

January 21/22, 2023  
"Losing Well, Winning the World"  
Guest Speaker John Dickson



## 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

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## Day 1 **1 Peter 3:13-16** | Losing Well, Winning the World

**But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. "Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened."** 1 Peter 3:14

The Apostle Peter writes to a gathering of early Christians who don't have life easy. They're undergoing significant struggles (1 Peter 4:12). And they aren't the only Christians facing difficulties or struggles in the New Testament. The Apostle Paul seems to face persecution everywhere he goes in the book of Acts. The church in Jerusalem ends up scattered around the Mediterranean world because of this persecution. It could be easy for first-century Christians to look around and feel like they were losing. Like Christianity was losing.

Many express this sentiment today as well. They feel the church is losing in America. Polls around the western world seem to support the feeling as well. The percentage of those identifying as Christians decreases, while those identifying with no religion increases. The feeling of losing often causes one of two reactions: (1) running away to hide or (2) lashing out. But Peter calls the first-century Christians to something else, and it applies to us too. We're called to have a cheerful confidence to enter the fray and a cheerful humility to lose well. Throughout this week, we'll look at what this means for us.

**IN YOUR CHAIR TIME TODAY** Reflect on whether you tend to run away to hide or lash out when you feel like Christianity is losing. It's possible you run away to hide in one environment and lash out in another. Maybe you hide at work and lash out at your family or friends. Ask God to give you the strength to cheerfully enter the fray and a cheerful humility to lose well this week.

## Day 2 **1 Peter 3:13** | Eager to Do Good

**Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good?** 1 Peter 3:13

Peter shares with the early Christians some wise advice. He tells them that when they are eager to do good, it is unlikely people will want to harm them. It's a generally true principle. It's not a promise but something that typically holds true over time. It's a reminder that a well-lived Christian life—one eager to do good—will point others to Jesus and usually win favor for Jesus. It's seen in other places in the Bible as Jesus grows in favor with people (Luke 2:52), and the church in Jerusalem grows in favor with people (Acts 2:47).

Peter's challenge rings true for us today. As Christians, we should be eager to do good. When we strive for the good of others, we will likely find favor with them instead of mistreatment. If we are mistreated, we have to ask ourselves if we are doing good or being a jerk. We're often mistreated simply because we aren't nice. It might have nothing to do with Jesus. Guest speaker John Dickson shared a childhood story about reading the Bible and praying instead of raking the leaves as his mom asked him to do. When he got in trouble, his mom wasn't mistreating him for reading his Bible. If he had been raking the leaves, he would've earned favor with his mom. He was disobeying. It's important to note that if we're mistreated or insulted, check to see if it is because we're smug, obnoxious or hypocritical—when instead we should be loving, selfless and humble in representing Christ.

**IN YOUR CHAIR TIME TODAY** Consider whether you are eager to do good for those around you. Use the following prayer from Psalm 139:23-24 to ask God to reveal your heart. "Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

## Day 3 1 Peter 3:13-14 | Even If

**But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. “Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened.”** 1 Peter 3:14

Peter tells the recipients of his letter that if they are eager to do good, it's likely people won't get mad at them. But Peter also knows that isn't going to happen every time. He's a realist. He tells them that even if they end up suffering, they don't have to fear the people. It's a dose of realism coupled with a side of encouragement. Peter tells them it will be ok even if they do the right thing and it doesn't go well. It doesn't mean they won't suffer. They might even die, but they are still ok. It's also a call to trust.

Sometimes our best efforts to live for Christ will blow up in our faces. Our attempts to do good for others don't always work out. There's still sin in our lives and the lives of others. The world is a broken place. We've all probably experienced this at one time or another. We try to help someone, and they lash out. We try to do the right thing, and we end up ostracized. We stand up for someone, and suddenly the nasty gossip going around is about us. It's in these moments that Peter's encouragement to not fear those around us matters most. We can be confident it will be ok no matter what happens. It might not turn out how we want, but it will be ok. We can trust God.

**IN YOUR CHAIR TIME TODAY** This month, we're focusing on the spiritual discipline of Bible reading. Today's focus is a great opportunity to read or listen to the entire book of 1 Peter. Notice what themes pop up over and over. Keep in mind the situation of Peter's original audience and how that is similar or different to our situation. Note where else Peter encourages them in the midst of their difficult situation.

## Day 4 Isaiah 8:12-13 | Revere Christ

**But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord.** 1 Peter 3:15a

Peter's realistic about what might happen even if first-century Christians treat others with love and respect. They still might suffer. But instead of telling them to toughen up, Peter roots his encouragement in understanding who God as quoted by the prophet Isaiah. It isn't just don't fear those around them—revere God. It's one thing pushing out the other. It's reverence for Jesus as Lord pushing out fear of others. A proper understanding of who Jesus is should make all the difference. Instead of being afraid, Peter tells them to be ready to speak up. When they view Jesus as Lord, it gives them the confidence to give a simple answer to those who ask why their lives are different.

It can be easy to live a life concerned with the opinions of those around us. While we shouldn't callously ignore how we come across to others, there is a different way. Peter's instructions help us see that we are to revere Jesus more than fear others. When we remember Jesus is Lord of our life, it can transform our identity. It minimizes the fear of others by replacing it with trust in God. It leads us to be open to giving a simple answer. Caring more about God than others makes us willing to step into spaces and openly give an answer for the hope of Jesus in us.

**IN YOUR CHAIR TIME TODAY** Return to the song, “Morning by Morning (I Will Trust),” from the weekend service. The lyrics call us to trust where God leads, even when we can't see because God is good and our future is secure.

## Day 5 1 Peter 3:8-17 | Humility to Lose Well

**Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing.** 1 Peter 3:9

Peter writes to a group suffering, and things aren't going to get better. Historical records show that the persecution is only ramping up. Yet, amid this, Peter calls them toward gentleness and respect in the way they talk about God. He tells them not to meet evil or insult with a similar response, but instead to bless the very people hurting them. Pastor John Dickson calls it the humility to lose well.

Confidence in Jesus frees us to relax about losing. We can trust God. Christians are the death and resurrection people. It's through Jesus's death on the cross and his resurrection that we have life. It's ok if it looks like we're losing because God is in the business of taking painful losses and raising them up into wins. It is likely the pushiness of Christians at times is a result of our insecurity. Some feel like we need to defend God at every instance. This passage doesn't call us to do that, but instead to be loving. It's like our love is what will actually prove the truth of Jesus to others.

**IN YOUR CHAIR TIME TODAY** Pray for forgiveness for the times Christians have been pushy, aggressive and treated others poorly thinking we were helping God. Ask God to help you see the times you may have done that with family members, co-workers, teammates or friends. Thank him for his forgiveness through the work of Jesus on the cross. Pray for the confidence to cheerfully lose and to trust God to take care of it in the end.