



TIME OF GRACE®

Evolution of Faith: From Apathy to Praise

Study Notes

Summary

Everyone wants hope, the firm belief that something better is coming. That's exactly what Easter brings. The resurrection of Jesus gives us a "new birth into a living hope," raising us from dead-end "hopes" and giving us something to live for.

- An evolution of faith = an evolution of _____.
- 1 Peter 1:3a: Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!
- 1 Peter 1:3b: In his great mercy he has given us new birth.
- 1 Peter 1:23: You have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.
- 1 Peter 1:3: 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.
- Living = _____.
- Hope = _____.
- "Living hope" = _____.
- Evolve your faith and _____.
 1. _____.
 2. _____.
 3. _____.
 4. _____.

Points to Ponder

1. Evaluate your current prayer life based on the P.R.A.Y. model. What blessings might come from spending some time/more time on Praise?

2. Read Ephesians 1:3-14, the longest single sentence in the Greek New Testament. Circle all the uses of the word *praise*. Underline all the spiritual blessings that lead us to say good things about God.

3. **Extra Credit:** Eulogize a living person this week. List the good things you love about him or her and share them, preferably face-to-face. Notice what happens to that relationship, and ask God to open your eyes this week to all the reasons he has given you to praise the Lord!

Homework for Next Week

Read 1 Peter 1:3-9.

“Praise lies upon a higher plain than thanksgiving. When I give thanks, my thoughts still circle around myself to some extent. But in praise my soul ascends to self-forgetting adoration, seeing and praising only the majesty and power of God, his grace and redemption.”

—Ole Hallesby

Time of Grace Ministry
Evolution of Faith: From Apathy to Praise
1 Peter 1:3-5
November 8, 2020

Pastor Mike Novotny

Do you want to get closer to God? Do you want to have a better relationship with your heavenly Father? Then start with a word of praise.

What do you think makes a relationship amazing? The University of Georgia has a theory to answer that question. A few years ago, the University did a survey of about 500 married people. The study found out in their interviews that if a couple spent a lot of time praising and thanking each other that they were well prepared for when other things happened in their relationship. That they could deal with financial debt as long as they knew they were supported and encouraged and loved and valued. That even if their communication wasn't perfect, if they knew their husband, their wife, loved and appreciated them that they could get through those difficult times. It turns out that praise is powerful. If the study is right and if earthly relationships grow and mature and evolve through simple daily expressions and praise, could the same thing work with your relationship with God?

I'm not sure how you would answer that question but I know how one of Jesus' best friends answered that question; a man named Peter. Two thousand years ago, Peter, one of Jesus' closest friends, wrote this letter that you can find in your Bible called 1 Peter. And he was writing to a whole group of Christians who, to be honest, were suffering and had really hard lives. In fact, if you'd read this short little letter, just five chapters long, there are more words of pain and suffering per page than any book of the Bible. Nineteen different words like "insulted" and "mocked" and "abused," "groaning," "pain," "suffering." And yet, when Peter writes to his friends, he starts not with a word of pain but with a word of praise. In fact, Peter gets so excited about this idea of the power of praise that he writes - he actually writes the second longest sentence in the entire New Testament. And not just cause Peter had a big mouth and he liked to talk and talk, but Peter was so excited about the power of praise that once he started the conversation he just couldn't stop. And so, in your English Bibles, they're going to put periods and divide this up into seven different verses. But in his original Greek language, this is just one run-on sentence to make one massive point that can make a massive difference in your spiritual life; the power of praising God.

So if you have a Bible with you or you just want to follow along on the screen, I want you to look at the words of 1 Peter 1 when Peter opens our eyes to the power of praise. He says in verse 3: "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!" There's Peter's simple theme: Praise God. Now you might not know much about the Greek language but I bet you've heard of the Greek word for praise. The Greek word that we translate as praise is the word "eulogy." Ever heard of that before? Eulogy, in Greek, is actually a compound word. "Eu" means good and "logy," means word. So eulogy is a good word. Peter is encouraging people to praise God,

which essentially means say a good word, say a good thing, about God; give your Father in heaven a eulogy. And if you pay attention, you might know this is an idea that's on almost every page of the Bible, especially the songbook of the Bible, the book of Psalms. The word "hallelujah," is just Hebrew that means praise the Lord; say a good word about the Lord. Phrases like "Bless the Lord, o my soul," "Lift up the name of God," "Praise the name of God." "Magnify the Lord, o my soul." These are like 10 different ways to say the same thing that when you get up every morning, the apostles and prophets and most joyful people, spiritual people, in the history of the world have encouraged you to say a good thing about God.

Because the truth is, most of us wait just a little bit too long with our eulogies. I mean, when I said the word "eulogy" what's the first thing that popped into your mind? Yeah, a funeral. That's an interesting custom, isn't it? Like I'm going to say a really good, nice word about you - when you're dead. Yeah, ha! But can you imagine - I mean, have you heard a eulogy before? They're heartfelt and they're emotional and people shed tears and they get choked up. Can you imagine if we put that much time and thought and effort into saying a eulogy not after grandpa or dad or our best friend died but before? Can you think of what would happen to a relationship if we put in that time and effort to say a good word about someone who was alive?

Bethany told me that it's one of the most powerful things you can do for a relationship. Now, let me show you a picture of Bethany. Bethany's a graphic designer that I know and the other day she told me about the eulogy that she wrote for her father. Not because he died; but because he was still alive. For his 50th birthday, Bethany and her siblings came up with 50 things, 50 good words, about their dad. And Bethany was in charge of the project and so she collected them and she organized them and then at the big 50th birthday party, she gave her dad a eulogy. She said 50 good words about her father. I know, I'm a dad with daughters, and I just think of how powerful that would be if my little girls came up with a list and they read - how close I would feel to them and our relationship - a eulogy is powerful! It evolves and grows and matures a relationship.

But not just for the one who receives it. Can you just imagine what that did in Bethany's heart? Like she's just zipping through her weeks designing and working and working out and preparing meals and sleeping and checking social media. To pause long enough to think what an amazing father she had? I have to imagine that as she was making that list she got emotional, too. To think, "Oh, my goodness. This is my dad! He did this and he says this and he's like this." Because a word of praise, a eulogy, can evolve a relationship like never before.

And essentially, that's what Peter's saying to you. Do you want to get closer to God? Do you want to have a better relationship with your heavenly Father? Then start with a word of praise. And if that's difficult for you, Peter's going to give us a whole bunch of reasons why. In fact, in 1 Peter 1:3-9, Peter's just going to list good thing, after good thing, after good thing, after good thing for you to start your eulogy to praise your Father in heaven.

Today, let me give you just two good reasons that Peter starts with in verse three. If we go back to that verse, he says this: "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. In his great mercy, he has given us new birth." You want to say a good word about God? Peter starts with

this: "In God's mercy." Which means he doesn't treat people as they deserve to be treated; he has given us new birth. He has made you born again, we might say.

Do you know what that phrase means? To be born again? We kind of mess that up a little bit in our culture. We talk about born again Christians like they're some special subset of Christians or some people think of like a voting block, the born again. But in the Bible, born again simply means to be a true Christian; to be part of the family of God. Like you're born the first time into your earthly family with mom and dad but if you're born again, you're like reborn spiritually into the family of God so you can actually call him not just a judge or a god or a higher power, but your heavenly Father. And Peter says if you want to say something really good about God, how about this: In his great mercy, despite all the mess of your life, he has invited you to be part of his family. And that is a crazy reason for praise!

You see, I think Peter would be totally baffled by our modern concept of praising kids for their birth. Have you ever stopped long enough to think about how wild that is? That we make cakes and get balloons and accept like birthday requests lists for people for simply being born? You know, I googled this; it turns out this is kind of a modern invention in the history of mankind. And I'm just trying to think, you know, who was the first really, really brilliant kid that hustled his mom and dad into making him a cake for his birthday? Have you ever thought about that? Like okay, I'm trying to picture the conversation: "Yo, mom. Hey, do you remember when I gave you that morning sickness and you were like vomiting on the way to work for three months straight?" Mom says, "Ah, yeah! And, "Remember, mom, when it was like 2:30 in the morning and I used to stamp my little foot on your bladder so you'd have to leave your warm bed and run to the bathroom?" "Ah, yeah." "And do you remember when I was breech and you had to push for like 23 hours and you're miserable and you thought you were going to die?" And she says, "Ah, yeah." And the kid says, "I think you should make me a cake!" Like how did that work? What parent said, "That seems reasonable. Can we get balloons, too? Would you like to make us a list of gifts that we could shower you with?" And Peter would say, "No, no, no. Why would you praise the one who has been born? You know what you should do, is praise the one who's given birth." This doesn't apply to my birthday, of course; I still want gifts. But for the rest of you, I mean, on your birthday, you should praise your parents. You went through this sacrifice and this pain and that's what Peter is saying: How much pain did God go through so that we could be part of his family?

I love that little line. He says, "In his great mercy." Like, it's just wild to me that God lets me have a seat at his table. And maybe that thought is just level to you; like despite all the sins and all the words and all the mistakes and all the times you just weren't really connected to God, that the door of the house of God is always unlocked. And when you come in Jesus' name, there's always a place for you to sleep and rest and be forgiven and saved. Isn't that crazy? In his great mercy, God did not let your sin and your struggle and your addiction stop him from making you part of his family. Some people throw up these like generic prayers: "God, if you're out there," "Lord, I don't know how to talk to you," but everyone who's been born again, we get to start prayer in this incredible way: "Father." And just like the best fathers on earth love to hear the requests of their children, God is even better than the best father. He loves it when we come to him in Jesus' name. So praise God, Peter says. In great mercy, he's given us new birth.

And maybe, if you're questioning today, you know, "I don't know if I've been born again," or "How does that happen? That sounds amazing to be part of the family of God." Well, just a few verses later, Peter explained how this new birth happens. He says in verse 23: "You have been born again. Not of perishable seed but of imperishable through the living and enduring word of God." It's the word. I mean, maybe you come to church or you listen to a podcast and you open this book and you finally get it. Maybe you have a friend who sits down and they open the Bible and you just thought religion was about rules and regulations and do this and don't do that and you find the beating heart of this word that lives and endures is a God who's merciful and kind and forgiving. And once that clicks in your heart, it's literally like you're born again. Like a kid who's born and everything changes - the sights, the sounds, the experiences - that's what happens to people who become Christians. We have new passions. We see sin in a new way. We see God in a new way. So this is the new birth. In the Scriptures, to find the gospel of the forgiving God, and to become part of his family.

And once you do, you stumble upon blessing number two. It's the last thing Peter's going to tell us back in verse three. Let's check out his words once more where he says, "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into," - here's the phrase - "a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." Number two on our eulogy, our reason to say good things about God, is this living hope.

Now I want to define that phrase for you because we just butcher the beautiful word hope in the English language. The last time you used the word "hope," I bet it wasn't very biblical. In the Bible, the word "hope" is big and it's powerful and it's beautiful and it will stir your heart to praise. So let me define this phrase for you, a "living hope." The word "living," if you're taking notes in your program, simply means if something is alive and well. It's not a dead hope; it's not a hope that's lost. It's not a hope that's sick. It's alive and well. And the word "hope" itself - and here's my favorite definition - is a for sure future. It's for sure. It's guaranteed. It's going to happen; it just hasn't happened now in the present. And so you put "living" and "hope" together and you have kind of this redundant, beautiful phrase that essentially means a living hope is alive and well for a sure future. Something really, really good is about to happen; it just didn't happen today. And if you've ever looked forward to something really, really good, you know that even a future hope can give you present joy.

Can I share like a PG-13 illustration? My wife says I shouldn't tell you this but I'm not going to listen to her. Alright, are you ready for this? So let's imagine once upon a time there's a guy named John and John has a miserable job. He's in sales and his boss is just money hungry and demanding. Every time John hits a sales mark, there's just higher expectations and there's major pressure and it just stresses him out. And if the boss wasn't bad enough, John shares a cubicle with a guy named Chuck. Have you ever worked with a Chuck before? He's just a lot to love. He has this - he's always like forwarding the forwards of forwarded emails and he thinks they're hilarious and, "You have to read this!" he types in the subject line in all caps. And he just says awkward, weird things at the meetings and then he stops by John's office just to repeat the awkward things he says at the meetings. And you put all of it together and John just doesn't like his job. And every Monday, he's like borderline depressed as he packs a lunch and he walks out the door because it's another 40, 50 hours of dealing with Chuck and with his boss until one Monday morning, he packs his lunch and he grabs his keys and he's just about to go out to the

garage when his wife grabs his hand and she spins him around and she pulls her body really close to his body and his lips about this far from his and she looks her husband in the eye and she says, "When you get home, I'm going to kiss you. A lot." She passionately kisses her husband, pushes him out the door.

Now when John gets to work that Monday morning, how does John feel? Chuck's still there; I mean, his inbox is filled with forwarded, forwarded, forwards of emails but there's something in John's heart and it makes him smile even when the boss is barking. And what would we call that thing? Hope! Right? There's something really, really good about to happen to John and even the messiness of the moment can't stop his face from smiling. Alright, the original version of that story was a little bit racier than "I'm going to kiss you when you get home." My wife says I couldn't tell you that version but you get what I'm getting at. When you know something amazing is on the way, it changes you're here and now heart. And when the Bible talks about this hope, that's what it's trying to tell you; that really soon, something amazing's going to happen. I mean, do you know the living hope that God's kids have? The hope is that when Jesus comes back, who died for our sins and was raised from the dead, that our bodies will be raised and changed. Can you imagine how good it's going to feel to never have anything bad happen to your body again? To never have to fight with the anxiety or to battle the depression that's so heavy you just don't want to get out of bed? To never deal with back pain or migraines or cramps? To throw away the cane, to never take a pill again. To never feel bad or burdened. Can you imagine how good it's going to feel to never feel anything bad? Cause that's the hope of everyone who's born again. And can you imagine how good it's going to feel to never do anything bad again? To never get to the end of the day and just wonder why you gave in to that same old temptation; why did I say that? Man, why did I come back like that? Why did I do that? To never wish there was a rewind button so life could be different. Can you imagine to go through life without feeling tempted? To battle that part of your heart that kind of wants to do the bad stuff? Because that's the hope of everyone who's born again. Can you imagine seeing the face of God? If you think a passionate night with someone you love is good, you think holding your granddaughter in your arms after her birth feels good. You think good music or a good concert, front row seats, are good. You think good food is good. Just wait until you see the face of God and you will define the word "good" in a whole new way and it will never end. That is the alive and well, for sure future, of the children of God. And Peter knows if you're suffering, if you're in pain, if your faith is kind of "meh" and lukewarm, what you should do is just stop and make a list of all the good things that are already yours because of Jesus Christ.

So let me show you this picture. If you want to take your faith and evolve it, if you're angry with God or frustrated with God or indifferent about God or questioning God, if you want to get to this place of worship and wonder and joy and awe, then Peter knows the best thing for you to do is to praise God. To lift up his name. To meditate on who he is and what he has done. And that's why I want to leave you with some homework today. If you're taking notes, here's what I want you to do just for the next 24 hours to increase and involve your faith. I want you to pray, to p-r-a-y.

Here's what I mean by that: Every time you pray, every time you talk to your Father in heaven, I want you, first of all, to praise, and then to repent, and then to ask, and then to yield. Before you say, "I'm sorry, God," and repent, before you say, "God, would you please help me. Would you

please give me this," and ask. Before you say, "But your will be done. In Jesus' name, Amen," I want you to praise. In fact, here's my challenge - and this is actually going to be really, really hard. For the next 24 hours, every single time you talk to God, I want you to start with 60 seconds of praise. I'm going to challenge myself, even today. Every time I pray, to start with one minute of praise. And you're going to get like into that routine where you sit down to pray the same prayer before a meal or before bed, I want you to adjust it and I want you to start with one minute of praise. "You've only been good to me my entire life and yesterday, I didn't trust you and I didn't think that what you said about words or forgiveness or marriage or drinking or sex was - I thought I was wiser than you, God. And that's just wrong and I'm sorry."

And then you're going to ask - and not just for little, temporary blessings - but for real, spiritual, eternal heart change. You're going to pray, "God, what I'm asking you today is that you would change my heart. That I could see you, that I could grasp what kind of God you are. Because if I could just see you for an instant, I wouldn't need anything else. I wouldn't need the family to be perfect or the cancer to go away. You'd be sufficient. I could be like King David who said, 'God, you're my shepherd. I shall not be in want.' I could be like the apostle Paul and rejoice always and find the secret to contentment and have a peace that goes beyond understanding. So what I'm asking, God, is to know you. That even if you don't change this thing, that you would change this heart." And then you yield. And you say, "God, I would really love this to happen but I trust you. So your will be done. You're going to be good even if the cancer comes back. You're going to be good even if I'm bankrupt. You're going to be good even if the marriage doesn't make it because you're God and you are good."

And praise God. Peter knows it's the best way to evolve your faith. Because I hope that you can become the next story. A few days ago, a bunch of pastors and I got together to talk about this message. And the most inspiring part of that conversation was when we talk about your stories; about evolutions of faith. About people who just didn't believe what they now believe and they didn't behave the way they now behave. And it was so moving and inspiring and I wonder if you could be the next story. We told the story of a guy who one pastor said might just be the best Christian you think you've ever met. And then we find out that he wasn't always that way. He wasn't a church guy; he wasn't interested in Jesus until he started dating this cute girl and she said after the first date, "You know, if we're going to go on a second date, it's going to be at church." And he came because he liked the girl. But at the end, he found out that he really liked God. And his beliefs changed and his behavior started to follow. I think of the people from our church family who just had no hope; nothing to live for, those who were suicidal. I know a person who literally sat down on the road waiting for a car to run him over and kill him and now he's a man of prayer and of hope and forgiveness. A man who's not just going through life waiting for some temporary high but who's leading his wife and his kids because he knows Jesus and he's not perfect but he has a perfect Savior. I think of the people, you know, whose friends are like, "Seriously? You're going to church?" Like, "You never did that before." And their lives have been totally changed and it doesn't feel like a "have to" or "I really feel like I'm supposed to; I'll feel guilty," but, "No, I want to. I want to hear about Jesus and his forgiveness and his love and you should come with because this is really, really good news." The stories are simply amazing of people who've escaped addictions and people who had no forgiveness before but they found it in Jesus Christ and I wonder if your story could be the next one?

How beautiful is it when people find hope and peace and joy and love when hearts and lives change? If the University of George is right, praise is a powerful thing. But they weren't the ones to discover it. It was Peter who said, "If you want faith to evolve, your relationship with your heavenly Father, start this day with a word of praise."

Let's pray.

Dear Father, I praise you right now because you're listening to this prayer. We're not just closing our eyes and talking into the air. You're the God who's giving his full attention to these words. It is so crazy to me, God, that there are so many important people who get back to us a week later, if at all. Sometimes, even our own family members are too distracted by a screen to give us their full attention but right now, you're God and you're running the universe and you're listening to my voice; you're listening to our hearts.

We praise you, God, for being compassionate and sympathetic and merciful and so, we ask our own hearts to bless the Lord, O my soul. You've given us 10,000 reasons why and so many more. Thank you, God, for inviting us into your family. I can't imagine what it would be like to not have hope, to not have a future; just to grasp for anything in this life to make us feel good. I know even if this life is really hard, God, there is an eternity where we will experience a happiness like we've never felt. I thank you that even if life is difficult, it will end and something beautiful will soon begin.

And so, I pray especially for all those who are suffering; those who are losing hope, those who are frustrated with you because this life is difficult. I pray that you would move them to a place of wonder and a place of worship. God, be enough for us. And so, we pray that you would open the eyes of our heart to see you, to know you better, to realize that you're worthy of praise.

Father, I think about the angels right now in heaven. They worship you and, yet, they have never been forgiven. They have never been saved from sin because they've never committed sin and yet, when they see you, they fall down and they worship because it's not just your forgiveness that's good; it's your face, your presence that is amazing. And so, God, we join the angels; we worship you. We say a word of praise and I pray that you would help us start every day, every minute, every hour, with saying good things about our Father. You deserve it, God, and it can change our hearts. So we ask you to help us and we pray it all in Jesus' beautiful name. And all God's people who agree join their voices and they said, "Amen!"