

Live With Hunger

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[0 : 0 0] Okay, that's going to be our theme for the day, these verses from 1 Peter chapter 2. And I think it's true of all of us, I certainly hope it's true of all of us, that we want to be, and strive to be, strong Christians.

We want to be strong Christians in our lives. And we sometimes wonder how we can become strong Christians, because it all seems to be such a battle for us.

And so often, if you're like me, you feel like a weak Christian, not like a strong Christian. And in some ways, there isn't any quick fix.

There isn't a quick fix to that question. It's a bit like, you know, if you're on Facebook or on email or whatever, and somehow, and I don't know how it happens, but this little advert comes along at the side of it, and it's just of a fat belly, you know, and it says you can be thin really quickly, and it's then got a picture of a thin belly, I don't know how they do that.

And they've got a fat belly and a thin belly, and he says, all of these is two quick steps by some Mikesha berries or something like that. And if you eat them, you'll be fine in two weeks, you'll be thin as anything. Quick fixes to getting thin, you know, and you look at one, and then the other one is really thin.

[1 : 2 6] You think, well, that would be great. And then you try it, and then you realise it costs about a million pounds, and you have to sign up for a decade and all that kind of stuff. And ultimately, there's not really a quick fix for that.

But spiritually, there may not be a quick fix, but there's clear direction for us in Scripture about how to be a strong Christian. And it's very simple, because I think good teaching and good understanding of Scripture and good Christian livings like football, you know, it's at its best, it's a simple game.

When it's played, it's best, it's simple. We're not going to eat all these complicated routines and moves and coaching and strategy. It's a simple game at its best. And so is Christianity. It's a simple life at its best.

And I'm not saying because of that it's an easy life necessarily, but certainly the core to strength as a Christian is a simple way for us. And so what I want to do this morning, by way of introduction, is to repeat myself.

And to remind ourselves, as we saw last week, the important, really important link between truth and living.

[2 : 4 4] And that last week, we looked, if you look back to verse 13, it said, therefore, because there was this really strong link between the kind of lives we live as Christians and the foundational truths that we believe and these truths of grace and peace that found our lives, that are at the core of our lives.

And do you see again, there's another therefore, at the beginning of chapter 2, which is where we've read today, verses 1 and 2, therefore, read yourselves of all malice and so on.

So you've got another link between what's gone before, what it speaks about the Word of God, and then what's gone before that, what it speaks about foundations. So there's this amazing link between how we live effectively as Christians and what we believe as Christians and the type of Savior, the God that we believe in.

And I simply want to use two very simple, everyday pictures, well, I don't want to use it, scripture uses it, I'll just piggyback on the back of that, two metaphors, two pictures, two illustrations of how we should be living that will enable us to be strong Christians when we are founded well in the truth of the character and the person of God.

And the great thing about these two pictures of illustrations is that I hope that they'll remove the glaze that I can see from some of your eyes because they're everyday, they're not kind of illustrations that you don't know or that are distant from you.

[4 : 16] Illustrations are about clothing and about eating. Very simple, everyday illustrations. You're all clothed today, I presume you've all eaten today, you may not have, of course, because you've got Acacia berries coming in the post, but it may be that you will at some point be eating today, clothing and eating.

So I just want to say two things about the simple truths that enable us to become, to be strong Christians. The scaffold that we put on, or the scaffold that is there that enables us to become strong Christians.

The first is, I'm sorry, this is a really long kind of poor first heading point to make. I couldn't think of making it any kind of sharper, but it's kind of ditch the bad wardrobe in our new society.

It's a bit clumsy, isn't it? Ditch the bad wardrobe in our new society. In verse 1 he says, Therefore rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy and slander of every kind.

Okay? Rid yourselves of these things. What Peter is reminding the people to whom he's writing as Christians is, as we've seen already, and as you'll go on to see furthermore in this book, you belong to a new family.

[5 : 48] You're in a new environment, you've moved from death to life, we've seen that. You now have a new father, the Lord God. He is your head, the head of your life, and therefore you are to bear the marks of grace in your life.

You are to become like a person who is in a new life and in a new environment in your new selves. You have to become like God and we are to live as those who have moved from darkness to light, from death to life and all the different illustrations that we've seen.

Rid yourselves, therefore, he says, in this new environment, in this new place, in this new life that you have as a Christian, in this new relationship you have, you've got work to do, he says.

He says, rid yourselves, get rid of. Take off, it's the same verb that Paul uses in Ephesians where we read about putting off, taking off the old clothes.

That's the picture, that's the verb that's used when it says, rid yourselves, get rid of, take them away. They live differently. The damaging, the old, the selfish attitudes, the self-centered thinking, what the Bible calls the sins of our lives, these things that are elucidated in Scripture, of which one or two examples are given here, get rid of them.

[7 : 13] The malice, the deceit, the hypocrisy, the envy, the slander, he says, take them off. It's the old clothes of the old life. Now just to kind of illustrate that again, and it's only like all illustrations, it falls short, don't analyze it too far, but you know, can you imagine as someone who is going to come to the front of the church on their wedding day and they're going to start a new life with their bride, well, say it's with their bride and it's a groom, and he comes out to the front on this big important day and he's wearing an old oily boiler suit at the wedding.

He's coming out of the front, everyone's made a great effort, his bride is there, she's spent thousands on the dress, she's got her hair done, and he comes traipsing up to the front with an old dirty, oily, smelly boiler suit.

Now today, of course, there are funky society, everything's, hey, that's cool, that would be cool, that would be funny. That would be funny, but it wouldn't really, it wouldn't be funny for the people who love you and who have come to this day, just kind of be disrespectful, wouldn't it?

And it would be a bit childish to do something like that and damaging to the relationships involved. Now sin is much more serious than that, but it maybe gives us a flavour, or if you had a family gathering and you'd been working in the garden all afternoon and your clothes were sweaty and they were dirty with mud, so you went into the shower, took your clothes off, went in at the shower, got all clean, just before dinner with the family, but when you came out of the shower, you put the same clothes back on.

Have you ever had to do that? Have you ever had to become clean by having a shower? And then because maybe there's no other option, you've had to put old, smelly, sweaty clothes back on, it's a horrible feeling, but imagine doing that by choice and deliberately coming up to sit at the table with everyone else, you've got this muddy, dirty clothes on that are smelling.

[9 : 15] It would waste the time having the shower, but it would also be a strange and bizarre thing to do. And in a sense, that's what we do as Christians if we come with the foo of the cross and we praise and thank God for what He's done for us, the cleansing and the renewal, and they moved from darkness to light, and then we carry on living without reference to His Lordship and we carry on sinning as if we haven't been changed at all in our motives and in our hearts.

Read yourselves, He says, of these things, because you're a new life, you have a new Lord in your life. We have a responsibility under Christ. That's what we have.

We have, when we become Christians and we've spoken and spent months preaching on grace here and the free offer of the gospel, and it's all of Christ and it's what Christ has done for us, absolutely, absolutely.

But that doesn't mean that when we become Christians, we just sit back and can't do anything. We are asked, we are given responsibility, and more than that, we're empowered to change because we're indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

Can I get you to flick back to chapter 1, the very beginning, the foundational bit that we looked at at the beginning, where He says in verse 2, who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit.

[10 : 39] So when we become Christians, we are renewed, we move from death to life, and we have the power of God in enabling us to rid ourselves of the old way of living and the old sinful, self-centered, proud, bitter lifestyles or thinking that we have.

God wants to cooperate with us to do that. He gives us His Holy Spirit and says, look, I'm enabling you to be transformed from the inside out, to be, although the illustration is about taking clothes off, it's only an illustration, and it's saying this is the outward expression of an inward change.

If we're changed on the inside, we've been brought to life spiritually by God, then it reflects, it is reflected by the way we live outwardly. But changed behaviour comes from a changed heart, not the other way round.

Okay? It's because we need the Spirit of God, and we cooperate with the Spirit of God that we are able to change our behaviour. We are buying back responsibility.

We've been made in God's image, that image is broken because of sin, but in Christ we buy back that freedom to do and live the way He wants us to live.

[11 : 55] It's a freedom by His grace. I'm not saying that we're earning anything or we're doing things legalistically or in our own strength. We still need God. We need the Holy Spirit, but we are responsible to get the old clothes off, get rid of these things.

He says, and particularly in this list, none of them are exhaustive, these lists in Scripture, but this list is very interesting because it's a list which reminds us, because He's speaking to a people here, He's speaking to a family, He's speaking to a chosen people of God, a community of believers.

He says, see these things, get rid of these things that affect everyone. You get rid of them, He says. You, you, me, individually, get rid of the things that are affecting not just you, but everyone else in the congregation and the family and the communities.

These are social poisons that are listed here to see hypocrisy, envy, malice, slander of every kind. I'm not going to spend much time, I'm not going to spend really any time, that their self-explanatory words, sins, they don't need great in-depth explanation.

But what He's saying is, He's saying, here you belong now to the family of God. With Christ is your head, you're not simply an individual who's in this great relationship with Jesus.

[13 : 17] You're part of the family of God. And He says, as such of a responsibility in your relationships, not just vertically with God, but horizontally with one another. And He says, get rid of the sins that break these relationships in the congregation, in the church, here in St. Columbus. For us, as we talk about it, let's get absolutely practical for ourselves.

May our relationships here be marked by the opposite of what we have to get rid of here, by honesty, by sincerity, by openness, by guarded speech, by goodness.

Let's not speak badly about others or think badly about others. Let's not be deceitful, trying to be one thing in front of our all friends, but being another thing secretly and privately in our lives, being hypocritical, being envious of others or slandering.

You're talking badly about them, talking behind their backs. Oh, we're greater than a church. Brilliant! Being at the centre of everything and us, we being the standard through which everyone must meet, rather than Christ being the standard and looking at ourselves.

Isn't it interesting? It's a kind of mixed thing here, because it's talking about how we relate to one another, how we deal with one another, but it says you relate to one another by dealing with yourself.

[14 : 42] And that's what we really have to do. So often we think, everyone else needs to change. I'm, by God, the church needs to change, but not me. I've got it here. I'm right.

Everyone else needs to adapt and mould and move themselves to me. Whereas Christ is saying here that, listen, the foundation is significant, hugely significant.

Christ is hugely significant, and we are to mould our lives to Him by self-examination, and therefore from that the way we treat and live with one another.

Be forgiven and be forgiving. Have you lost your sense of that? Have you lost this sense of dealing with sin? Is it old? Is it Victorian now to talk about dealing with things in our lives that God is unhappy with?

Have we stopped being a repenting people, a turning people, changing people, a convicted people, a people who see ourselves in the light of God and say, I want to change. I want to become like Him.

[15 : 50] I'm tired of hurting other people and letting other people down and letting God down and being the centre of my own universe. Is it time for us to recognise the responsibility we have to not be sinners according to God's standard?

It's hugely significant. So it's negative at that level that we put off, we take off. But then He goes on to say in the second place, like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, that you've tasted the Lord is good.

So the second point, the first point in that clumsy title is ditch the bad wardrobe in the new society. I wanted to get across the importance of society, not just individual Christian living, but it's part of God's people, ditch the old wardrobe, the old way of living.

But then in this new one, develop a good appetite. So it's clothing and eating. We know all about these things so that they're kind of good illustrations, aren't they, God gives us, develop a good appetite.

And that's hugely significant, isn't it, that we've got this example of a newborn baby, where today we have Isabella, who's a newborn baby. And we can use her as an example, can't we, of how important it is that they're fed and that they learn and know and understand and grow up with these things in their lives.

[17 : 18] Develop a good attitude, a good appetite. This is really vital, I think. And I think the first point that I'm going to make is the most vital of all. Please, if you haven't heard anything so far, please listen to this one.

This is really important. We need to be learning, as Christians, where the goodness is. Like newborn babies crave pure spiritual milk so you may grow up in your salvation.

But now that you've tasted it, the Lord is good. We need to be learning and continuing to learn where the goodness is.

So what I'm saying here is we're going to go right back again to foundations. It's absolutely vital that our foundations are right. Because if your life as a Christian is not founded on the goodness of God as a person and his character, then you will struggle to be a strong Christian and you will struggle to persevere.

That's hugely significant. If you doubt his goodness, you'll struggle to keep going or to believe in God. And it's having tasted his goodness and having that foundation in our lives that enables us to move forward and to grow and be strong even when times are bad.

[18 : 41] You'll struggle if your God, as you understand him, from God's word isn't good. God created, and that's why the whole Bible, old and new, is so important. Because it starts at the beginning of the redemptive story.

It's not the history of the world, but it does give us the redemptive story from the beginning. God created and said, this world is good. What I have made is good. It's a good world. And I am a good, perfect, pure God.

And you and me are made originally as was, good people made in his image. With all the complexity of that, human beings made in the image of God complex, that is.

And the complexity gets even deeper when we reject him, when we reject his goodness, when we say we want to be in control of our own lives, and we want to military against his goodness by becoming lords of our own lives.

Therefore, this image of God in us, when we allow rebellion and sin to enter in, becomes hugely complex. Death enters and evil enters in.

[19 : 55] The distorted image of God becomes an ugly and yet powerful reality. You know, can you think of, we're made in God's image.

That was a great privilege and great responsibility. But having chosen not to remain in his goodness and under the goodness of God, but wanting our own lordship, then the image of God becomes a complex reality for us.

It becomes a complex evil, yet God remains pure, God remains good, God continues to pour out good gifts to people, even those who reject him.

And of course, the cross is the absolute zenith of his goodness expressed. Even when we weren't interested in him, we rebelled against him, and our lives were that complexity of distorted and broken image mixed in with evil and death.

He went to the cross and offered us grace and peace and life, not death, life.

[21 : 03] Not darkness, light, spiritually. That must be the foundation of your life. And mind, if you spend your life questioning, maybe because of experience, maybe because of feelings, and I'm not denying the significance and importance of these things, but if we get away from the foundation of God's goodness, we will always struggle to crave after him and love him.

So learning where the goodness is is absolutely crucial, isn't it? Going back to foundations. It's always about foundations, grace and truth. Your life is a believer. Therefore, then you go on to develop a craving for him.

Crave pure spiritual milk, now that you've tasted that the Lord is good. See, Isabella tastes her mother's milk, or Hattie, who's with us as well today.

Look, Hattie. And we've got lots of little babies. But they've tasted. They want more. They don't say, oh, it's rubbish. Can I have some Coke?

Try something else. This breast milk is rubbish. It's hopeless. They don't do that. They crave, and new mums and dads know exactly what that craving is like, whether it be in the middle of the night or the middle of the day.

[22 : 29] This craving for what they've already known implicitly and instinctively is good. They know it's good, so they crave it.

And as believers, when our foundation is in Christ and we understand that, then we recognize and know that he is good and we crave him. We need to feed ourselves on that, on his goodness.

We need to educate our spiritual palate to learn to know more. And as we do so, our appetites are changing.

So maybe all of you, I know I've often said and sometimes saying, probably we'll say today, I don't crave after God. I don't have this newborn child like longing for God as a newborn child has for milk.

I can't change that desire. You're right. You can't change that desire. You can't make yourself crave God, as it were. But he's saying, there's ingredients here. You've got things to put off.

[23 : 36] You've got sins to get rid of. And you've got foundations to remain in. You're to know the God who reveals himself in his word and his goodness and trust in that.

That develops, the desire comes when we do the things that he commands and encourages us by grace through his Holy Spirit to do.

He goes, I can't change. Hopeless. Keep going back the same things. That's a lie of sin. We are empowered by the Holy Spirit to change as Christians and to know his goodness.

And as a result, we have to feed our faith regularly. Crave, pure spiritual milk. Feed your faith. That's the picture, isn't it? It's milk, newborn child, absolutely essential, needs it every day.

That's the only way they'll grow up. And we need to feed our faith regularly with that same image. We need the spiritual, the basic nourishment that's essential for our spiritual survival.

[24 : 40] We need the Word, the Bible, the truth, the foundation of this revelation of Jesus Christ. We need prayer and fellowship. These are good things.

That's what he gives us to make us strong as Christians. And we can't do without them in a relationship with them. It's crazy, isn't it? To just bow the knee, fall down at his feet.

Thank you for saying that. I love you so much. And I never being in touch with him again. It just doesn't make sense, does it? That we're not coming back to and speaking to the One who is redeemed.

The good One who we have tested is good. It's a disaster to do without these. You can say, oh, well, I'm a spiritual kind of Christian. I don't need these disciplines.

Fine. But you're reading from another Bible. Another revelation of God that isn't here. He says, if you love me, you'll be in my fellowship.

[25 : 38] You will be reliant on me. You will focus. The foundation will be there. And you will feed on the things that you know spiritually are good for you.

I often feel that we focus on this, feeding your faith regularly. You know, the Word and prayer and the Bible. I think we focus on them.

But if we're honest, we know the craving is not there. We don't really want to do it. I know that is a really horrible place to be as a Christian. You're doing the things that you're supposed to be doing, because you know they're supposed to be good for you, but you actually, you're getting no benefit, and you're not craving this God that you seek to be nourished by.

It's like the horrible place where you are, if you're not well, you know you have to eat, but you've got no appetite. You know, you're not enjoying it. You're forcing it down.

It's kind of miserable, but you think you ought to do it. Is that how you are as a Christian? And I can only ask the question of yourselves and myself, is it because your life isn't founded on the goodness of God?

[26 : 45] Are you doubting His goodness? In other words, can I give another illustration? Do you see God as a spiritual chemist, as opposed to a spiritual chef?

Do you see your God as a chemist who's dispensing medicine? Must be good for you, but it's pretty grotesque, horrible to taste. But it must be good for you.

Or is he a chef preparing the finest of food for you to enjoy? That's where foundations matter. I think a lot of us have a chemist God, a God who dispenses medicine.

Now, there's a sense in which, of course, it is, it's healing medicine. But I think our understanding and image of who God is is more geared towards that than towards this loving Father who's providing us with the best of food.

And is it because the right things are not in place? Our foundation is wrong. No, we've spoken a lot about foundations. Is it that the foundations aren't right with God?

[28 : 04] What's wrong? Are we complicated things? I'll go back to our Christianity being a simple thing. Can you look back on this week then?

Your Christian life, your behaviour, your attitudes, the kind of week you've had, your interests are otherwise in the wider Christian community and your attitudes that will affect how that community develops and grows.

Is there a lifelessness, a lack of craving, a lack of desire, a lack of interest in God and in His people? It may be that we need to get back to basics again, to foundations again, and to relationship with God at that level.

The most important thing to do in this church is to just close by remixing the metaphors. Is that you're not wearing the grace clothes that are spoken of, particularly in Ephesians 4.

I may just read a little bit there at the end of Ephesians 4 where we read this morning. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other.

[29 : 21] This is grace clothes. Grace, God forgive you. Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children. Live a life of love just as Christ loved us and gave himself for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

This is the grace clothes. We take off the old wardrobe, but we put on the grace clothes to change or mix the metaphor of the analogy. We are positive responsibility, not only to take off the sins, but to put on grace to live forgiveness, to live a loving, caring, open-minded forgiveness and grace and compassion and love, particularly as a society of people.

It's difficult to do these things in a monastery. It's difficult to do them just looking internally to yourself. But as you sacrificially give of your life for Christ in community, then you live grace.

You put on grace. I think if your God is harsh and oppressive and morally dubious, you'll be weak.

Your faith will collapse and you'll wander from the truth. So put on the grace clothes and to move to the food image, we need to consider whether we may be, rather than craving the pure spiritual milk of the word in our lives, whether we are making unhealthy spiritual appetite choices.

[30 : 59] Are we willing today to make Christ chief chef of our lives spiritually, to make Him Lord and God and accept what He says is bad for us and move away from it?

Or do we not want to heed God's warnings because somehow we feel it's more like a chemist or someone that we want to avoid? We don't need to change, we may say, I can't be wrong, I like doing it.

It was God to tell me whether it's right or wrong, I like it, it's good. Can't be wrong, but God says move from that self-absorption and from that moral sinking sand, which has no foundation and no ultimacy or exclusivity, don't resent His Lordship.

Are we doing all the wrong things and then blaming God for being a distant, loveless being? You know there's that famous statement people talk about where they say at the end of their lives, there's not going to be anyone who will say I wish I spent more time in the office, no one says that.

And it's just a reflection on the kind of choices we make in life. And I wonder spiritually as well, or to be broadened with regard to food, will there be anyone at the end of their lives who's dying of lung cancer, will say I really wish I bought another 20 fags a week to smoke, I wish I'd done that.

[32 : 43] Or who possibly is dying of chronic heart disease, I wish I went to McDonald's more than twice a week, or to the Chippy, wish I had more unhealthy lives.

I don't think many people will be like that at the end of their lives with regard to the choices they make. And spiritually do we want to be like that at the end of our lives to say I really wish that I'd been spiritually unhealthy all my life, that I hadn't listened to God, that I hadn't changed, that I didn't desire him because my foundation wasn't in him.

Or do we take his word, accept the cross as the core and ultimate reality of an expression of his goodness, over and above even creation and our lives and how long we've had to live and all these things.

And are we going to accept that and accept his Lordship and the responsibility he gives us in life to get rid of the old clothes and to desire him through fellowship and communion and prayer.

That's why more than anything what's been said this morning, what Colin said at the very beginning is probably the most important thing today. We come together to pray, that we learn and become a vibrant, pleading people, not just on our own but together.

[34 : 05] May that be the case for us and may we know that. And if you're not a Christian, I think you can only not be a Christian today, here, if you doubt the goodness of God.

And can I ask you to revisit that and revisit the cross and revisit the breath that you are breathing today that allows you to be here and all the benefits and the goodness that you are given on a daily basis, even though you stick your fingers heavenwards at him.

May it be you consider the word of God in the living reality of his goodness today. Let's put our heads in prayer. Father, help us to be a people who don't go through the motions of spiritual eating without appetite or who maintain an outward demeanour that is un-Christ-like and unwashed as it were, even though we claim to be washed inside.

May we see the link between our foundations and the truth of God and the practical lives that we need to live. And may we be convicted by your spirit to enjoy you and to rejoice in you and to belong to you.

Thank you for your goodness. Thank you for the goodness and grace that we see expressed in our fellowship together. Thank you for all that we know and even in the questions, the difficulties, the darkneses and the problems that this life throws up for us with all its evil and death and darkness.

[35 : 53] May we find by faith that we can hold on to the promises of Christ and the promises of redemption and munis in eternity.

For Jesus' sake, amen.