

January 7/8, 2023
"The New Community"
Pastor Jeff Manion



SPEND DAILY TIME WITH GOD AS YOU READ, THINK, PRAY + ACT.

2023 SPIRITUAL PRACTICES

Intentional activities to deepen our relationship with God and mold us to be more like Jesus.

JANUARY PRACTICE

Bible Reading

Day 1 1 Peter 3:15 | The Questionable Life

Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect. 1 Peter 3:15b

The Apostle Peter writes a letter to believers in the early church urging them to be ready to answer why their lives look different from their culture. Peter knows when people follow Jesus—their lives should be so dramatically different from the world around them that people start to ask what's going on.

People today are starving to see people live this differently. Yet they may not know how to ask the question. Often the start of a spiritual conversation may not sound like one. Instead, the question may come across as genuine confusion: "Why do you spend every Wednesday night hanging out with middle schoolers at your church?" "What do you do with that group of people who come to your house every week?" It may even sound like an accusation, such as, "I could never go to church because there are so many hypocrites," or "I can't believe you're so nice to her." However, part of being ready to answer for our changed lives is listening for how people question us.

Throughout this sermon series, we will look at our life as Jesus's followers and how we live in a way that makes people want to ask about our faith. We will talk about our response, and being ready with a brief and gentle answer with an attitude that reflects Jesus. We can trust that when given the opportunity to answer for our new life in Christ, God will provide us with what we need to answer for our hope in Jesus.

IN YOUR CHAIR TIME TODAY Throughout this series, ask God to help you recognize when someone is asking a spiritual question. Then, ask God for the courage to answer and trust that he will give you what you need.

Day 2 1 Peter 3:8 | The New Community

Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble. 1 Peter 3:8

The questionable life begins with healthy relationships. The opening pages of our Bible reveal the beauty of creation and relationships. God creates people to have a relationship with him and with each other. But a few pages later, people's sin drastically breaks those beautiful relationships. Cain kills his brother Abel. Abraham and his nephew Lot separate over land struggles. Jacob cheats his brother Esau out of his birthright, and Esau is ready to kill him. Joseph's brothers sell him into slavery out of pure hatred and jealousy, lie to their father, Jacob, and claim an animal killed him.

Yet, from the beginning, God enacts a plan to rescue people from sin and restore our broken relationship with him and each other. Jesus came to fulfill that plan and restore what sin has broken. Part of his restoration plan is to create a community of people that reflects what he intended relationships to look like before sin broke the world. The Apostle Peter watched Jesus live out this restored relationship with God and others. Peter then writes a letter to a young church to share, in practical terms, what their lives and relationships with each other should look like because of Jesus. He reveals a community that brings healing, restoration and redemption.

The church community is designed to look like a healthy family—the family we've always wanted. We are to care for, protect and love each other the way Jesus did for us. Yet we may talk about people from our church with the same disdain or grumbling as everyone else who bothers us or we don't like. Jesus offers a different way to live in oneness, sympathy, brotherly love, compassion and humility. This way of life is like an island of wholeness in a sea of brokenness. It makes the world sit up and ask, "What's going on here?"

IN YOUR CHAIR TIME TODAY Reflect on how you talk to and about people in your church community. Are you quick to criticize, or does your heart reflect unity, sympathy, brotherly love, compassion and humility—especially when annoyed? Confess the times you've disregarded or criticized others, and thank God for his forgiveness and help to live his way.

Day 3 Philippians 2:1-11 | Humility

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. Philippians 2:3-4

The Apostle Peter shares a list of character traits that Jesus's followers should display that will stand out and ask people why their lives look so different. The last trait listed, and one that lays the foundation for all the others, is humility (1 Peter 3:8). Peter walks and talks with Jesus for three years and sees this is the trait that made Jesus radically different from the world.

The Apostle Paul writes that we are to have the humble mindset of Jesus in our relationships with each other. Jesus, God-in-flesh, makes himself nothing for our sake, being completely obedient to God, resulting in his death on the cross for us. Jesus is our model for humility and, through the Holy Spirit, empowers us to live in humility in our relationships.

Humility contrasts with self-importance and requires complete dependence on Jesus. Humility enables us to give and receive apologies. Humility does not need to prove that we are right. Instead, humility looks out for the needs of others and puts them above our own. It's not the absence of strength, but it's holding our strength in the welfare of others. Watch this video clip as Pastor Jeff Manion teaches what humility can look like in our relationships.

IN YOUR CHAIR TIME TODAY Acknowledge your need for God's help to grow in humility. "God, help me live in humility today. I struggle with humility in the area of _____. I desire to grow to be more like Jesus in this way."

Day 4 John 17:20-23 | Oneness and Sympathy

I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. John 17:23

Leading up to his death, Jesus prays for all who will believe and follow him. He asks the Father that his followers would be marked by oneness just as Jesus and the Father are one. He then links oneness among his followers as a way the world will know him. The way believers treat each other and live in oneness makes Jesus believable. It's not that all of Jesus's followers think or vote the same way or align on every issue in life. Instead, it involves a oneness of heart, mind and purpose with Jesus as Lord and his mission as a priority. We remember that we all have the same story of being radically lost and radically rescued by Jesus. Peter hears Jesus's prayer and adds oneness to the traits the Jesus-community should live out (1 Peter 3:8). The oneness Jesus's followers display in a fractured world stands out and makes people ask what's different.

Sympathy is another trait that attracts the attention of our world. Sympathy involves sharing with another individual in their experiences. We stand with someone in joy or misery. The Apostle Paul describes this as rejoicing with those who rejoice and mourning with those who mourn (Romans 12:15). We feel with them, but it's more than feeling. Sympathy is like a bonding agent and builds oneness. As we stand with them, our hearts move toward them. As we display sympathy for those we may not understand, like or think differently than we do—we show the world what Jesus is like. Sympathy builds relationships and makes Jesus more believable.

IN YOUR CHAIR TIME TODAY A great way to grow in and practice oneness and sympathy is within a small group. Groups provide opportunities to grow in God's Word and develop community with people we may not otherwise know and who come from different backgrounds and experiences. Sign up to join a group at adabible.org/joinagroup.

Day 5 John 13:34-35 | Brotherly Love and Compassion

A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another. John 13:34-35

In Jesus's final meal with his disciples before his death, he offers clear direction for how his followers are to relate to each other. The hallmark trait of a believer is love for one another. Their cultural norm is that brotherly love is reserved for family members. Jesus applies this love to his followers. They are now part of his family (John 1:12) and are to care for one another with the same love a healthy family should display for each other. It's not based on the illusion of good behavior all the time. But how we love and care for each other, even when we're not at our best, can show the world that Jesus is believable. Peter sits at that meal with Jesus and later adds brotherly love to his list of traits that make people ask about our faith (1 Peter 3:8).

Peter also highlights the trait of compassion. Jesus not only taught compassion but lived it out. Throughout his ministry, the Bible reveals that Jesus was moved by compassion, whether for a crowd or an outcast individual (Matthew 9:36 and Matthew 8:2-3). He also models compassion in his teaching: The father runs to and embraces his prodigal son (Luke 15:20). The Samaritan cares for the beaten man left to die alongside the road (Luke 10:34). Compassion involves moving toward someone, inconveniencing ourselves and meeting a real need. As we move toward others with the compassion of Jesus, we show the world what Jesus is like.

IN YOUR CHAIR TIME TODAY Look around your church community and ask God who he is inviting you to move toward. What is a real need he is equipping and calling you to meet? Write this in your journal and then take action this week with his help.