours—what else do we have but one another? If we’re not committed to each other, we’re alone in this world. If we bite and devour one another and are not staying focused on the main things of the gospel together, we’re undermining a vital source of strength we have in this world as Christians.

So it’s important that we not let differences and disagreements over things that are not central gospel truths divide us and tear at us. See, the world is watching and we have a special opportunity today to show them Christ through the brotherly and sisterly love we show to one another.

We began this morning by thinking about the life of Elisabeth Elliot, asking, “How was she able to love the very people who killed her husband?” Wow! How did she do that? Where does that kind of love come from? If she can do that, then certainly we can love one another. And now we learn from 1 Peter that this love comes from the Word of God. God’s Word about Christ gives our souls the kind of inner life and strength that enables us to love like that. So as we recommit to God’s Word, let it have its intended effect—the effect of genuine, committed brotherly love.

New Covenant Bible Church

[4N780 Randall Road, St. Charles, IL 60175](https://www.newcbc.org)

(630) 584-2611 ♦ www.newcbc.org

All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

Text provided by sermontranscribers.com ♦ emily@sermontranscribers.com