

Living without Giving Up

1 Peter 4:1-11

6 September 2020 | Grace Bible Church Corinda | Ben Shannon

Big Question: What should we do when suffering for doing good makes us want to give up?

Big Idea: Never give up on following Jesus, even if it means suffering.

Introduction

Never, never, never, give up.

Last Wednesday, it was seventy-five years since the official end of World War II.

It wasn't a day to celebrate war, but it was a day to remember when the years of costly fighting finally stopped.

The suffering and misery weren't over – that would go on for decades – but the cause of that suffering was finished.

It was a day that could barely be imagined at the end of October 1941.

Great Britain had been at war for over two years and the German army was still advancing through Europe.

The United States didn't have a reason to enter the war and it was hard to imagine how the United Kingdom could win.

Prime Minister Winston Churchill knew that they were in dark and difficult days.

At that time, he gave an address to boys at Harrow School.

These were his words:

“This is the lesson: never give in, never give in, never, never, never, never—in nothing, great or small, large or petty—never give in except to convictions of honour and good sense. Never yield to force; never yield to the apparently overwhelming might of the enemy.”¹

Decades later, knowing that he'd lead his country to victory, Churchill's words seem so obvious.

Don't give up because we've read the history books and you come out on top.

But at the time, when the suffering was great, when the whole world seemed to be against them, those words would've taken a huge amount of courage.

Courage to never, never, never, give up, despite the suffering that would come his country's way.

The apostle Peter was writing at a very different time, but his message in our passage this morning was basically the same as Churchill's.

Never, never, never give up.

Outline

This term, we've been working through the book of 1 Peter.

It was originally a letter written by Peter, one of Jesus' closest friends.

He was in the capital city Rome, writing to Christians on the other side of the Roman Empire.

The whole letter is about living for Jesus in sight of the end.

We saw that the first bit of the letter was about living as chosen people.

People who have been chosen by God to be his people.

We're finishing off the second section of the letter today.

This part of the letter's all about living as strangers.

Being a Christian may mean that you're going to be out of step with most other people in your community because of your Christian faith.

How do you live as a Christian under those circumstances?

Peter gave us his surprising answer in verses eleven and twelve of chapter two.

They can basically be summarised like this: do good and not evil.

Peter didn't live in some made-up world, he was a realist: life's going to be difficult at times.

You might – in fact, probably will – be treated unfairly.

You may not suffer for doing the wrong thing and you might suffer for doing the right thing.

When the pressure's on and you're tempted to go back to ungodliness, press on because of the confidence you have in Christ's victory.

When you feel like a black sheep, Peter's final piece of advice is the same as Churchill's: Never, never, never give up.

Never give up on following Jesus, even if it means suffering.

Peter outlines three points:

- Never give up because you're done with sin (vv1-3)

- Never give up because you will give an account (vv4-6)
- Never give up because the end is near (vv7-11)

Never give up because you're done with sin (vv1-3)

Firstly, never give up because you're done with sin.

Being done with sin will mean suffering for doing God's will, but don't give up.

As Christians, we're at war.

We're in a war and the enemy, our greatest threat isn't out there somewhere.

Our biggest danger comes from inside of us.

Sin is our enemy and our sinful desires are at war with us.

That's exactly the imagery Peter uses in 2:11:

1 Peter 2:11 NIV11 ¹¹ Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul.

That might sound a little bit aggressive to you.

This's church, after all, where's the love?

Make no mistake – it's not found in sin.

It could well be that you've got no idea what sin is because it's not a word that people generally use much anymore.

If you think sin's about breaking rules, that's kind of true.

Sin IS breaking God's rules, but it's much worse than that.

Sin is being so self-centred, so self-contained, so self-sufficient that we live in defiance of God.

A sinner is a rule-maker who thinks THEY know what's best for them and for absolute certain that God doesn't.

Sin is saying that it's not wrong to do whatever I please – if I want to take something that belongs to you, then I say that's okay.

If sin was company, it would just about entirely be made up of the marketing department.

Sin would be known for continually coming up with viral ad campaigns on YouTube and Instagram.

Sin sells itself to us, telling us that it will make life good for us.

“Come on, you know you want to. It'll be fun.”

When actually, sin destroys us.

The problem is that sin always harms ourselves and others.

And yet we're so caught up on it that we keep going back for more.

The Bible uses a really graphic picture – a dog returning to its vomit.²

Yes, it's disgusting, but that's the point.

Sin offers us freedom but refuses to give us an escape and instead keeps calling us back to the disgusting mess that it is.

God's love frees us from the power of sin.

Jesus' defeat over evil, which we looked at last week, buys us the freedom to live for God and not just the culture around us.

It was his love for sinful people that caused Jesus to take on the suffering of the cross.

He was willing to follow God's will and die for our sin because it was the only way for us to be saved.

1 Peter 3:18 NIV11 ¹⁸ For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit.

His triumph was through suffering, so, arm yourself with the same attitude as Jesus, verse one.

Christian belief is recognising that Jesus is Lord, 3:15.

It's love for God that compels us to put sin to death.

Our only defence against sin is to arm ourselves with the same willingness to suffer.

Being godly, living "for the will of God" to use Peter's words in verse two, isn't going to be easy.

The battle against sin is messy and it's going to mean suffering.

A commitment to not sinning is a commitment to suffer because our lifestyle choices will be met with cultural disapproval.

If you want to be accepted, then give up on Jesus.

Though of course that's not Peter's point.

His point is to never, never, never give up.

Suffering can make you feel like a loser.

There are going to be times when giving up feels really, really attractive though.

You're going to want to give in.

But your willingness to suffer is evidence that the power of sin has been broken in your life.

Suffering doesn't make you a loser, it actually shows that you're winning the battle against sin.

Peter's not talking about all kinds of suffering here.

He's not got in mind the person who suffers from chronic pain and suffers every waking moment of their life.

But he does have in mind those who are suffering for following Jesus.

As we saw last week, baptism is a sign that you're done with sin.

The desire to be done with sin isn't the same as never sinning.

Becoming a Christian doesn't mean that you're instantly sin-free.

To use the same language that Peter does in 3:20, it doesn't remove dirt from your body.

This side of heaven, we will sadly continue to sin.

But being united with Jesus does mean that you're done with it.

It's an appeal to God that you don't want to live according to sin any longer.

You're not going to spend your time living for "evil human desires," verse two.

Instead, you're going to live the rest of your days on this planet seeking to follow God's will.

Peter says that you've spent enough time doing the things pagans do, verse three.

It's kind of ironic that Peter says these are the things that "gentiles" do when this was a letter probably written to mostly gentiles.

He's talking about outsiders, people who aren't yet Christians.

These are things that were once very natural for Christians, but aren't anymore.

1 Peter 4:3 NIV11 ³ For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do—living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry.

What if you don't really feel like it has been enough time though?

Feeling like you'd be missing out is one of the reasons that people don't want to become Christians.

But is it really missing out not to do these things?

No, not at all, because what Jesus offers you is so much better.

He offers you the best life in heaven with him forever.

And unlike sin, we know he'll deliver because he's already proved it's possible by rising from the dead.

Living for the will of God will mean suffering.

Friends, where are you feeling the rub because you're living for Jesus?

Where are you seeing friction because you're pursuing the will of God?

You might be really feeling the pinch at the moment because you're suffering for Jesus.

If that's you, then be encouraged because it's a sign you're done with sin.

On the other hand, perhaps the answer is nowhere?

If that's the case, then you need to ask yourself if it's because you're a chameleon?

Are you blending in and not living distinctly for Jesus?

Is it a sign that you're not actually fighting the battle against sin at the moment?

You can't do it on your own – you need God's help.

Never, never, never give up and give into sin.

Be willing to suffer for carrying out God's will because you're done with sin.

Never give up because you will give an account (vv4-6)

Secondly, never give up because you will give an account for your life.

Living for Jesus, with him as Lord of your life, is going to change the way you live.

If you're someone who doesn't call themselves a Christian, hopefully you've noticed that your Christian friend's faith motivates them to do good.

And then at other times, it seems to be the reason that they do things that are quite strange.

Like coming on a Sunday morning to hear a talk from the Bible.

To the Christians in the room, Peter's saying that you shouldn't be surprised when your friends are surprised.

They'll be genuinely surprised when you don't live the same way they do.

And don't be surprised if some people even abuse you for it.

Don't be surprised, because as someone who's living for Jesus, you're going to look really strange.

I'll see if I can show you why.

Let's pretend for a moment that there really isn't one, true and living God.

If you take God out of the picture, what's the meaning and purpose to life?

If there is no God, if when you die you simply become worm food or return to being part of the universe again, then nothing you do really has any lasting value.

The Preacher in the book of Ecclesiastes reminds us that we won't be remembered after we die.

Life is like a vapour, here one moment and gone the next.

If that's true, then what can life possibly be about, other than making the most of the present?

It makes perfect sense to live with abandon.

To put it like Paul does in 1 Corinthians 15:

1 Corinthians 15:32b NIV11 If the dead are not raised, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die."

Why would you NOT want to do these things if there is no God?

Christian friend, OF COURSE your friends will want you to lunge into the pool and call you to join them.

And when you don't make the same lifestyle choices they do, then you need to realise that you're actually kind of criticising them.

They might feel like you're condemning them because they think that you think you're better than them.

So, expect that there'll be pressure on you to give up.

My friend R works in a part of the world where there are very few Christians.

One of her friends is a Christian who doesn't come from a Christian family and grew up in a culture where there aren't many Christians.

I feel for sorry for her because she desperately wants to get married, but she knows how difficult it would be to be married to someone with completely different beliefs.

They'll have very different ideas about how to live and bring up children.

Her family want to get married to, so they're putting more and more pressure on her to get married to someone from their home culture regardless of his religion.

That's not easy to resist.

We don't give up because we know that we'll have to give an account, verse five.

On the other hand, what if this isn't all that there is?

What if there's actually more than this life, the here and now and the pleasure that it gives us?

Peter, like all Christians, believed that there was more.

What if there really is a God?

What if this life isn't all that there is?

The Bible clearly teaches that there will be a day when every single person – Christian or not – regardless of whether you say you believe in God or not, will have to give an account.

There will be a day when the one, true and living God will call people to give an account to him.

The Bible tells us:

Hebrews 9:27 NIV11 ²⁷ Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment,

Some people might have the objection that being a Christian doesn't make any difference since we all die.

Cemeteries are full of the bodies of Christians who've died.

Don't Christians die, just like everyone else?

Yep, that's true.

We die because each and every person is a sinner – that's why we preach the gospel.

Sadly, there are times when all of us live self-righteously, but Christians don't have any reason to.

Christians aren't any better than anyone else if we're marked on our own merit.

Without Jesus, based on my own performance, I'm no better in God's sight than someone who most of us would consider the scum of the earth.

I am a sinner, just like everyone else.

But the good news is that Jesus has saved me.

He's died in my place.

The perfectly righteous son of God stepped in to take the punishment that I deserved.

The righteous one has stepped in for an unrighteous sinner like me.

I can go to heaven because of Jesus, not me.

I might well be judged and found wanting according to human standards, but that matters less than what God thinks of me.

Christians might be hauled before courts and judged to have done the wrong thing.

We might even be burned at the stake for no other reason than following Jesus.

After all, that's exactly what happened to Jesus.

A decision was made by the Romans courts that Jesus should die.

Actually, Pilate found him not guilty but had him put to death to appease the Jews.

If we judged Jesus the same way they did, we'd see him as a failure, just like they did.

Yet three days later he rose he rose from the dead.

The grave couldn't hold him because he defeated death.

If we trust in him, then our suffering will be followed by resurrection too.

We know that life beyond the grave is guaranteed for us as well.

We know we'll be accepted by God if we trust in Jesus alone.

The only way I can be acceptable to God is because of Jesus.

If that's the case, then don't give up, don't abandon ship because we will have to give an account to God.

You might face suffering in the short term, but it's what God thinks that matters more.

Never give up because the end is near (vv7-11)

Finally, never give up because the end is near.

Press on and keep living according to God's will.

The best part of two thousand years ago, Peter wrote that the end is near, verse seven.

Doesn't it seem a little far-fetched to still believe that after such a long time?

Peter didn't mean that Jesus would come back in the next five, ten or one hundred years.

He couldn't know when Jesus would come back because Jesus himself said that nobody knows.

The point is that Jesus rising from the dead was a turning point in history.

I know that we call it CE and BCE now, but we still count from his death and resurrection.

The cross was the beginning of the end and so we are living in what in other places is called the last days.

Jesus could come back at any time and if he doesn't, the end will come quicker than most of us expect.

Even though we know it's not really true, most of us secretly live as if we'll live forever.

A little bit of perspective can help you face the pressures of living in this world so that you don't give up.

Just like an athlete needs a coach to remind them of their goals and encourage them to press on even when they want to give up, or the person who's trying to lose weight needs to remember what the goal is, we need perspective to stay motivated.

How would you live if you knew that Jesus is coming back tomorrow?

If you knew that it was a dead cert that Jesus is coming back tomorrow, how would that change the way you live?

Some people say that if they knew that Jesus is coming back tomorrow, then they'd start believing in him.

Maybe that's you.

The truth is that none of us know how long we've got on this earth.

I was going to give you some examples of bizarre ways that people have unexpectedly died – you know, pianos falling out of the sky stuff – to make the point that you never know when it's going to happen.

But I realised that it'd give you nightmares and might make you too scared to walk out the front door, so you can look it up later.

Which still kind of makes the point that you could go at any time but you don't need to be afraid if you're trusting in Jesus.

What's stopping you doing business with God now?

Come, repent and turn to God as the only way that you can be saved.

Ask for the forgiveness that he offers to you today.

What if you're already a Christian? What would you do then?

Life is short, so live every day in sight of the end and make every moment count.

How do you do that, though? What does it look like in everyday life?

Well, it looks much more ordinary than ticking a whole lot of thrills off your bucket list.

Peter gives us three things about living with the end in sight.

#1 Be alert to pray.

We've seen that we're in a spiritual battle.

When Jesus was in his greatest spiritual battle, the night he was arrested, Jesus went to pray in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Peter was there with him as he wrote this, he probably couldn't forget that night.

Although he probably wished that he could forget because although Peter was there, he was far from alert – he was asleep!

Prayer is more than a quick fix for a difficult situation.

It's the engine room of our lives where we express our utter dependence on our God.

We've seen a few times that Peter thinks prayer's so important that you should make sure that nothing gets in the way.

The end is near and so we need God to act.

#2 Love each other

The second way of living in sight of the end is by loving each other constantly.

New, fresh love is as hot as a furnace, but it can quickly grow cold over time.

As time goes on, it can be difficult to keep loving each other at full stretch (that's what the original word means).

We experience this in marriage, family, friends and with people at church.

Love's an essential part of the Christian life.

We need to keep stoking the fires of love because love is a priority.

Peter quotes from Proverbs 10:12:

Proverbs 10:12 NIV11 ¹² Hatred stirs up conflict, but love covers over all wrongs.

Please don't misunderstand what this means.

We're always looking for ways to make ourselves right with God by doing things.

Peter's not saying to do something loving because it'll balance out all the bad thing that you've done.

No, our love doesn't atone for our sin.

He's saying that love lets stuff slide.

Love says, "I'm going to let that one go through to the keeper."

When you wrong me, out of love I'm not going to remember it.

That's what makes love so powerful.

#3 Serve each other

Peter seems to zoom in on hospitality.

Perhaps that's because when he wrote, mission was supported by people putting the first gospel workers up, like Phoebe at Cenchrae.³

People may have felt wronged when they showed hospitality which seems to be suggested in the Didache, an early Christian manual for life.

Or perhaps Peter simply knew how quickly we complain when the novelty of church meeting in our homes (as they often did in the first century) wears off.

He also speaks more generally about serving.

God graciously gifts Christians in all kinds of ways.

He gives every Christian different skills and abilities.

They might be things we hone and refine, but ultimately they're a gift from God.

And they're not really for our benefit – they're for the benefit of others.

God didn't give us gifts and abilities so that people would sing about how great we are, but how great he is.

Some of the gifts involve speaking.

If you're gonna speak, speak the words of God and don't fluff around with anything less.

It doesn't mean that the words that come out of my or anyone else's mouth are on the same level as the Bible – don't make that mistake.

But speaking God's truth is important.

At the same time, speaking isn't the only thing that matters.

The people who give the sermons, lead worship, teach Sunday School or facilitate Bible study groups are far from being the only ministries that matter.

God's gifted people to serve in all kinds of ways and each and every one of them matters.

I'm so thankful for the people who serve in crèche, do morning tea and more than ever, clean and maintain the building so that we can meet in safe place.

Serving is hard work that's always costly.

Pouring out time, energy and love into other people is a joy, but it always comes with a price tag.

If you serve in your own strength, you'll run out of puff.

The only way that you can serve consistently over the long term is by doing it in the strength that God provides, verse eleven.

As human beings we have limits, we can't do everything, but it never ceases to amaze me when I'm at the end of the my tether and the Lord helps me get through.

Never, never, never give up on these fundamental parts of the Christian life.

They're essential as we live in sight of the end and we need to keep coming back to them, especially as we live as strangers in the world.

Not so that we'd be glorified, but so that God might be glorified though Jesus.

To him be the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen.

Conclusion

Never, never, never give up.

Because you're done with sin.

Because you will give an account.

Because the end is near.

Never give up on following Jesus, even if it means suffering.

¹ Quoted from <https://winstonchurchill.org/resources/reference/frequently-asked-questions/quotes-faq-2/>. The address was given on 29 October 1941. The full speech is contained in *The Unrelenting Struggle* (London: Cassell and Boston: Little Brown 1942, and is found on pages 274-76 of the English edition). It may also be found in *The Complete Speeches of Winston S. Churchill*, edited by Robert Rhodes James (NY: Bowker and London: Chelsea House 1974).

² 2 Peter 2:22

³ Acts 18:18; Romans 16:1-2

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Big Question: What should we do when suffering for doing good makes us want to give up?

Big Idea: Never give up on following Jesus, even if it means suffering.

Discussion Questions

1. What things do you think were going through Winston Churchill's mind when he spoke in October 1941?
2. Why do Christians need to be armed? Isn't that a bit aggressive?
3. What was Jesus an example of?
4. What are some points that you'd want to make if you were having a conversation with a Christian who felt that they hadn't spent enough time doing the things Peter lists in verse three?
5. Why would someone who's not yet a Christian have for abusing your for not joining them in their lifestyle.
6. How does God's judgment shape our perspective on suffering?
7. How can Peter (writing 2,000 years ago) say "the end of all things is near"?
8. Why do you need to be alert to pray?
9. Why reason does Peter give for saying that love matters so much? Do you think he's right?
10. Why is serving a way of living in sight of the end?