

Steps to Staying Clean

In Pursuit of Holiness, Part 1

1 Peter 1:13-16

Discussion Guide

Main Idea:

If the Christian is going to stay clean and live a holy life in an unholy world, the solution is not *isolation* – or more *information* – but *application*.

Discussion Points:

What we think on will determine how we live. In verse 13 the Apostle Peter speaks to this truth as he charges these believers as it relates to their minds. Peter's main point is that believers should have the right focus concerning the future and the hope of Christ's return. This can only happen as we "gird up the loins" of our mind and take control of our emotions, especially as we live in a culture that is aggressively opposed to right thinking.

- The mind is where we must do battle if we are to live victorious lives over sin. Share your concrete strategy for doing battle on a daily basis for your thoughts. What scriptures give you a basis for this?
- The Bible teaches that we can actually control our emotions instead of them controlling us. Since our emotions are directly tied to what we are thinking, how would you counsel someone whose emotions are out of control to get a grip? What scriptures would you use?
- We are to set our hope fully upon the return of Christ. If His return grabbed our full attention how would that change your activity tomorrow? Give concrete examples.

In verse 14 the Apostle Peter commands believers not to be conformed to the lusts of our former ignorance. This command is based on the reality that our identity has changed. Those that are in Christ are now children of God. Our life should be characterized by obedience as children and not ignorant rebellion.

Discussion Guide cont.

- As children of God, our obedience involves not being conformed in our desires to what our former desires/lusts were. In other words, our desires shouldn't be what they used to be when we were lost. Give specific examples of what motivations and desires drive those that are lost. How should this contrast with what desires drive a child of God?
- In what observable ways can you determine what motivates someone?
- Looking into your own heart's desires, can you give specific examples of how you are driven by wants or desires that are characterized by godliness?

- How do the habits of your life demonstrate your desires? What "habits" need to be removed from your life or more specifically, what desires need to be addressed?

Gospel Connection:

Every day our thinking should be shaped by our identity in Christ. We live in light of our hope in Christ's return. We live in light of our position as children of God. These realities should captivate our mind. When we stray from them let return with repentant hearts, forsaking the vain thinking of our former lusts, submitting our minds to the truths of Christ, and experiencing the victorious life that He gives in the midst of a perverse world.

Practical Implications:

- Think:** Engage your mind with the truth regarding Christ's return. Set your hope fully upon this reality. How we think will determine how we live.
- Pray:** Pray for Christ's return as you pray this week. In doing this you are accomplishing two things: first, you are praying for something you know to be God's will. We know He will answer it. Second, you will put your mind and hope upon it. If you have trouble praying for this then this is a good indication your thoughts are not in the right place.
- Do:** As you go throughout the week record at least 5 incidents of you being overcome with emotion of any kind—anger, frustration, sadness, despair, annoyance, etc. For each incident answer two questions: what am I focusing/thinking upon in this incident? What am I wanting/desiring in this incident? This would be a great exercise to do with your spouse or a close friend and then come together at the end of the week to talk about what you learned about your thoughts and desires.

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In Pursuit of Holiness, Part 1

1 Peter 1:13-16

One of the problems we have with living next to a 30 acre pasture is the proliferation of wildlife that we really don't want to have on the inside of our house.

A couple of months ago, I was in my study at home and my wife was in the back master bathroom – I heard her scream, “There’s a mouse in here!”

I assumed she didn't scream that because she wanted me to look up the word mouse in my Greek dictionary . . . or start working up a sermon on how to minister to mice . . . she didn't want information, she wanted action.

I placed a couple of traps out and within a few hours, that mouse entered the glory of its final resting place . . . wherever that is.

Just this week I came across an article that reviewed how most people are actually willing to live with rodents and spiders and all sorts of pests . . . this article revealed how researchers found that people will dish out hard earned money for exterminators – which means they'll finally get serious about getting results – only when the following pests have invaded their homes.

- 24% of adults will pay an exterminator to get rid of spiders
- 27% of adults will pay to have exterminators come out and kill ants
- 56% will pay to get rid of mice
- 58% will pay to get rid of roaches
- 90% of adults will pay to get rid of termites.

Now I gave you that research, not so much to tell you how many people will spring into action to get rid of which animal – what struck me was how many people were willing to live with them.

Half of them didn't mind spiders, ants, mice and roaches – and even 1 out of 10 were okay with termites turning their foundation into mud. It's really not that big-a-deal!

I found that to be an illustration and a warning for the believer. How many Christians will live with something that doesn't belong . . . with invaders . . .

with spiritual ants, spiritual spiders, spiritual mice and spiritual termites.ⁱ

In other words, how bothered are we with things that invade our hearts that do not belong in-doors?

Let me put it another way – “What are you willing to tolerate and what eventually drives you to action.”

I am convinced that what the church needs today is not simply more information . . . but application.

Where we arrive at the point where we not only declare the right beliefs, but demonstrate the right behavior!

As you know by now, if you've been with us in our study, the believers to whom the Apostle Peter is writing are living in a corrupt society where everything is tolerated; where anything goes – where right is wrong and wrong is right.

In the First Century, culture had become synonymous with political, economic and moral corruption; which meant, that for the believer, temptation wasn't being offered behind closed doors – it was bartered and sold and freely offered on Main Street.

So . . . how do you handle that kind of culture? How do you handle relentless discouragement or temptation? How do you know what to tolerate and what to exterminate.

Let me put it this way: how do you stay clean while living in the middle of corruption?ⁱⁱ

The Apostle Peter arrives at that intersection this morning in our study.

If you have your copy of the New Testament, turn once again to 1 Peter. We've just finished Peter's introductory comments in chapter 1 that have been freighted with doctrinal truths.

Now we arrive at **verse 13**, the place New Testament Bible students identify as the hinge verse that changes Peter's objective from belief to behavior.ⁱⁱⁱ

And before we dive in, let me quickly tell you that Peter's premise is fairly simple – if the Christian is going to stay clean and live a holy life in an unholy world, the solution is not *isolation* – or more

information – but *application*. Peter is now going to move us to take action.

What I want to do is break down these next few verses into what I'm just going to simply call, 6 Steps to Staying Clean.

In fact, you could amplify it to read, Six Steps to Becoming . . . and Staying . . . Clean.

1. And step #1 is this: Get a handle on your thought life

Notice *verse 13. Therefore* – that is, based on all the discussion we've just completed on what to believe, now here's how to behave – *Therefore, prepare your mind for action.*

The verb *to prepare* is translated more literally in the King James Version, which I like here in this text to read, "*Gird up the loins of your mind*".

By the way, that verb is so rare that it only occurs here in the New Testament.

And it takes the reader back into the context of the Book of Exodus where the Passover is being established among the Israelite people, who've been held in bondage to the Egyptians for nearly 400 years.

Following God's command to them through Moses, each household has slain a lamb and applied some of its blood to the doorposts of their slave huts; they have cooked the lamb and all the Israelites are told – and I quote – *to eat with your loins girded, your shoes on your feet and your staff in your hand (Exodus 12:11).*

Why? Because you're about to be freed from Egypt; Your lives have been spared by the blood of an innocent lamb and you are about to begin a new life with new laws and a new, future home that is a land flowing with milk and honey.

So gird up your loins. To *gird up your loins* was a reference to someone in this ancient world, pulling up the hem of their outer garments that flowed to the ground – to pull the hem of their garments up between their legs and tuck the fabric into their belts.^{iv} It would make movement easier . . . faster . . . less encumbered.

Roman soldiers always tightened their belts before running into battle to eliminate any restrictions from their outer garments.^v

Now what Peter does here in this text is transfer the idea of tightening up your clothing to tightening up your thinking.^{vi}

Gird up the loins – notice – of your mind.

This word refers to your thought processes. In other words, tighten up the thought processes – get a grip on what you allow to invade your mind, and move into the home of your heart.

You could paraphrase this phrase to read:

- Tighten up the belt around your mind!^{vii}
- (or) Roll up the shirt sleeves of your mind!^{viii}
- (or) Pull your thoughts together!^{ix}
- (or) as my father used to tell us boys growing up – Use your head!
- Think!

By the way, Peter is giving us the first and important step in doing battle – because it is a battle that takes place in your mind.

Do battle with those thoughts that surround you and attempt to invade and infest your thinking processes, because they will ultimately inhibit you in fighting the good fight or running the race with endurance.

This is exactly what Paul has in mind when he exhorts the believers in Corinth to *destroy every speculation and every clever suggestion that attacks the true knowledge of God and to take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5).*

I love Eugene Peterson's paraphrase of that Corinthian text - **fit every loose thought . . . into the structure of a life shaped by Christ.**

If you want to be clean in the midst of an unclean culture, don't be loose in your thinking – mark it down; loose thinking leads to loose living.

Just ask Eve . . . or King David . . . or his son, King Solomon.

Tolerate temptation . . . manage sin . . . make room for it . . . it's just a couple of ants . . . it's just a few termites out in the garage . . . they're not inside the house . . . what can they do?

Those little thoughts . . . those little mental invaders, must be dealt with, without mercy or apology or negotiation. It's time for action.

Step #1: Get a handle on your thought life:

2. Step #2: Get a grip on your emotions:

Peter writes further in *verse 13, Therefore prepare your mind for action, keep sober in spirit.* The words *in spirit* are italicized because they aren't part of the original text, but added to provide clarification.

Peter isn't talking about being sober in contrast to being drunk or intoxicated; he's talking metaphorically about being emotionally self-controlled.^x

The word *sober* refers to being steady, calm, controlled – it can even refer to someone who is carefully weighing matters at hand.^{xi}

You could render his command – stay levelheaded.^{xii}

Keep in mind the first readers of this letter in the First Century – they had every reason to panic . . . to stay up at night . . . to overreact at every news release from Rome about what the Emperor just did or the laws the Roman state just decreed against them.

Peter says, “*Stay sober* . . . in other words, don't stagger around out of control and lose your balance.

Yes, these are mind-reeling times, mind-numbing times . . . don't panic . . . don't get carried away . . . don't come unhinged by trouble . . . don't lose your emotional stability in the face of hostile or troubling or unfair or insecure seasons of life.

This is spiritually applying the words of that famous poetic line – if you can keep your head when all about you are losing theirs – you'll be a man, my son.

Evidence of spiritual maturity is getting a grip on the excesses of unbridled emotions.

Peter effectively writes here:

Get a handle on your thought life:

Get a grip on your emotions:

3. Step #3: Get focused on the future:

Notice *verse 13*, the middle part, *fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*

Fix your hope – pin your hope – on the coming of your Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

This command is actually the central verb or thought of this paragraph.

You can understand this verse to read something like this: While you have girded up your minds and are currently getting a grip on your emotions, fix your hope on your future with Jesus Christ.

Fixing your hope isn't an emotional feeling – it's an act of the will. Live expectantly . . . live with anticipation of the glory of the coming Lord and your inheritance which will never fade away.^{xiii}

In a very real sense, the Christian lives in the future tense.^{xiv}

In contrast, the world of unbelievers lives in the past tense or, at best, in the present tense.

They are constantly looking for someone or something to place their hope in.

But for the believer, what excites us most isn't what happened yesterday, or what happens today, but what we know will happen in a future day.

One author wrote that we live in the future tense and our present actions and decision are governed in light of that future life with Jesus Christ.

If you're married, you may well remember that as soon as you got engaged, all your thoughts and all your actions and all your plans had to do with that future life with your bride.

Everything was interpreted in light of the fact that one day you were going to be married.

You treated money differently, in light of that wedding. You began buying things and saving things and building things with that day in mind.

After I got engaged – when I finally was able to talk Marsha into marrying me . . . and it took some talking – I started doing things I'd never done before.

Like saving money. I never saved money as a college student – any money lying around went immediately into more food.

But as a senior in college, one weekend, I worked on a man's property for an entire day and when it came time to pay me I asked him if I could instead be paid with that old table and set of chairs I saw in his garage gathering dust. He was somewhat dumbfounded, but agreed – happily!

Why in the world would I work all day for a table and chairs that didn't fit in my dorm room? Because after graduation I was getting married and we would need chairs and a kitchen table where I could one day soon sit and eat my wife's experiments. Which were always delicious – I'm thinking about my future.

And by the way, while Marsha and I waited for college graduation to take place and July 11th to finally arrive, she was collecting things in a cedar hope chest – appropriately named – hope chest – her actions were now based on her future expectation.

You want to stay clean in a corrupt culture – don't get bogged down in the past – don't get enamored with the present; get your focus fixed on the coming of your bridegroom, Jesus Christ – and a future marriage supper of the Lamb (Revelation 19:9).

The Apostle John and the Apostle Peter must have been reading each other's notes, because John put it this way, *We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself (1 John 3:2-3).*

Get the connection? Staying clean today has a lot to do with where we plan to be – and it might be tomorrow!

**So . . . Get a handle on your thought life:
Get a grip on your emotions:
Get focused on the future:**

4. Step #4: Get rid of old habits:

Notice verse 14. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance.

Ignorance here doesn't refer to intellectual ignorance – as in, you didn't know that it was wrong; Peter is referring to a kind of moral ignorance in the willful, defiant suppressing of the truth so that you can convince yourself and those in your world that it isn't really wrong – it's actually right (*Romans 1*).

But you – *as obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts* – notice the foundational relationship to getting rid of old habits.

You are getting rid of former lusts because of your new family likeness.^{xv} As obedient *children*.

But as many as received Him – Jesus Christ – to them, He gave the right to become children of God (John 1:12)

How many of you grew up with brothers and/or sisters? How many of you parents have more than one child? They're all so entirely different, aren't they?

I grew up with three brothers. We had the same mother and father, lived in the same house, ate the same food, went to the same church, attended the same schools, and played in the same neighborhood. But were we ever different.

But my brothers and I had different tastes and personalities. Some of them were disobedient and one of us was spiritually minded.

I remember my mother giving us our traditional birthday wish – we didn't have much money for presents, as missionary kids, although we never really thought of it . . . but we loved the tradition that on our birthday we could choose our favorite dessert . . . my older brother's choice was German chocolate cake; mine was always angel food cake – which fit my personality.

My youngest brother took trumpet lessons, my younger brother next to me learned how to play the guitar, I took piano lessons and my older brother – much to the chagrin of my jealous heart got to learn how to play the accordion. I mean, how cool was that?!

Think of what his future could be!

Children all have different character and personality traits – they are all unique and sometimes worlds apart – however, there was one characteristic that was expected from all of us as children – *obedience*.

Listen, we come into the family of God by faith in Christ – and we are all uniquely different in our personalities and our emotional wiring and temperaments and abilities and tastes – but one characteristic that we should all pursue alike is obedience.

And what does obedience look like? Well first, Peter tells us what it doesn't look like – notice again, *As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours.*

Do not be conformed (this is a rare verb that appears only again in *Romans 12:2*) – *don't be conformed to the world*: literally,

- don't be squeezed into the mold of this world –
- don't be fashioned by worldly fashion –
- don't pattern your life after the pattern of this world.

Listen, the oldest argument in the world for defending behavior – and children start using it early in life – is that everybody else is doing it; God doesn't care what everybody else is doing. God knows what everybody else is doing.^{xvi}

And He, through Peter, is commanding us – warning us – encouraging us to fight against the undertow of the majority that wants to pull us out to sea.

And what is this undertow . . . this pattern and fashion of the world? In a word – *lust*.

He calls them, *former lusts* – which is encouraging by the way, because Peter calls them

former lusts – which informs us that they can be broken.

What are they? Well, this word for *lusts* is used often in the New Testament letters to characterize a life of sinful desires, the selfish pursuit of wealth, power and pleasure; evil longings, uncontrolled appetites, sensual impulses and all other unrighteous motivations and selfish urges that drive the unbelieving world.^{xvii}

This is their pattern. Which is why whenever someone does something so obviously self-less, it makes news.

Like the article from the Daily Herald in Chicago that ran a few years ago about two Newlyweds who lost all their money. This couple had left a black zippered case – the size of a personal calendar – on the roof of their car as they sped away from their reception to begin their honeymoon. The case had all their wedding gift money and other cash gifts from their parents zipped up tight in this black case. When they reached their destination it was gone. The newspaper ran the story. Two days later the same newspaper carried the headline, “Finders Keepers? Not Everyone Believes It.” David Yi, an unemployed suburban resident had found the black case with the \$12,000 dollars inside. In spite of the fact that he was unemployed and had mounting bills, he tracked down the couple and gave it back to them. After this hit the newsstands, David was inundated with job offers – and why not . . . employee theft is in the billions every year . . . where can you find an honest employee?

For carpenters in Nazareth, one of their chief tasks would have been to carve plows for oxen to pull and yokes for their harness.

For several years, the Lord Jesus no doubt worked as a young boy and into his early adult years alongside his adoptive father, Joseph, sweating over planks of wood as he sawed and sanded and fastened.

It always intrigues me that Jesus could have waited until no one was looking and no one was around and He could have twinkled His nose or snapped His fingers and poof – there’s a perfectly constructed yoke or plow.

Why sweat it out? Because in His humility, He had chosen to accept the limitations of mankind (Philippians chapter 2) and he showed us how to put in an honest day’s work . . . He labored for 18 years or so, setting an example in a world that even then was governed by getting by with just enough.

I’m always struck by the fact that Justin Martyr, the second century church leader in Galilee, made the interesting statement that farming families were still using the plows Jesus had crafted, 75 years later.

What a model for a work ethic. What distinction in a world wrapped up in a quick deal – and shoddy workmanship.

Perhaps the first step in becoming clean and staying clean for you this week will be to put in an honest day’s work – with excellence as your work ethic.

1. **Get a handle on your thought life:**
2. **Get a grip on your emotions:**
3. **Get focused on the future:**
4. **Get rid of old habits:**

Steps number 5 and 6 are for next Lord’s Day, Lord willing.

Until then, we have plenty to apply for this coming week.

I received a letter at our Wisdom for the Heart Studio some time ago . . . it was from a young lady – a faithful listener to the program. She doesn’t live here in this area.

She wrote that every time the program comes on the air she gets out her Bible and her notebook and takes as many notes as she can.

Then she went on to ask several questions in her letter, primarily how to discover the will of God for her life. I could easily tell from reading her letter that she was deeply committed to living for Christ. She writes, “I’ll do anything God tells me to do. I often tell the Lord; “Lord, show me what to do. I am totally open to you.”

What challenged me most about this letter is that it was written by a young girl who was still in Middle School.

Sounds a lot like someone Peter the Apostle would be proud of – someone obviously focused on the future; someone not wanting to be hindered by old habits or runaway emotions or loose thinking –
– Someone unwilling to tolerate spiritual termites to move in where they don’t belong and eat away at the foundation of the faith.

So, this week . . .

- let’s tighten our belts around our thinking –
- let’s roll up the sleeves of our thought life –
- let’s get a grip on runaway emotions –

- let's get focused on that future marriage that governs our decisions –
- and let's continue – even this week, to break off old habits that so quickly turn into concrete and slow us down.

I want to close by praying the words of a Puritan who prayed centuries ago – in a collection entitled *The Valley of Vision*.

But first, let me read the paraphrase by Peterson of this text we've explored together today. It captures Peter's sense of conviction and encouraging at the same time – the paraphrase reads: So roll up your sleeves, put your mind in gear, be totally ready to receive the gift that's coming when Jesus arrives. Don't lazily slip back into those old grooves of evil, doing just what you feel like doing. You didn't know any better then; [but] you do now.

Father, day and night are thine,
Heaven and earth declare thy glory;
Let me never slumber, never lose my assurance,

Never fail to wear armor when passing through
enemy land.

Fit me for every scene and circumstance;

Let me never undervalue or neglect any part of
thy revealed will;
May I duly regard the doctrine and practice of the
Gospel
Prizing its commands as well as its promises [so
that]

If I prosper I may not be unduly exalted,
If I suffer I may not be unduly sorrowful.
Balance my mind in all varying circumstances.

Lord, help me, for I am often lukewarm and chill;
Unbelief mars my confidence,
Sin makes me forget thee.

Let the weeds that grow in my soul be cut at their
roots;
Grant me to know that I truly live only when I
live for Thee.^{xviii}

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 10/30/2016 by Stephen Davey.

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i Adapted from Carey & Simmons, *Calling the Exterminators* (USA Today Snapshots (May 22-25), p. 1A

ii Adapted from Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on James, 1 & 2 Peter* (Zondervan, 2010), p. 154

iii Adapted from D. Edmond Hiebert, *1 Peter*, BMH Books, 1984), p. 85

iv John Phillips, *Exploring the Epistles of Peter* (Kregel, 2005), p. 64

v William Baker, *The Books of James & First and Second Peter: Faith, Suffering and Knowledge* (AMG, 2004), p. 111

vi Michael Bentley, *Living for Christ in a Pagan World* (Evangelical Press, 1990), p. 44

vii J. Allen Blair, *Living Peacefully* (Kregel, 1959), p. 69

viii Scot McKnight, *The NIV Application Bible: 1 Peter* (Zondervan, 1996), p. 85

ix Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Hopeful: First Peter* (David C Cook, 1982), p. 44

x Adapted from Hiebert, p. 91

xi Wiersbe, p. 44

xii Adapted from Hiebert, p. 91

xiii John MacArthur, *1 Peter* (Moody Publishers, 2004), p. 62

xiv Wiersbe, p. 44

xv Phillips, p. 67

xvi Adapted from R.C. Sproul, *1-2 Peter* (Crossway, 2011), p. 45

xvii Adapted from MacArthur, p. 66 & Daniel. Powers, *1 & 2 Peter, Jude* (Beacon Hill Press, 2010), p. 68

xviii Adapted from *The Valley of Vision*, (Banner of Truth Trust, 2002), p. 254