

Dr. David A. deSilva, Cultural World of the New Testament, Session 2, Reading 1 Peter Attuned to Honor and Shame, Podcast Audio Summary

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Ever feel like you're going against the grain, you know, like your values just don't fit in with what everyone else seems to think? Yeah, well, today we're going to be diving deep into a time and place where that feeling was the norm: the lives of real Christians in the Roman Empire. Yeah, it's uh, it's fascinating. Yeah, how their experience, yeah, with intense social pressure can still teach us, right, a lot about navigating Challenges for sure, our own beliefs.

Yeah, values even today. Absolutely. So paint the picture for us: what was it like to be a Christian in the Roman Empire?

It wasn't exactly the in crowd, right? Not at all. Power, social order. Yeah, very established ways of life, and then along come the Christians turning things upside down, right? They're radically different beliefs, right? They refuse to worship the Roman gods, right, or support the Emperor in the expected ways. I'm mad; unsettling that must have been. I can imagine what that must have been like for those who saw these traditions as the bedrock of their society. It's like showing up to a formal dinner party in a swimsuit, right? You're definitely making a statement, but maybe not the one you intended. Yeah, so how did the Romans react to these Christians who were rocking the boat for many Romans? It seemed like a direct attack on their way of life their reaction shame Think slander insults even physical abuse Wow, they wanted to use shame as a weapon to force Christians back into line Dr. David de Silva in his lecture on the book of first Peter really emphasizes this point Shame was a powerful tool of social control back then it still is and you know, it still is today Yeah, absolutely that feeling of being an outsider judged and rejected that cuts deep No matter what century you're living in right? So tell us about this book of First Peter. Was it some kind of ancient self-help guide for dealing with haters? You could say that. Okay, Dr. De Silva describes First Peter as a guidebook for navigating intense shame. It offered practical strategies, okay, for early Christians not just to cope but to thrive amidst this hostility.

Okay. I'm all ears. What kind of strategies are we talking about? Well, one of the first things Peter tackles is how to deal with the judgment from outsiders. Okay, he argues that those rejecting Christians are living in darkness, meaning they lack a true understanding of the Christian message. Okay, their judgment is unreliable because they're missing vital information.

Wait, hold on. Isn't that a bit dismissive? Well, I get that it must have been frustrating for those early Christians to be judged. But yeah, writing off all criticism as coming from a place of ignorance seems a bit extreme, doesn't it? It might seem that way at first glance, but I think what Peter is getting at is that sometimes people rush to judgment without having the full picture. He even uses a powerful analogy from the Old Testament, comparing non-

Christians to the builders who rejected Jesus as the cornerstone. They misjudged his true value. Just like they misjudge the value of the Christian faith.

So if I'm understanding this correctly, it's not about saying everyone who disagrees with you is clueless, right? It's more about recognizing that sometimes people are judging you based on incomplete information. Just like those builders who missed out on the importance of Jesus, exactly. Okay, it's about taking a step back from the immediate sting of criticism and asking yourself, Do these people truly understand what I stand for? Maybe their judgment isn't so much about you as it is about their own limited perspective. That's a really helpful way to reframe things. It takes the focus off of feeling personally attacked and allows for the possibility that maybe, just maybe, the people judging you haven't fully understood your choices either, right? Okay, and that brings us to another powerful strategy Peter offers: reframing shame as a test of faith. Okay, this sounds intriguing. So it's not just about gritting your teeth and bearing the shame, not at all. Peter draws a parallel between the suffering of Christians and the refining of gold in fire. The intense heat purifies and strengthens the metal, just like trials can refine and strengthen faith. It's not just about enduring suffering. It's about finding meaning in it.

So instead of letting shame crush you, you see it as an opportunity for growth, precisely. And of course, Peter points to the ultimate example: Jesus himself endured suffering and shame on his path, right? This sets a precedent for his followers: challenges, even painful ones, are part of the journey. So how can we who may not share the same faith connect with this idea? Think about a time when you faced a tough challenge. Maybe a career setback, a personal loss, or a time when your values were really put to the test. In the moment, it probably felt awful. But looking back, did it reveal something about your character, your resilience, your values? You're right. Those tough times often force us to dig deep and figure out what we're really made of. Exactly. We come out stronger on the other side. Is that kind of what Peter was getting at? Exactly, and for early Christians, enduring shame for their faith became a badge of honor, a sign of their unwavering commitment. They found strength in their unshakable belief, but they didn't just grit their teeth and bear it alone. Right, the Christian community played a huge role in their strength.

Ah, so they had their own support system. Yes, tell me more about that. So it wasn't just about individual grit, right? But about the power of community to lift each other up. Absolutely, Peter emphasizes this constantly.

Okay, he reminds them of their shared identity as chosen people, a royal priesthood. This language was powerful. Yeah, it created a sense of belonging and worth, right? Directly countering the shame they faced from outsiders. It's like the world may reject us, but in here we've got each other's backs. Exactly that sense of belonging must have been a powerful antidote to the hate they were getting. Yeah, and it wasn't just about warm fuzzy feelings, right? This belonging had practical implications: early Christians relied on each other for material support, for protection when things got dangerous, and for encouragement when their spirits were low. So, facing a hostile world, they knew they could only survive, maybe even thrive, by sticking together. Right? Makes sense.

Yeah, is this where that radical equality idea comes in? Yes, the one Dr. deSilva talked about: their unity wasn't just about shared beliefs. Okay, but about a different way of relating to each other. Peter specifically urges husbands to honor their wives as Joint heirs.

Okay, this was huge in god's eyes. All believers were equal regardless of social standing or gender. Well, that's way ahead of his time. Even today we're still grappling with gender equality. To think that early Christians were already embracing this idea of shared worth and dignity, right? It's pretty amazing. Okay, and this emphasis on equality went beyond gender; slaves and masters, rich and poor all found a sense of belonging and purpose within the Christian community. Wow, this wasn't just about escaping shame. It was about building a new kind of society, right, one based on love, respect, and recognizing everyone's inherent worth.

Okay, that's making me think. We've been talking about how early Christians deflected shame and found strength in their community, but what about when they were directly confronted? Yeah, like someone's in their face, right? Insulting their beliefs. How did they react? That's where this fascinating concept of the *repost* comes in. In honor-shame cultures, right? The *repost* is how you defend your honor when it's challenged, but Peter advocates for a distinctly Christian way of doing it. So no throwing punches or trading insults. I'm guessing they didn't have ancient Roman Twitter to rant on. Nope. Drawing on Jesus's example.

Okay, Peter urged a different approach: resist retaliating with insults or violence. It was about maintaining dignity. Even when provoked, that takes serious self-control. I know I'd be tempted to clap back if someone was dissing something I care about. So what did this Christian response look like in action? It was about returning good for evil, blessings for insults. The idea was that by responding with love and kindness, they might win over their opponents. Okay, it was a long game focused on transformation, not instant gratification, kind of like kill them with kindness but with real depth to it.

Yeah, not just being saccharine but showing the true character of their faith. Did it work? It's hard to measure the impact. Yeah, but what we see in early Christian writings is a consistent emphasis on this approach. Okay, they weren't just passively accepting persecution, right? They were actively engaging with their critics trying to bridge the divide And demonstrate the truth and beauty of their faith through their actions That's such an important distinction they weren't pushovers, right, but they weren't letting anger drive them either That's something we can all learn from and especially in today's world where it feels like everyone's shouting at each other It's a powerful reminder that how we respond to those who disagree with us Even those who attack our values right speaks volumes about who we are totally This has been eye-opening But it makes me wonder are these struggles really just ancient history? Well, don't many Christians around the world still face this kind of pressure today? You're right.

It's not just a historical curiosity. Yeah, Dr. deSilva connects these ancient struggles to the experiences of Christians in parts of the world, right, where they face persecution and marginalization. Even now, that's a sobering thought. It's easy to get caught up in the historical drama, sure, but this is still a reality for many people, right? So what can we learn from these early Christians that might help those facing similar situations today? I think one

of the most important things is remembering that their strategies weren't just about survival. They were about thriving, even flourishing, amidst adversity, and that starts with recognizing the power of shared identity and a higher purpose. Yeah, that transcends the immediate pain of rejection or persecution, so it's about finding that source of strength that goes deeper than the current circumstance.

It's about holding on to a bigger vision, right? A sense of meaning that helps you get through the tough times, exactly, and for early Christians that source of strength was their faith; it wasn't just a set of beliefs. It was a way of life a source of deep meaning and purpose That gave them the courage to stand firm even when the world was telling them they were wrong It's like yeah, you can try to shame me But my faith is my anchor is what defines me and that's something you can't touch and this sense of purpose wasn't just about The afterlife it was about living out their faith in the here and now right creating a new kind of community that embodied Values of love compassion and justice. Yeah, values that offered a powerful alternative to the prevailing Roman culture. You're building a counterculture, right a different way of being in the world. That's incredibly inspiring.

Yeah, it shows that even in the face of intense pressure, you can choose to live by a different set of rules, right, a different vision of what the world could be. But it's not easy. It is definitely not, which is why the support of the community is so vital. Remember what we were talking about earlier: Peter's emphasis on finding strength in their shared identity as Chosen people, a royal priesthood, right? Those words weren't just rhetoric. They were a lifeline. They were a reminder that they weren't alone, that they belonged to something bigger than themselves, and that's something we can all relate to, isn't it? Yeah, the need to find our tribe, our people, those who get us and support us, especially when we're feeling vulnerable or under attack. So much to unpack here.

It feels overwhelming to think about applying these incredible strategies from 1 Peter to our lives today. It's true. It can feel daunting.

Yeah, but remember, Dr. deSilva highlighted that change often starts with small, deliberate actions. One thing he suggested, taking inspiration from 1 Peter, is to start by supporting those who are currently facing similar challenges. You mean like those Christians around the world who are still experiencing persecution for their faith? Exactly. It's about remembering that these aren't just stories from the past, right? These struggles are real and present for many people today.

And while we might not be able to single-handedly start persecution, there are things we can do, right? Dr. De Silva talks about prayer, offering material aid, and engaging in diplomatic efforts to advocate for their safety and freedom. So it's not just about feeling sympathy. It's about taking concrete action to help. Yes, and it can be as simple as researching organizations that are doing good work in this area and supporting them financially or volunteering your time, yeah, or even just raising awareness among your friends and family. Every little bit helps. That makes sense, yeah, but beyond the practical support.

What about the emotional and spiritual needs of those who are suffering? Yeah, how can we help them hold on to hope in the face of such darkness? That's where the power of

encouragement and affirmation comes in. Yeah, imagine you're facing constant pressure, rejection, maybe even threats, right, because of your beliefs. Simply knowing that someone out there sees you, he's you, and supports you can make all the difference. It's like that feeling when you're struggling with something and a friend just listens, right? Really listens without judgment.

Yeah, it can be so validating and empowering exactly So, how do we offer that kind of support to those who are going through something so much bigger than everyday struggles Dr. De Silva suggests reaching out to persecuted Christians through organizations that facilitate communication Maybe it's writing letters of encouragement sharing stories of resilience or simply letting them know that they're not alone Yeah in their struggles and when you listen to their stories, you're not just offering comfort You're also helping to amplify their voices raise awareness of their plight and challenge those Who seek to silence or marginalize them? It's like their stories have the power to move people, to inspire action, to change hearts and minds, right? But sometimes those stories get lost, overshadowed by all the noise in the world. Yeah, sharing them, giving them a platform, it's a powerful way to fight back against the forces that try to erase or diminish their experiences. Absolutely. And as we engage with those stories, we're not just helping others; we're also challenging ourselves to examine our own beliefs and values. Yeah, are we living out the principles of love, compassion, and justice in our own lives? Are we willing to stand up for what we believe in even when it's unpopular or uncomfortable? It's like their courage can be contagious, right? You can inspire us to be more courageous, to live more authentically, to be more intentional about aligning our actions with our values. But even with all the support in the world, facing that kind of pressure can be so demoralizing, right? How can we help them remember? Why they hold on to their faith in the first place.

That's where this idea of Helping them articulate and remember their own reasons for faith comes in It's about prompting them to reflect on their own journeys to reconnect with the core of what Drew them to Christianity in the first place because when you're facing external pressure Yeah, it's easy to lose sight of your own inner compass So it's like saying hey remember that fire that burns inside you remember what gives you hope what gives you strength, right? Don't let anyone extinguish that. Yes, and those answers, those personal testimonies, yeah, can be incredibly powerful, right? They remind us that faith isn't just about dogma or ritual It's a lived experience a source of deep meaning right that can sustain us through even the most difficult trials and it's in those moments those times of intense pressure that affirming their inherent worth and dignity becomes even more crucial Absolutely, and that's something we can all do regardless of our religious beliefs or background, right? It's about Recognizing the humanity of those who are different from us those who hold different beliefs and treating them with respect and compassion It's like even if we disagree even if we don't understand right we can still acknowledge their right to believe and to practice their faith without fear of Persecution or discrimination and that's ultimately what the legacy of first peter is all about Finding strength and shared identity purpose and a commitment to living out our values even in the face of adversity It's a message that transcends time and place Offering timeless wisdom. Yeah, for anyone who's ever felt like an outsider, anyone who's ever struggled to live authentically, anyone who's ever dared to believe in something bigger than themselves. So as we wrap up this deep dive, I'm left with a renewed sense of hope and possibility. It's inspiring to see how the struggles of those early Christians can still speak to us today, offering guidance and encouragement as

we navigate our own challenges. What stands out to you as the most important takeaway from this exploration of 1 Peter? For me, it's the reminder that we all have the power to choose how we respond to the challenges we face. Yeah, we can choose to let shame control us right or we can choose to find strength in our values in our communities in our faith. We can choose to retaliate with anger and bitterness right or we can choose to respond with love, compassion, and understanding. The choice is always ours.

That's a powerful reminder, and it's a choice we face every single day in big ways and small. So as you go about your day, remember those early Christians who faced down an empire with nothing but their faith in their community. Remember their courage, their resilience, their unwavering commitment to living out their values, and ask yourself: How can I embody those same qualities in my own life? How can I be a source of strength and support for others? How can I make a difference in a world that so desperately needs more love, more compassion, more? Understanding, and if you find yourself facing a challenge that feels insurmountable. Yeah, remember the words of First Peter: Humble yourselves therefore under God's mighty hand that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. Those words have carried countless people through dark times, and they can carry you through yours as well. Thank you for joining us on this incredible deep dive into the world of early Christianity. We hope you've come away with a renewed sense of purpose, a deeper understanding of the power of community, and the inspiration to live out your values with courage and conviction.

Until next time, keep exploring, keep questioning, and keep diving deep.