



Sermon Growth Guide

January 10, 2020

Here We Go! - Live for God

1 Peter 1:1-9

Key Verse: 1 Peter 1:8

"Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy."

Big Idea: Value #1 Live for God: worship trains our hearts to beat for God.

Foundations

"Here We Go!" That's the name of our new series that launches today. In January 2020 we held Vision Weekend where we introduced **The First Way: 7 Values in Our Pursuit of Jesus**. Then, COVID. Wow, God gave us our 7 Values in our pursuit of Him just before the shutdown.

Pastor Tim reflects: "It was as if the Lord had dropped in on us in January (2020) and handed us a compass and map right before we flew into the fog. God is so good!" It's time to regroup around these values. Today, **Value #1, Live for God**. Worship trains our hearts to beat for God. Each week of this series we'll be in the book of 1 Peter.

Pastor Tim at length: "The church is not primarily a social change agent or a gathering of people pursuing a common spiritual interest. It is not in its essence a factory for good deeds or an inspirational rally for moral behavior training. It is not at its core a place for education or dissemination of information. The church is a body of people called into a special relationship with God, commanded to gather together in His presence and give Him worship and praise from whatever context or corner they find themselves in. Praise be to God!"

Gathered together with your circle, open your time of study in prayer. Ask the Spirit to guide and guard your spiritual formation, your growth in Christ.

Understanding God's Word

In verses 1 and 2, what do we learn about those to whom this letter is written? How does one come to love God according to these verses?

Spend time working through verses 3-9. In what ways are you encouraged, challenged and exhorted in these stunning sentences?

Applying God's Word

Peter exclaims in verse 8, "though you have not seen him (Jesus), you love him." One of our values is "Live for God." We strive to live for God because we love Him. One way we love God and live for God is to devote our "First Hour" to Him in worship every week. How are you doing in gathering together with the Church in lifting up the name of the Lord and declaring that He alone is worthy of all praise? How can you cultivate an even deeper habit of praise?

Witnessing God's Word

A part of this week's sermon is about identifying idols in our own hearts. What gets your attention most? What do you ascribe as "worthy" first and foremost? We must cultivate hearts that seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. When we do this, we witness well and the watching world will see God through us.

End your time praying that you and every person in your circle would reflect the light of heaven throughout each moment of your upcoming week. Pray that as you "Live for God" the watching world will, in turn, follow suit.

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On January 25, 2020, which was about ten years ago, I think (wasn't it?), we held Vision Weekend 2020 and introduced **The First Pres Way: 7 Values in Our Pursuit of Jesus**. Then 2020 happened. Time and again as we navigated the difficult decisions of this year, we returned to these values. Our mission statement, that we are called to be "Light and Life for the City," and these seven values guided our decisions. God had given us a gift we didn't really know we needed. Pilots are expert pilots when they can fly through fog and not get lost. They know how to trust the navigation systems and make it through. Our mission statement and values were our navigation system this year, and we could not be more grateful. It was as if the Lord had dropped in on us in January and handed us a compass and map right before we flew into the fog. God is so good! Well, First Pres, I know it's not over yet, but it is time to regroup around these seven values and find our way forward into a fresh start in 2021. For this next series we will look at 1 Peter and renew our commitment to the First Pres Way. Seven Values: Live for God, Hold Fast, Keep Growing, Love Like Jesus, Share Good News, Deploy Generosity and Make Beauty. That's how we make disciples.

So, here is value #1: **Live for God:** Worship trains our hearts to beat for God. How you worship will change how you live. What you worship will determine what you become. We want to live for God. Worship is where that starts. Why go to church? I mean, when you could go to church and when we once again will go to church? Why go to church? Why worship? Why take time to turn on the screen at home and posture your heart for worship? Why do we do this? What's the point? A boy was standing in the foyer of the church looking at a memorial plaque with a hundred names on it. The pastor said, "That's our memorial wall. Those are the names of our members who died in the service." The boy said, "Oh, which service? The 9:30 or the 11:00?"

I'm dying in here! What are we doing this for? Anybody remember feeling like that as a kid? Kids? What are we doing? Worship comes from the same word as "worthy." For one hour each week we dedicate time to come together as a congregation and declare with one voice, the Lord is worthy of praise.

We believe Peter wrote his letters from Rome, just before he and Paul were executed under Nero. Peter wrote, as Paul did, to gathered congregations. Paul was sometimes clear, "I charge you before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers and sisters" (1 Thessalonians 5:27). These were group exercises. Gather up and read this aloud when you are together for group prayer, group singing, collective reading and teaching, congregated activities as one body—worship. Remember, all these verbs and pronouns are in the plural, there is not a one that is singular, this letter is to the church gathered for worship.

"Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To God's elect, exiles scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance" (1 Peter 1:1-2). Peter writes, not to those who chose wisely on the spiritual smorgasbord of life, not to those who learned how to be acceptable to God through strict moral behavior. No. Peter writes as he experienced, to those who were chosen, elect, grabbed by Jesus. Those who had found themselves, as Peter had found himself, surprisingly confronted by Jesus. And in that confrontation met by a Savior and a Lord with more love than Peter believed possible, more grace than Peter dared hope, more purpose for Peter's life than Peter could ever have imagined. If that's you, halted and grabbed, pulled out by Christ



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and sprinkled with His blood, if that's you, "Grace and peace be yours in abundance." You are the church.

Okay, what now? What do we do? What is the church? "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Peter 1:3). Praise be to God. If we could pause and take a course on ancient rhetoric and classical Greek epistolary structure you would know the weight of that first word, "Praise." Peter was not a man of letters. He was illiterate when Jesus called him. I can only imagine Peter getting help here from Paul, or some other expert in the Roman church, "Peter, this next word. I want you to really think about this next word. Stop and pray before you choose that word. It's the most important word of the letter." "I've got it: Praise!" It's about praise. It's about giving glory to God. It's about worship! "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!" The church is not primarily a social change agent or a gathering of people pursuing a common spiritual interest. It is not in its essence a factory for good deeds or an inspirational rally for moral behavior training. It is not at its core a place for education or dissemination of information. The church is a body of people called into a special relationship with God, commanded to gather together in His presence and give Him worship and praise from whatever context or corner they find themselves in. Praise be to God!

The thesis is praise. The supporting evidence is readily at hand. "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Peter 1:3). In his great mercy—God is merciful—he has given us new birth. We get new life in Jesus. We get a fresh start in Jesus. We get to participate in life beyond the so-called life of this world.

Remember, Peter writes while awaiting execution by Nero. New life. Living hope! Not dead hope. Not empty hope. Not a hope you have to gin up by psychological gymnastics forcing yourself to hold on to something you don't even believe is true. No. Living hope, because Jesus died and Jesus rose from the dead. Praise be to God! "And into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you" (1 Peter 1:4). The riches of this world are nothing compared to the riches in heaven kept for you where nobody can steal it, and nothing can rot it or rust it. Praise be to God! It's yours, you "who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Peter 1:5). Put your faith in Christ and know the power of His salvation. Put your faith in Him and find He has put His faith in you, and the very power of God protects and keeps and guards your life into eternal salvation. Praise be to God!

"In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed" (1 Peter 1:6-7). Yes, there are trials. Yes, there are hardships. Yes, there are tests...for a little while. They only serve to reveal the pure gold of your faith, refined by fire. And what does it all result in? "Praise!" "Praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed." Praise. Worship. It can keep you in touch with your faith, which can carry you through the little inconveniences of life—things like being burned at the stake or beheaded or crucified upside down—things like that. They don't matter all that much to Peter. He has seen a glimpse of the glory of Jesus Christ. Praise be to God!

How does a church cultivate such faith? How do you deepen your faith



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in a God you can't see, can't always feel, sometimes wonder if he's there? "Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls" (1 Peter 1:8-9). Though you can't see him, you love him. You love him. Not singular, plural. Not you alone. You together. Church. Worshipping body. You love him. Even though you don't see him now, you believe in him. Plural. Not singular, plural. Not alone, together, you believe in him. You are filled with inexpressible joy. Not alone. Not by yourself. Together. Get it? Why do we go to church? Why do we link up and worship? When you find it hard to believe what you cannot see, it's easier together. It's easier when the body gathers. It's more possible when you can lean on the guy next to you. It's easier to pray when everybody's praying. It's easier to sing when everybody's singing. It's easier to believe when everybody is focused in, at the same time, under the same moment, on the same Word of God, on the same Jesus Christ, filled with the same Holy Spirit, together. Praise be to God!

So, what is first in your life? What are you living for? What is your heart set on above all else? We all have something. You wake up to it. You go to sleep thinking about it. You have an app to improve it, monitor it, or imagine yourself being the best at it in the world. It's the first app you hit on your phone. The first channel you turn on. It has you. By now, you're thinking, "Tim, how do you know what's in my head? It's like he sees me in the living room! How did Tim know I was so addicted to..." But that's it. We all have different things in mind. Money. Travel. Romance. Skiing. Fishing. Golf. What is it? Maybe it's more subtle. It's about fighting for justice or being the holiest and most pious Christian. These idols can creep in very quietly. You can't not have a top to the pile, a head, a

chief. We all have one. What is it? Is it worthy? Live for God, and God alone. Worship trains your heart.

Why go to church? Conservatives go to church out of duty. Maybe you grew up being dragged to church, and it almost felt like your parents liked that you hated it. You're supposed to hate it. Take your medicine. Earn your place. Pay your dues. This is how you make a citizen, a Christian. Liberals go to church to be inspired to do good deeds. New York Times columnist Ross Douthat wrote some years ago now about how surprised liberal preachers are when people stop coming to church. You shouldn't be surprised, he said, you've been telling them every week that they were not supposed to come to worship, they were supposed to go to the food bank. Eventually they did! Don't come to church to satisfy duty. Don't come to get inspired to do something else. Come to be with Jesus.

Jesus satisfied the requirements of good citizenship before God. He earned the place. You don't have to. Jesus is the selfless one who does good in the world. The closer you get to Him, the more you will see of that. But it's His work, His glory. What matters to you is to get close to Jesus. When you get into worship, you get close to Jesus. In a concentrated, distilled, congregational and communal way, we all get pushed closer to Jesus. We can feel Him a little more, trust Him a little more, love Him a little more and feel His love for us. That's why we go to church. That's why we worship. To get close to Jesus. That's it. At the core of our fellowship is joy in relationship with Jesus! "Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls." (1 Peter 1:8-9) Learn to get close to Jesus here, and you will start to walk with Him everywhere else. **Live for God:** Worship trains our hearts to beat for God.

