

Peter's PR Plan

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Peter the Apostle describes the Public Relations plan that all churches should have to witness Christ to their communities.

During my time in ministry, I have spoken at 9 different churches.

Some of these congregations were large urban groups and others were very small churches in remote locations.

Regardless of the size or location however, I noticed that every church struggled to make a good witness in their communities.

It seems that wherever the church is located, people outside the church often make the same accusations against us.

They accuse Christians of being self-righteous, or of being hypocritical.

Or they say we think we're the only ones going to heaven.

As a matter of fact a long time ago on the David Letterman show when David would go out in the audience to play some game.

He would get someone to stand up and would ask them what their name was, where are you from and what do you do?

So, he got some man to stand up and he asked where are you from and he said Nashville Tennessee

He asked what do you do? And the man said I am a minister.

David say Oh and what denomination? And the man said I am a minister for the Church of Christ.

David Letterman asked him if he thinks they're the only ones going to heaven?

David Letterman, you can't get away from the thing.

So that is something you may have to deal with no matter where you go or who you deal with.

And then, of course, there's the old standby that we're legalistic.

It's as if they all read the same propaganda about Christians and swallow it whole.

Of course, that Christians are not popular is nothing new.

In the first century, the favor of Christians among the populace fell dramatically as Nero,

in an effort to consolidate his hold on power and divert attention from his leadership failures and crimes,

outlawed all religious and especially singled out Christians accusing them of starting the great fire in Rome.

A terrible time of displacement, prejudice and persecution followed for Christians.

At a time that it wasn't popular being a Christian,

Peter writes a letter to the church giving them some helpful ways to maintain a good reputation in a hostile environment.

We're not openly persecuted today, but in this postmodern era where religious people are seen as foolish, insignificant, marginal,

Peter's words provide a good public relations plan for the church to follow.

I'm persuaded that the art of public relations did not exist in Peter's day as it does today.

There were no "AD" men/women, no P.R. representatives for individuals or government officials.

But Peter's first letter contains a very definite strategy for the church in any age to establish and improve its image and reputation in the community that it is in.

We know that it works because the presence of the church within the Roman Empire grew so strong despite persecution, despite prejudice that it survived the fall of the empire and thrives to this day, stronger than the Roman empire ever was.

So, let's take a look at 1st Peter and the P.R. plan he provides to help churches impact their neighbors and their communities:

Slide -Strategy #1 — Live Holy, Not "Holier Than Thou" Lives

Living Before God Our Father

Slide -1 Peter 1:13-14 – Therefore, prepare your minds for action, keep sober in spirit, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance,

Slide -15 but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy.

Now go down to chapter 2

Slide -1 Peter 2:1-3 Therefore, putting aside all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord.

Slide -1 Peter 2: 9-10 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;

Slide -10 for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

The main accusation lodged against Christians is not about what we preach, it's about what we practice.

People are drawn by the forgiveness and hope offered by the gospel.

They are turned off by people who profess to be Christians but live in no better way than they themselves or even worse!

Imagine someone who confesses they are Christians and live in a way or a style that is worse.

Talk about bad PR in the community.

So, there is no attraction because there is no proof that the faith actually impacts the ones who claim Christ.

Note that everything Peter mentions in this passage is something that is real and dynamic in a person's life,

It's not ceremonial or cerebral, it's real action.

Slide -Peter talks about Sobriety

Peter talks about Obedience

Peter talks about Holy behavior

No malice, envy, slander, sneakiness

People who actually see themselves as called by God to a different lifestyle described in the Bible as priests, a nation of spiritual royalty, a people that know and act like they belong to God, personally.

There is no faking a genuinely holy life.

It stands out from the crowd; It shines despite the darkness; It speaks without uttering a word.

If we have to explain, excuse or defend our lifestyle, we lose any impact on those around us for Christ.

A genuinely holy life, however, immediately makes a statement and creates a positive effect no matter who we are or where we are.

Slide -**Strategy #2 — Practice Good Citizenship**

As Christians we are good at pointing out the failures of godless leaders and worldly government policies, but our criticism is not what impresses others about us.

If there was ever a government easy to criticize and find fault with, the Roman government was it — brutal, godless, immoral, self-serving.

And they didn't care. They didn't care that they were that way. You either put up with it or we kill you.

But listen to what Peter says about a Christian attitude towards the "system" in which he lived.

Slide -1 Peter 2:13-25 Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right.

Slide -15 For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men. Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bondslaves of God.

Slide -17 Honor all people, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king. Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable.

Slide -19 For this finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly. For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God.

Slide -21 For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth;

Slide -23 and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously; and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed.

Slide -25 For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.

Everything about the government, the social system of slavery, the burden that all of this created for the Christian was unfair!

The Roman government was unfair, the system of slavery was unfair.

But what does Peter tell these people about their situation?

Rebel, revolt, criticize?

No, he reminds them that regardless of the system under which they live,

they are citizens of another place and subjects to another ruler whose leadership and example they follow.

As citizens of the kingdom, their conduct, their contribution, their calling is governed by a heavenly ruler

and their good conduct, sincere service, loyalty and devotion are a witness to the fact that they serve a much higher power than the earthly government that rules over their short time here.

Good Christians are good citizens who lead by example, service and involvement in the affairs of their nation, not just criticism and self-imposed isolation.

Groups who stop paying taxes, hide out in the woods, and practice fake spirituality never impressed their fellow citizens about the power of God or the sincerity of their faith.

Slide -Strategy #3 — Love Your Own

Slide -1 Peter 3:1-9 In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior.

Slide -3 Your adornment must not be merely external—braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, or putting on dresses; but let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God.

Slide -5 For in this way in former times the holy women also, who hoped in God, used to adorn themselves, being submissive to their own husbands; just as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, and you have become her children if you do what is right without being frightened by any fear.

Slide -7 You husbands in the same way, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with someone weaker, since she is a woman; and show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered.

Slide -8 To sum up, all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit; not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing.

Few of us ever get the chance to be famous, or

Few of us ever get the chance get up to preach to great numbers, or

Few of us ever get the chance write a best-selling book promoting our Christian ideas.

Most of us lead ordinary lives out of the spotlight and the only people who notice us are our family, friends, co-workers, neighbors and church family.

Most of us have ordinary jobs and hobbies and so the thing that most people notice about us are the ordinary things in our lives like our families and how we treat them.

Your neighbor may not know what you think about the Trinity or the second coming of Jesus.

Your friends probably don't understand or care about the teachings in the Bible concerning the use of music in worship or how to choose elders.

But you know what?

They know how you treat your wife/husband/children/friends.

They know about your children and how you help or don't help your aging parents or sick sister-in-law.

In other words, the most frequent and dynamic advertising tool you have for your faith and this church is how you treat your family day in and day out.

Because that is what the world notices.

Slide -People are not impressed by your doctrine, they're impressed by how your doctrine affects your life in a situation they can relate to → family life.

This is why the Bible makes how a man deals with his family the main criteria in judging his suitability for leadership in the church.

A happy, balanced, faithful family is the best way to promote the sincerity of effectiveness of your faith.

This is why Mormons make this the key idea in their TV commercials.

Their beliefs are strange and based on flimsy evidence so they appeal to the community by pointing to their strong family values and it works!

Why, because everybody can relate to family values.

For them, it may be a marketing approach, **for us it has to be the actual way that we are in real life.**

Slide -Strategy #4 — Suffer Patiently

We don't have time to read this long passage, but Peter summarizes the thought in 1 Peter 3: 13-16.

Slide -13 Who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. And do not fear their intimidation, and do not be troubled,

Slide -15 but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence;

Slide -16 and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame.

The early Christians were accused of all sorts of things in order to fuel the fire of their persecution.

They were accused of sedition, public mischief and secrecy.

Some said that they were cannibals (because they misunderstood of the communion).

Peter tells them to continue doing good and living holy lives as their testimony of faithfulness so that their accusers would be ashamed of charging them with evil.

Today we're accused of being legalistic or hypocritical or concerned more with our internal disagreements and ceremonies than the plight of the poor and the need to evangelize the lost.

How do we answer such things?

We do it by:

Suffering patiently our own troubles and our own trials

Demonstrating our zeal to share the gospel

Being sensitive and open to sharing the love of God with those around us in need

Nothing has changed in 2000 years.

Christians are still alienated, maligned, and misunderstood by most people.

Slide -We need to remember that everyone in the world suffers, whether they have faith or not.

We generate the best P.R. when we demonstrate our attitude of faith and love and service despite the trials and sufferings we encounter.

This is what inspires non-believers.

Slide -Strategy #5 — Be Faithful

Slide -1 Peter 5:1-11 Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness;

Slide -3 nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

Slide -5 You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.

Slide -6 Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you.

Slide -8 Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. But resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world.

Slide -10 After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you. To Him be dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Note Peter's final exhortation is to the elders and then to the flock they shepherd.

He tells the elders that if they are not faithful themselves in their leadership, they jeopardize the safety of the flock.

You see:

The flock belongs to the shepherds. They are responsible for it, no one else.

Ministers, deacons, teachers help the elders, but in the end, they will be held accountable by God, no one else.

If the sheep are weak and directionless, the first place to look is to the shepherds, if they are conducting themselves and serving as they should.

He then speaks to the congregation and says that they are faithful to Christ in the way they are in submission to their shepherds.

Shepherds need to be faithful in their leadership, and the flock needs to be faithful in following the lead of the shepherds.

Faithfulness and humility is required by both groups because Satan devours the proud:

Elders who crave power, control, prestige will be destroyed by their own pride.

Saints who are too proud to submit to the word, to the Spirit or to the leaders God has placed over them will wreck their faith and create division in the church.

No one is impacted by lukewarm Christians, and no one is inspired by leaders who are too proud or worried or tangled up in worldly pursuits to lead properly.

Slide -Brothers and sisters, disbelievers are not impressed with a faith that we are not willing to sacrifice ourselves for!

Summary

Every church, no matter how big or small has similar problems and challenges:

Wanting to grow

Making budget

Dealing with discouragement, apathy, division

What's different about congregations is how they deal with these things.

Some throw up their hands and quit and simply go through the motions on Sunday/Wednesday church.

Others throw away the best parts of their heritage and try new doctrines, new religious styles in an effort to infuse some life into the body.

And some, hopefully, go back to God's word and re-read carefully what the Spirit teaches and directs churches to do in times like these, for problems and challenges like these.

Peter tells this church that is tired, discouraged, afraid and disillusioned that they must take the spiritual "offensive" and lays out a plan that will keep them motivated and viable during a difficult period.

And this same plan I offer to you brethren as an invitation for you to respond to this morning.

Peter's plan, and my invitation are one and the same to all who are (really) listening to the message this day:

Invitation #1 Renew your commitment to holy living.

No church program or project can replace the holy and pure lives of members witnessed by the world.

Invitation #2 Practice good citizenship.

We're not of the world but while we're in it, we have to try to make it a better place to live.

Invitation #3 Make sure you're loving your family.

Your spouse and family are the first witnesses called to prove if you are a true Christian or not.

Invitation #4 Learn to suffer Patiently.

That you do not abandon your attitude of kindness and mercy and hope while you suffer, shows that Christ truly lives in you.

Remember, everybody suffers. Some do it more like Christ than others.

Invitation #5 Keep the faith.

It's easy to slack-off, grumble or quit.

God needs people who will hang in there no matter what,

because these are the ones who have truly seen the light of heaven and can witness from this perspective.

This is our plan for success, for growth, for harmony, for glory, for churches everywhere.

This is God's plan for revival for this or any congregation that desires to do the "greater" things Jesus promised His disciples in John 14:12.

I hope this will be your strategy...

If you need to respond to God in some way this morning:

To be buried in baptism

To be renewed in prayers

To be recommitted publicly

To be in fellowship...

Come now