

Until Then (Part 1)

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[0 : 0 0] How is life right now? If you were asked to describe your life right now and do it in enough detail to fill up one sheet of paper, what would you say?

What would you talk about your life right now? Who would you talk about in your life right now?

Well, I would imagine that all of us would describe a mixture of both positive and negatives concerning such things as our health, our feelings, our relationships with other people, even our relationship with God.

If we could compile all these papers, most of what would be written would describe situations that are less than ideal.

And that's because we live in a less than ideal world. We live in a fallen world that is far from perfect. But one day, if you are a Christian, that's going to change.

[1 : 1 5] We've looked over the past four weeks at what happens after we die. Last week we looked and we saw that one day the Lord will rescue you and me if we're Christians from this broken world.

He's going to take us to a perfect world where we'll live with Him and our Heavenly Father and all other Christians forever. We're going to live eternally in a new heaven and a new earth.

In that perfect world, all the beauty that you enjoy in this world will be preserved and even enhanced. Every Christian relationship that has been severed by death, it'll be restored.

Your relationships with your Christian family members who've died, they'll be refreshed. They'll be new.

All pain and frustration and ugliness will disappear. All of your deepest God-honoring desires will be fulfilled.

[2 : 4 3] God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ will light up this perfect world with their glorious presence and power.

And they'll guarantee that life will always be perfect for you and me because when we get to heaven, they will have made us perfect.

And they will have banished from eternity all that is not perfect. You know, the Bible writers do their best to describe for us what we can look forward to for all eternity in heaven.

But words are not really adequate to describe what it will be like. And Paul actually tells us that. Look at this in 1 Corinthians 2.

He says, No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love Him. God has prepared the best life possible for us, His children.

[3 : 55] Jesus' death on the cross for our sins makes it possible, and His resurrection guarantees it. If you're trusting in Jesus as your Lord and Savior right now, you have a perfect eternal home waiting for you.

And that's what we've been looking at over the last four weeks. Well, today, we're going to shift focuses. We're going to think today, or look today, how we should live until then.

As Peter instructs us in his second letter, the third chapter. And I want you to take your Bible because we're going to keep it open there. 2 Peter chapter 3, beginning in verse 13.

What's happened in 2 Peter chapter 3, he's been describing end times. And he concludes it by talking about the new heaven and new earth. But what he's actually doing, beginning in verse 13 and 14, and then through the end of this letter, he's giving us some instructions on how we need to live now and in anticipation of living forever in this new eternal home.

Read with me. 2 Peter chapter 3, beginning in verse 13. But according to his promise, we're waiting for a new heaven and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

[5 : 25] Therefore, in light of that, in light of what he's been saying, therefore, beloved, he's talking to Christians. He makes it clear at the beginning of the letter and throughout the letter in various ways like this, he's calling these people beloved.

Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish and at peace.

And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters.

There are some things in them that are hard to understand. Now, I want you to think as you read the New Testament, some of Paul's letters, you run across things, you scratch your head and think, these are hard to understand.

Well, Peter even said the same thing. So we're in good company, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction as they do the other scriptures.

[6 : 32] That puts Paul's writings in the New Testament on a level with scripture, the authority of scripture. You, therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability, but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus, of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen. Peter is telling us no matter how good it's going to be one day, it matters how we live now.

It matters how you live your life every day in every setting. It matters to God how we all live.

What we have here are some instructions on how to live in this world until Jesus comes for us either at our death or at his second coming if we're alive at that time.

Let's think in terms of how we should live until then. First, and we're just going to look at one thing this morning. First, get serious about your character.

[7 : 46] Believe it or not, in 2019, character still counts. It may not with a lot of people. It may not in certain places of government.

It may not in certain centers of the entertainment world, even in the sports world. It may not in a lot of places, even where you work.

But before God, among God's people, in Christian homes and churches and businesses, wherever we are, God wants us to know that character counts.

Our character. Who we are deep down. Who we are when no one else is looking. Character counts. And he's telling us here in no uncertain terms, get serious about your character.

Look at verse 14. Be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish and at peace. Let's define what I'm talking about when I say Christian character in this verse.

[8 : 54] First, he says to be without spot or blemish. That may be a phrase that comes from the Old Testament sacrificial system where God told the people of Israel they were to bring an animal to be sacrificed that was without spot or blemish.

They were to bring their best to God not what they didn't want. Bring their best. Well, these words, the idea of being without spot or blemish are really found throughout the Bible to describe the holy character that God calls all of his people to develop and then to actually demonstrate in the way that we live.

The point here is purity matters to God. Purity matters to God. Now, most people when you think about use the word purity they automatically think sexual purity.

That's okay. Let's look at it for a moment. It's not limited to that but let's think about it for a moment. God calls us today in our culture to be pure in what we think and in how we live in the sexual realm.

He wants us to be pure in our thoughts and in our actions and it applies to both the single and the married. Here's something you're not going to see anywhere today or you haven't seen or heard in a long time but the Bible tells us that God wants every young person man, woman, older person, man, woman who is single to abstain from a sexual relationship until you get married.

[10 : 41] You don't hear that much today do you? And you certainly don't see it lived out in our culture on the screen or in real life. And most people today think it doesn't matter.

That's just, that is so way back in history dark age type mentality. Tim Tebow talks about about things like that and he has a certain number of people, certain group of people who like him but a lot of people despise him and make fun of such statements about remaining sexually pure until you get married.

This also applies to married people, remaining faithful to your spouse no matter what. Now, you think, you just don't hear a lot about purity today.

Does anyone really care about sexual purity enough to talk about it, to emphasize it today? Well, God does. And it has not been removed from his word.

And if God thinks purity matters, we, his children, we should understand that it really does matter. It should matter to us. God cares about more than sexual purity, though.

[11 : 57] He cares about us being pure in our speech, in the things we talk about, in the way we talk to people.

He cares about us being pure in our thought life, in our attitudes, as well as our conduct. Now, look back. God also wants us to be at peace, it says.

Now, it's not clear whether this is, he's talking about peace with God, peace with other people, or just having a sense of personal inner peace.

Well, we know that the Bible talks about in other places that we can have peace with God through a right relationship with Jesus. When we have peace with God, we can experience the peace of God in our lives, and when this is taking place, it should spill over into our relationships with other people.

So, when he talks about we should be at peace, let's just think in terms, in this context, he's talking about the character quality of peace, that we experience it and we communicate it in all of our relationships.

[13 : 16] we are peaceful people. We'll look at it that way today. Now, there's one phrase that we skipped over at the beginning of verse 14 that I want you to look at now.

Look at it carefully. He says, be diligent to be found by him, that's the Lord when he comes back, without spot or blemish and at peace.

The NIV translates that first phrase be diligent as make every effort. God wants us to make every effort.

God wants us to try our hardest to be people of high moral character. That's the way he wants us to live. That's the kind of character he wants us to develop.

And when the Lord, when we do see the Lord, whether it be we die or he comes back, we won't be ashamed. We won't be embarrassed. Now, when he says, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, he talks about make every effort.

[14 : 22] That means to try your hardest. Hopefully, you know, and just in case you don't want to clarify here, this does not mean that we have to try our hardest to earn God's favor or to save ourselves.

As I said when I was reading through that passage, Peter's making it clear that he's writing to Christians, people who are already right with God because they are trusting in Jesus. He's writing this letter, it's addressed to Christians, he refers to them as the beloved, they're his brothers and sisters in Christ.

So Peter is writing to people who are already Christians and he's saying it matters how you live. He's saying you need to put forth every effort to live this kind of pure and peaceful life that will please God, that will please the Lord Jesus when we see him, whenever it is that we see him.

Now, this is a command for us to put forth the effort, we can put it this way, this is a command for us to put forth the effort to live like the Christian that we are through faith in Jesus.

Paul said something similar in his letter to the Philippian church. I want you to look at it, it's on the screen, Philippians chapter 2 verses 12 and 13, look at it, the first verse, therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence, but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.

[15 : 55] Let's stop there. Paul is writing to Christians, the church in the city of Philippi, people who are Christians, people who have experienced salvation.

He's telling them to put it into practice with that word, work out your salvation. He's talking about being very serious about it with fear and trembling and then he goes on to describe how that takes place.

For it is God who works in you both to will and to work for his good pleasure. Let's think about what he's saying there. When God saves us, he puts his spirit in us.

Whenever you became a Christian, whenever you were born again, you put your faith in Jesus, you turn from your sin, God put his spirit in you.

In Romans chapter 8, we're told that if the spirit of God does not live in us, we are not Christians. very clear. From the point that the Holy Spirit comes to live within us, he works in us to enable us to work out our salvation.

[17 : 14] And the way he does that, he gives us the desire and the ability to live a life that pleases God. Let's sort of pause here and evaluate this.

if you are a Christian, you should be able to say, like this verse is saying in some way, you should understand and be able to say, I am a Christian, the Spirit of God works in me, and he gives me desires to live the kind of life that would please God.

He causes me to want to do the kinds of things that please God like, tell the truth, love your spouse.

He puts desires in you to cause you to know, I don't want to lie. I don't want to be dishonest. I don't want to be a jerk husband.

I don't want to be a battle axe kind of wife. The Spirit of God causes us to have the right kind of desires that would please God. And not only does He give us these kind of desires, if we'll cooperate with Him, He will give us the ability to see what we need to do and put forth the effort like that verse is talking about to sometimes close our mouths, sometimes do the thing that is hard to do, sometimes resist the temptation that seems overwhelming.

[18 : 51] Now don't misunderstand this now. We talk about the Spirit of God works in us to give us both the will and the work for His good pleasure. The Spirit of God lives in us, but sometimes we're not very sensitive to His presence.

And so sometimes we don't have the strongest desire. Sometimes we're just not willing to put forth the effort. That's because we have a sinful nature.

We're still tempted to do what we want to do, to ignore the Holy Spirit's prompting desires. But Peter is telling us, in effect here where we are, be diligent.

Put forth your best effort to cooperate with the Holy Spirit to develop Christ-like character, specifically to be pure and peaceful.

Now, what God calls us to do in our relationship with Him in terms of put forth effort, work at it, what God calls us to do like that in our relationship with Him is really no different from all our other relationships.

[20 : 02] You think about it. If you're married, don't you have to put forth an effort to develop a close and intimate relationship and maintain it with your spouse?

Some of you have to do it, work a lot harder than others. I can tell, I can see some punching going on right here. I said that to be a smart, that can be funny, but it's true.

Sometimes we just don't want to do it because we're selfish, because we're lazy, because they don't deserve it today, right? But if we're going to have the kind of relationship that makes us think, as we think about going home, we get a smile on our face.

We think about doing something with our spouse. We get excited about it. Hopefully, you don't think you have to earn your spouse's love. Something's wrong if you have to earn their love.

Something's wrong if you are communicating to your spouse that he or she has to earn your love. Hopefully, you're married to someone, those of you who are married, and you know that they love you.

[21 : 33] There is no doubt. Some days they don't like you, but they do love you. If you have a healthy marriage, you want to demonstrate your love by doing certain things for and with your spouse.

If you have a healthy relationship, you want to do some things for her. You want to do some things with him. You want to show that love.

Sometimes it's just hard. Life is busy for all of us, isn't it? Not enough hours a day to do all the things we want to do, all the good things that come through our minds.

That's why we've got to actually put forth effort. We've got to work at doing what we know is important. We've got to work on doing the things that we cannot neglect. That applies not just to a relationship between husband and wife.

It applies to a relationship between parents and children. If you've got children, you've got to put forth the effort to develop and maintain a close relationship with them, to have those open channels of communication.

[22 : 44] That kind of stuff is tiring, isn't it? Sometimes it's tiring physically and emotionally. If you've got children living at home, if you're going to maintain or recapture a good relationship, you've got to spend some time together.

You've got to talk. Not text, but talk face to face. Nothing wrong with texting. But you can't replace talking and listening face to face.

But here's the thing. In most family situations, whether your children are teenagers or little, you get up in the morning, mom and dad, you go off to work, children go off to school, you come back at the end of the day, everybody's tired.

Maybe you come home at the end of the day, you go to play ball, you have some kind of other extracurricular activity at school or somewhere. And you come home and everybody's just tired.

We don't want to talk. We don't want to have to engage. We just sort of want to lay back and unwind and then go to bed. And if you do that day after day after day, you all of a sudden realize we haven't spoken.

[23 : 58] We haven't actually talked. I haven't actually listened for two weeks. One of my favorite Bible teachers is Matt Chandler.

We've done a lot of his studies on Sunday nights in our discipleship classes. I have been helped by him as he's talked about in several studies and in the one we're involved in right now on Sunday nights.

how hard it is some days he'll tell us to go into his children's rooms at bedtime and spend time with them in the way that he knows he needs to.

He's tired. He's worn out. But he says because I love my children, I want to keep an open line of communication. I want to have a close relationship with them. I want to have an influence in their lives.

I go in there and I lay down on the bed and I ask them about their day and I listen. and we talk and we pray together.

[25 : 01] And when I get up and I think back, it's worth the effort. It's worth the putting forth the effort, the being diligent like Peter is talking about here.

Talking about your relationship with your spouse and children may have struck a nerve for some of you right now. If I've struck a nerve, I'm glad because it's something we need to talk about.

We need to think about here for a moment. What kind of relationship right now do you have with your spouse? What kind of relationship do you have with your children?

What kind of relationship do you have with your parents right now? could the words purity and peaceful apply in terms of the words you're normally speaking to one another?

The way you talk to one another? Well, the way you talk about one another. The words purity and peaceful apply in terms of the way you think about that person that you live with.

[26 : 18] And then would the words purity and peaceful describe the way you interact? Right now, this moment is a good time for you to evaluate your relationship with your spouse and your children.

It's a good time for you to evaluate your relationship with your parents, those of you who are living at home especially. We all can agree that it's God's will for our relationships to be healthy.

But Peter is telling us, as in everything about living the Christian life, it takes diligence. You've got to put forth the effort.

You've got to work to maintain, to develop, to grow relationships. By God's grace, you can do it, or at least you can do what you can do.

But go back to what we said a while ago about when God puts His Spirit in us. God gives all His children the desire and the ability to please Him. And being a godly husband, wife, parent, child, that pleases His God.

[27 : 42] He talks about that in His Word. I want to encourage you, get serious about your home relationships now. Homes in this country are not healthy.

A lot of homes, church homes, are not healthy. And a lot of times, it's because we don't give it the attention we need to give it.

And a lot of times, it's because we don't give it the attention we should because it takes work. It takes effort. It's hard, and we're just not willing to do it. We're too selfish and lazy to do what needs to be done to maintain, to develop, to grow relationships with the people that we truly do love more than anyone else in the world.

I want to encourage you, get serious about your home relationships now. If there is sin that you need to confess, because your speech, your attitudes are far from pure and peaceful, you confess it to God.

Agree with God about it. Repent of it. Change your mind about living this way, talking this way, acting this way. Turn from it. Seek God's forgiveness. And the scripture says, if we confess our sins, he is faithful to forgive us and to cleanse us of all unrighteousness.

[29 : 07] But after you confess it to God, confess it to your spouse. Confess it to your child. Confess it to your parents.

My attitude has stunk here lately. Things I've said I am so ashamed of. The way I've treated you, I know it is totally wrong.

Be open. Be honest. Confess with no qualifications. Seek their forgiveness. Now, if there's changes that need to be made in the way you talk to one another, make those changes.

You've got to start. You don't wait for the other person to start. If you're showing, speaking disrespectfully to your spouse, to your parent, to your child, own it, kill it.

That attitude. Ask God to help you to learn to speak the right way, the loving way, the pure way, the peaceful way, to think that way, to act that way.

[30 : 28] If there's changes that need to be made in how you spend your time, ask God to help you to see what needs to be done, what changes need to be made, and make them.

Your family is important. Those are the most important relationships in the world, in this world. For some reason, as I've worked on this message this week, and especially zero in on an end this weekend, I have felt the need to focus, just to camp out here and focus on the character we demonstrate in the home.

I believe God wants that emphasized this morning, and if God wants it emphasized, it means there's people here that need to hear it, to heed it.

If you're a Christian, the place to begin working to develop and demonstrate pure and peaceful character is in your home.

First of all, it's in your heart, and then it's in your home. More than anything else, that's what your family members need. They need that more than your money. They need that more than your support, some kind of sport or extracurricular activity.

[31 : 49] Your family needs for you to be the man, the woman of God, that God calls you to be and has put his spirit in you that will enable you to be, but you've got to work at it.

You've got to care enough to work at it. The question is, will you? One day, sooner or later, we're all going to see Jesus face to face.

It will happen immediately after we die, or if we're alive, he returns. We'll see him then. But as you think about the Lord looking you in the eye, does that comfort you?

Or does that frighten you? You know, none of us will ever be totally without any spot or blemish as long as we live in this world.

We're fallen sinful people. God's working in us, but we're still having to fight the temptations of our sinful nature and the world around about us and the devil.

[32 : 52] But thankfully, if we are trusting, I want you to listen to this. If you are trusting in Jesus right now, God considers you without spot or blemish for this reason.

Because you're united to Jesus by faith, you are cleansed by his blood. What that means is, when Jesus died on the cross, he actually paid the penalty for your sins.

He took your punishment. He died. He shed his blood. His blood cleanses you if you're united to him by faith. If you're united to him by faith, you are clothed in his righteousness, his rightness.

Think about it this way. His perfectly spotless and blameless life, the life he lived in this world, that is credited to you through faith in him. So God accepts you as spotless and blameless because you're united to Jesus.

God declared you to be spotless and blameless the moment you trusted in Jesus. But ever since that day, God has called you, been working in you through his spirit to cause you to want to actually become spotless and blameless in your character.

[34 : 20] So the question now is, think to yourself, am I cooperating with the spirit of God as he gives me these desires? Am I cooperating with him and obeying him, putting forth the effort to discipline myself and develop pure and peaceful character?

Are you confessing your sins when you fail? As I said, we all do. And then are you, with God's help, getting up every time you fall and continuing to put forth your best effort with God's help to develop Christ-like character?

You know, we can be ready to meet Jesus when he returns. We don't have to be afraid. We won't be perfect, but by God's grace, we can be found trusting him and obeying him in seeking to grow and develop pure and peaceful character.

And if we're living like that when he returns, whenever it is, and he looks into our eyes, it won't be frightening.

It'll be comforting. And it'll be exciting because we know he's come to take us, to bless us, and to take us to live with him for all eternity in that perfect place.

[36 : 01] But in the meantime, he calls us to put forth the effort to live like his people at home, at work, at school, wherever you go.

Let's pray together. Dear God, show us now how we should respond to what you have said about how we live today, about developing Christian character.

Show us what we need to do that we might leave here today prepared with your help to work on developing pure and peaceful character.

In an attitude of prayer, you just listen to the Lord and obey him. Do what he's telling you to do. I'd be happy to pray with you if you want to right here at the front this moment. But what's most important is that we all listen to God, obey him, pray for people in your life.

Don't be a distraction. You just listen to the Lord and do what he's telling you to do. Pray for others during this next few minutes.