

CFBC Hymns Class 13

John Wesley (1703-1791)

The Golden Age of Hymns: Did You Know?

- **Augustus Toplady wrote 6 hymns; William Cowper wrote 68; John Newton wrote 280; Philip Doddridge wrote around 400; and Isaac Watts wrote 697. But Charles Wesley wrote 8,989.**
- **Dr. Frank Baker calculated that Charles Wesley wrote an average of 10 lines of verse every day for 50 years! He completed an extant poem every other day.**
- **John and Charles Wesley published 56 collections of hymns in 53 years.**
- **John Wesley's first two published books of tunes included only a melody line, because he held serious doubts about the propriety of singing in parts.**
- **John Wesley often severely edited his brother Charles's hymns, both for length and theology. When Charles wrote "Thou didst in love Thy servant leave," John wrote in the margin, "Never!"**
- **Though not usually known for writing hymns, John Wesley did write several original hymns, and he translated many from German.**

By James Townsend

<https://christianhistoryinstitute.org/magazine/article/golden-age-of-hymns-did-you-know/>

The legacy of hymn translators...

- **Catherine Winkworth...**

Miss Winkworth, although not the earliest of modern translators from the German into English, is certainly the foremost in rank and popularity. Her translations are the most widely used of any from that language, and have had more to do with the modern revival of the English use of German hymns than the versions of any other writer.

-- John Julian, *Dictionary of Hymnology* (1907)

- **Paul Gerhardt...**

Translated “O Sacred Head Now Wounded”

- **John Wesley...**

Translated four hymns by Paul Gerhardt from the German

- **Wesley and Zinzendorf & Isaac Watts...**

John Wesley translated “Jesus thy blood and righteousness” (Zinzendorf) from the German

John Wesley edited “Our God our help in ages past” (Watts)...to “O God our helping ages past”

In 1738, John Wesley in his hymnal, *Psalms and Hymns*, changed the first line of the text from "Our God" to "O God." Both Watts' wording and Wesley's rewording remain in current use.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Our_God,_Our_Help_in_Ages_Past

From John Wesley’s perspective, the use of “our” as an adjective to God implied a narrower Calvinistic God who was the province only of the “elect.” For the Wesleys the grace of God was open to all, not just the elect.

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/history-of-hymns-o-god-our-help-in-ages-past1>

A Brand Plucked from the Fire...The story of John Wesley

On June 17, 1703, John Wesley was born in the small market-town of Epworth, England. Although the Wesleys were a prestigious, upper-class family, John’s childhood was not without challenges.

Childhood at Epworth (1703-1713)

His father Samuel was a priest in the Anglican Church during a turbulent time and faced enemies inside and outside of the church. In 1705, when John was just two years old, Samuel spent time in prison for debt, and in 1709, the family’s parsonage burned down. Their rebuilt home was left half-furnished for thirteen years because of their struggle with poverty.

Despite unsettling circumstances, Wesley’s mother Susanna held the home together with impressive structure. She had nineteen children, including John, who ate, prayed, and slept at fixed times. As soon as her children could speak, they were taught to pray the Lord’s Prayer and soon began memorizing Scripture, catechism, and written prayers. Susanna homeschooled each child, starting at age five, with rigorous studies in every area of knowledge she deemed useful.

God’s hand was clearly upon John from a young age. The five-year-old nearly died in the Epworth Parsonage fire, leaping out of an upper window into a rescuer’s arms just as the whole roof fell in; he forever considered himself “a brand plucked out of the fire.” In his journals, Wesley tells that forty-one years later during a watch-night service he “gave a short account of that wonderful providence. The voice of praise and thanksgiving went up on high, and great was our rejoicing before the Lord.” Everyone knew that John had been spared for a mighty work.

Education at Charterhouse (1714-1719)

In 1714, John was nominated for the Charterhouse, a prestigious school in London...John showed exceptional diligence for a ten-year-old boy and quickly became a favorite of the illustrious schoolmaster, Dr. Thomas Walker...John’s older brother reported to their father that John was “learning Hebrew as fast as he can.”

During this time, John hoped to be saved by “not being so bad as other people, having still a kindness for religion, and reading the Bible, going to church, and saying my prayers.”

College at Christ Church, Oxford (1720-1724)

In 1720, John was elected to attend Oxford University. Wesley, now a seventeen-year-old young man, studied at Christ Church — one of Oxford’s constituent colleges.

One of John’s contemporaries described him as “the very sensible and acute collegian baffling every man by the subtleties of logic, and laughing at them for being so easily routed; a young fellow of the finest classical taste, of the most liberal and manly sentiments.” Wesley was lively and lighthearted, well-known for his wit and humor. His work was polished, and he showed gifting in poetry, like his father. Unfortunately, these days were tainted by poor health and

financial struggle. Wesley was embarrassed by his amassing debt and lived on a puny allowance. He learned to keep a careful diet of meat, vegetables, and water. **Wesley was dutiful in his devotions, but conscious of his lack of inner holiness. He later reflected, “I cannot well tell that I hoped to be saved by now, when I was continually sinning against that little light I had, unless by those transient fits of what many divines [theologians] taught me to call repentance.”**

Ordination and the Teaching Fellowship at Lincoln College, Oxford (1725-1727)

In 1725, Wesley’s interest in religion peaked, and he considered service in the Anglican Church; his father agreed to help him pay for ordination. Wesley read *The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas à Kempis and **devoted himself to leading a new life. He became conscientious about the use of his time and began penning his famous journals. He writes that at the time, “I doubted not but I was a good Christian.”**

Wesley began pursuing his divinity studies and in 1726 was unanimously elected to a Fellowship at Lincoln College — another of Oxford’s constituent colleges. This secured a room at the college, a regular salary, and opportunities to study and lecture. Again, his father Samuel gave sacrificially to underwrite John’s pursuits...John’s younger brother Charles came to Christ Church soon after John left for Lincoln. **John tried talking to Charles about religion, but he was anxious to enjoy himself and would respond, “What, would you have me to be a saint all at once?” John had no time for such frivolity.** John’s mother wrote him a letter, urging him to cut his exceedingly long hair; he insisted that he would not spend the money to have it done and added, **“Leisure and I have taken leave of one another. I propose to be busy as long as I live, if my health is so long indulged me.”**

Wesley was an impressive scholar. Monday and Tuesday were devoted to the Greek and Latin classics; Wednesday to logic and ethics; Thursday to Hebrew and Arabic; Friday to metaphysics and natural philosophy; Saturday to oratory and poetry; Sunday to divinity. He studied French on occasion and dabbled in the writings of Euclid, Keil, Gravesande, Sir Isaac Newton, and other mathematicians.

Assisting at Wroote (1727-1729)

In August 1727, after achieving his Master of Arts, Wesley left Oxford to assist his father with a second parish in Wroote, a town about five miles from Epworth.

This was Wesley's only time serving at an Anglican parish. **Wesley later reflected, "From the year 1725 to 1729 I preached much, but saw no fruit of my labour. Indeed, it could not be that I should...for I neither laid the foundation of repentance, nor of believing the Gospel; taking it for granted that all to whom I preached were believers, and that many of them needed no repentance."**

Back to Oxford (1729-1735)

Wesley returned to Oxford in November 1729 and was assigned eleven pupils, whom he taught every day in the year but Sundays. He advised them to read selectively and constantly, and he wrote a sermon for them on the duty of receiving the Lord's Supper as frequently as possible.

While John was helping his father at Wroote, his brother Charles had become serious about religion and started a small society to grow in spirituality. The society, known as the "new Methodists" for their methodical approach to life, was named after an ancient school of physicians who thought all diseases could be cured by a specific method of diet and exercise.

When John Wesley returned to Oxford after assisting at his father's pastorate, he was immediately recognized as the head of his brother Charles' campus society. The society had been coined the "Methodists" and met for three hours each evening, usually in John's room. They began with prayer, then studied the Greek New Testament and classics, listened to John read a selection from a book, and discussed Christian love. They fasted on Wednesday and Friday, received the Lord's Supper once per week, and had a system of regular self-examination to carefully scrutinize all of their attitudes and conduct. They offered frequent and vigorous prayers. **Their religious fervor gained them the nickname "Holy Club."**

During this time, George Whitefield heard about the Methodists and came up to Oxford to join them, beginning a lifelong friendship with the Wesleys that had a tremendous impact on the later evangelical revival in America.

Wesley continued to study religion and serve as an itinerant preacher...In 1734, John traveled more than one thousand miles and learned to read on horseback — a habit which served him well on his long journeys.

His strict diet and rigorous schedule caused serious health problems, but these were soon remedied with proper care and exercise.

When the health of his father Samuel began deteriorating, John felt tremendous pressure to take over the work at Epworth, but insisted that it was not his calling; he preferred to preside over the growing Oxford Methodists. Samuel Wesley died in peace on April 25th, 1735, with John and Charles by his side.

Meeting the Moravians: Mission to Georgia (1735-1738)

In October 1735, John and Charles sailed for Georgia as missionaries for the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel. John Wesley's main desire was to work out his own salvation and preach to the Native Americans. Two other Methodists joined them, and the four met in the Wesleys' cabin to read and pray during the voyage. ***Twenty-six Moravians were onboard, so John began to learn their language, German, in order to converse with them. The four Methodists attended the Moravian services each evening.***

The Moravians had a deep impact on Wesley. When the vessel nearly sank during a severe storm, the Moravians sang calmly while the eighty English passengers trembled and cried out in fear. Even the Moravian women and children were unafraid to die. Wesley, ashamed, asked himself, "How is it thou hast no faith?" and scurried about, pointing out the difference.

Wesley was very religious, but he did not have saving faith or the peace and assurance that comes with being a child of God.

When they arrived in Savannah, Georgia, in February 1736, a local Moravian minister pressed Wesley to be sure that he had a saving knowledge of Christ. Wesley was unable to answer the question, "Does the Spirit of God bear witness with your spirit that you are a child of God?" — a reality which his father had testified to on his deathbed.

In March, he preached his first sermon at Savannah. Despite the 518 residents and nearly 200 others under his pastoral care, his true desire was to preach to the Native Americans, and his opportunities to work with them were limited. Wesley's influence grew rapidly. He left for a short time to minister in the town of Frederica, but soon returned to Savannah and began teaching and catechizing the children.

The return voyage was a time of deep soul-searching. After his interactions with the Moravians, Wesley was plagued by fear and doubt, and was now convinced of his unbelief. He longed for true faith and recorded those famous words, “I went to America to convert the Indians, but oh! who shall convert me?”

Back in England: Convinced by Peter Boehler (1738)

After arriving in London after the long journey home from Georgia, John was reunited with his brother Charles who had returned at an earlier time. The Wesleys soon met another Moravian named Peter Boehler who had just landed from Germany. Boehler had been ordained by Moravian bishop Count von Zinzendorf to work in the Americas and was preparing for his next voyage. Boehler and the Wesleys became friends and traveled to Oxford together.

In a letter to Zinzendorf, Boehler wrote: “I traveled with the two brothers, John and Charles Wesley, from London to Oxford. The elder, John, is a good natured man; he knew he did not properly believe on the Savior, and was willing to be taught. His brother, with whom you often conversed a year ago, is at present very much distressed in his mind, but does not know how he shall begin to be acquainted with the Savior. Our mode of believing in the Savior is so easy to Englishmen that they cannot reconcile themselves to it; if it were a little more artful, they would much sooner find their way into it.”

After Charles nearly died from a severe illness, John was “clearly convinced of unbelief from the want of that faith whereby alone we are saved” and decided he was unfit to preach.

Wesley’s beliefs underwent a radical transformation during this time. He was convinced, after examining the New Testament, that Boehler’s teachings were correct: salvation is instantaneous, not gradual; happiness and holiness are the fruits of faith; and one must not be confined to liturgy. His brother Charles was angry on the first account and argued that salvation was instead gradual; Charles wrote, “His obstinacy in favoring the contrary opinion drove me at last out of the room.” ***The Wesleys learned that we do not grow into salvation; rather, we are saved instantaneously when we trust in Christ and are born again.***

The Aldersgate Experience: Coming to Faith (May 24, 1738)

After a long conversation with Boehler, Charles finally came around. For a time, the Wesleys and the Moravians began gathering in small bands of five or ten to have open religious discussions. ***When Boehler left for the Americas, both Wesleys were committed to seek a living faith. Charles was the first to find rest for his soul and by simple faith experienced the peace he was looking for.***

John was heavy-hearted until the following Wednesday, May 24, 1738. His journal entry for that day records his conversion: “In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther’s preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.”

Charles writes, “Towards ten, my brother was brought in triumph by a troop of our friends, and declared, ‘I believe!’ We sang the hymn with great joy, and parted with prayer.” The hymn referenced by Charles was the one he had written the previous day on his own conversion:

Oh, how shall I the goodness tell,
Father, which Thou to me hast showed
That I, a child of wrath and hell,
I should be called a child of God,
Should know, should feel, my sins forgiven,
Blest with this antepast [foretaste] of heaven!

<https://godsmissonarychurch.org/2019/05/22/a-brand-plucked-from-the-fire-the-early-life-of-john-wesley/>

How Happy Is The Pilgrim’s Lot

By faith he (Abraham) lived as a stranger in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise;
Hebrews 11:9

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. Beloved, I urge you as

foreigners and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts, which wage war against the soul. Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God on the day of visitation.

1 Peter 2:10-12

Words: John Wesley, *Hymns for Those That Seek and Those That Have Redemption in the Blood of Jesus* 1747.

Music: Habakkuk Edward Hodges (1796–1867)

How happy is the pilgrim's lot!
How free from every anxious thought,
From worldly hope and fear!
Confined to neither court nor cell,
His soul disdains on earth to dwell,
He only sojourns here.

This happiness in part is mine,
Already saved from self design,
From every creature love;
Blest with the scorn of finite good,
My soul is lightened of its load,
And seeks the things above.

The things eternal I pursue,
A happiness beyond the view
Of those that basely pant
For things by nature felt and seen;
Their honors, wealth, and pleasures mean
I neither have nor want.

I have no sharer of my heart,
To rob my Savior of a part,
And desecrate the whole;
Only betrothed to Christ am I,
And wait His coming from the sky,
To wed my happy soul.

I have no babes to hold me here;
But children more securely dear
For mine I humbly claim,
Better than daughters or than sons,
Temples divine of living stones,
Inscribed with Jesus' name.

No foot of land do I possess,
No cottage in this wilderness,
A poor wayfaring man,
I lodge awhile in tents below;
Or gladly wander to and fro,
Till I my Canaan gain.

Nothing on earth I call my own;
A stranger, to the world unknown,
I all their goods despise;
I trample on their whole delight,
And seek a country out of sight,
A country in the skies.

There is my house and portion fair,
My treasure and my heart are there.
And my abiding home;
For me my elder brethren stay,
And angels beckon me away,
And Jesus bids me come.

“I come,” Thy servant, Lord, replies,
“I come to meet Thee in the skies,
And claim my heavenly rest”;
Now let the pilgrim’s journey end,
Now, O my Savior, brother, friend.
Receive me to Thy breast!

Excerpts from “The Pilgrim Life (1 Peter 2:11-12)”

Steven Cole

My subject today is one that used to be a major theme among Christians, but today it is strangely absent from Christian thinking.

To my knowledge, there are no recent Christian books on the subject, although the second best-selling Christian book behind the Bible (“Pilgrim’s Progress”) deals with this important theme. ***My subject is the pilgrim life--the fact that we are just passing through this life, journeying toward heaven. We are on this earth only for a short while and we should feel as settled in this world as we would feel if we were traveling in Mongolia. It may be a fascinating place to visit, but you wouldn’t want to sink down roots there.***

Being a pilgrim just isn't the dominant model of the Christian life for our times. Our view of Christianity is geared to the here and now: What will it do for my marriage? How will it help me raise my kids? Will it help me succeed in my career? Will it help me overcome personal problems? Will it help me feel fulfilled as a person? Heaven is thrown in as a nice benefit at the end of the ride. But heaven is not our focus. We want to enjoy life now and cling to it as long as we're able. We don't view death as the gateway to everything we've been living for. We see it as something to be postponed and avoided at all costs. We don't view ourselves as pilgrims.

In the summer of 1986, this truth hit me in a fresh way. I was preaching through 1 Corinthians and came to 15:19: "If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied." I thought, "Can I truthfully say that?"

There's nothing wrong and everything right about enjoying God and the blessings He freely bestows on us in this life. But ***if we don't hold the things of this life loosely and aren't focused on God Himself and on being in heaven with Him as our goal, we are holding to a shallow form of Christianity.*** If we're just living for the good life that being a Christian gives now, we wouldn't last a minute under persecution. We wouldn't endure much suffering. Nor would we withstand the many temptations to indulge in fleshly desires. ***The only thing that can steel us to endure suffering and to seek holiness in this wicked world is to live as pilgrims, bound for heaven.***

That's what Peter wanted his persecuted readers to see-- that the Christian life is a pilgrim life. We're aliens and strangers on this earth. Peter shows us four things we must do to live as pilgrims:

To live as pilgrims, there is a mindset to adopt, a war to fight, a lifestyle to maintain, and a day to remember.

1. To live as pilgrims, there is a mindset to adopt.

"Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers..." (2:11). That's how we are to think about ourselves: ***Beloved by God we are thus aliens and strangers on this earth which is for now under the dominion of the evil one. Thus we're not simply foreigners, we're on enemy turf! We dare not forget it! Our sense of identity should not be derived from this world, but from our relationship to God and His people, bound for heaven.***

At the heart of this mindset is the precious truth that we are beloved by God. Peter uses “beloved” as a form of address to assure his readers of his love for them. But beyond the apostle’s love, the term reminds them of God’s love for them. The reason that they are out of sync as aliens and strangers in this evil world is that they are the special objects of God’s redeeming love in Christ (1:1-5). ***His great love is the motive that enables us to endure hardship as we live as pilgrims.***

I don’t want to belabor the point, since Peter doesn’t camp on it. But ***I do want you all to cement in your heart, as the central motive of the Christian life, the unfathomable love of God as shown to us in the cross of Jesus Christ.*** The fact that God loved me enough to send His beloved Son to die for my sins should motivate me to endure any hardship for the few years I am upon this earth.

Peter says, “Seeing yourself as beloved by God, also view yourself as an alien and stranger in this wicked world.” ***“Alien” and “stranger” are used synonymously. They point to one who is a temporary resident or traveler in a foreign country, passing through on his way to his home country. Such a person has a different mentality about life than a permanent native has.***

For one thing, a traveler doesn’t live according to the customs and standards of the foreign country...As citizens of heaven, we may adopt some of the ways of earth, if they are morally neutral, in order not to offend the natives. But we live according to different standards than they do, namely those of God’s Word.

Pilgrims don’t get attached to the country they’re passing through. They have a destination in mind, and they look forward to getting there. If they pass through a scenic area, they’ll enjoy the beauty, but they won’t decide to move there. If they stop at a nice hotel, they don’t start hanging pictures on the wall and settling in. ***They have a transient mentality that affects how they live on the trip.***

One thing that has shifted our focus from being aliens on earth, looking toward heaven, is modern medicine. I’m very thankful for the advances in medicine that enable us to recover from diseases and injuries that would have killed people a generation ago. But at the same time, good medical treatment has removed the stark reality of death from us in a way that was not true in earlier times. Even at the turn of the century, it was rare for families not to have lost at least one child in death.

The Puritan theologian John Owen (1616-1683) lost ten of his eleven children before they reached adulthood. His other daughter died as a young woman.

In the face of death, you don't get as attached to this life, and you live more consciously in light of heaven. Howard Hendricks has said, "Most people think that they're in the land of the living, heading toward the land of the dead. But the truth is, we're in the land of the dying, heading toward the land of the living." As a young man, Jonathan Edwards resolved to think much, on all occasions, of his dying, and of the common circumstances which attend death. That may sound morbid and it runs against the grain of our day. But I think it's biblical. We're aliens and strangers on this earth, heading as pilgrims toward heaven. We've got to adopt that mindset, which includes constantly remembering that we aren't staying here for long. Our home is in heaven. We should live like it!

2. To live as pilgrims, there is a war to fight.

“Abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul” (2:11). To abstain means “to hold oneself constantly back from.” ***Waging war points, not to a single battle, but to a military campaign. Every believer faces a lifelong struggle against these fleshly lusts which, if yielded to, will take a person captive and destroy him.*** These lusts wage war against the soul, by which Peter means the total person. But the word “soul” connotes the nuance of the inner person. The battle against sin is waged in the mind (1:13-14). ***If you can win the war against sin in your thought life, you will win in your behavior. All sin starts in the mind and must be defeated there.*** We must learn to take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ (2 Cor. 10:4).

What are “fleshly lusts”? They include, but are not limited to wrong sexual desires. They also include “all kinds of self-seeking, whether directed toward wealth, power, or pleasure” (Ramsey Michaels, Word Biblical Commentary [Word], p. 57). ***Unbelievers, who are ignorant of God and His Word, live for self. Everything they do is directed to promote self, please self, or protect self.*** Such people shrug off God and often mock Him (2 Pet. 3:3-4). But they are enslaved to their lusts, which they thought would bring them freedom (2 Pet. 2:18-19). ***But Christians can live for the will of God, which is opposed to the lusts of men*** (1 Pet. 4:2; 1 John 2:15-17).

Please note that it is believers whom Peter exhorts to abstain from such fleshly desires. Becoming a Christian does not eradicate the strong, inner, emotional tug toward self-will and sin.

Walking with God for years does not eliminate the need to do battle with sin. I used to find it odd that the godly George Muller, as an old man who had walked with God for years, used to pray, “Lord, don’t let me become a wicked old man.” But he knew the propensity of his heart toward sin. ***It is significant that many of God’s giants who fell into sin did so after years of walking with Him.***

Noah got drunk and was indecently exposed after the flood. David, the man after God’s heart, was probably in his early fifties when he fell into sin with Bathsheba. Elijah’s faith wavered after years of boldly proclaiming God’s Word to the wicked Ahab and Jezebel. Hezekiah, a godly king who brought great reform, late in his life fell into the sin of pride. ***As long as we live in this body, we must be vigilant and fight against these inward desires to go our own way and gratify ourselves in opposition to the will of God. Our old nature is not eradicated at conversion and it does not grow weaker as we grow older. We’re in a war for the rest of the time that we’re in this body.***

Also, note that we are able and responsible to obey this command to abstain from these fleshly desires. Certainly such fleshly desires are powerful. The word “war” points to a fierce, constant struggle which implies a fair amount of effort on our part. If we yield, we can become enslaved to them (2 Pet. 2:18). But ***through saving faith in Jesus Christ and through the power of the indwelling Spirit and the Word of God, we can abstain from these lusts. We can experience God’s victory in the war.***

Thus, to live as pilgrims, there is a mindset to adopt: strangers and aliens; there is a war to fight: abstain from fleshly lusts.

3. To live as pilgrims, there is a lifestyle to maintain.

“Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles” (2:12). The word “behavior” (used in 1 Pet. 1:15, 18; 3:1, 2, 16; 2 Pet. 2:7; 3:11; the verb is used in 1 Pet. 1:17 & 2 Pet. 2:18) means conduct, way of life or lifestyle. It points to the overall flavor of our lives. ***The word “excellent” means good in the sense of beautiful or attractive. Our lives should be marked by “good deeds” which conform to God’s Word, but which also, in a lesser sense, are viewed by even a godless culture as attractive.*** The world should look at the lives of Christians and admit, even if they don’t accept Christ or the Bible, that we are good people. ***Note that the pagans (“Gentiles”) observe our good deeds. This word only occurs here and in 3:2. It has the nuance of long-term, reflective observation. Even if you’re not aware of it, unbelievers are watching your life.***

They see how you react to things at work. They observe how you talk about others. They watch how you deal with problems. They note how you treat your family. Missionaries who have gone to primitive cultures tell of how the natives will often come and stand at their open windows, watching everything they do to see how they do it. The native pagans in America may not be so blatant. But they are watching you as an alien and stranger.

Peter is not so naive as to think that our good deeds will result in the immediate conversion of the lost. Rather, out of jealousy, guilt, or insecurity, they may slander us. ***But Peter says that as pilgrims, we are to maintain a lifestyle of attractive deeds, even in the face of ugliness from those who are lost.*** It will result ultimately in glory to God (2:12), which is the overall aim of the Christian life.

Cal Thomas, a committed Christian who is a syndicated newspaper columnist, wrote (“Tabletalk,” 8/91, p. 13),

I got a letter from an editor of a newspaper that recently started carrying my column. He said, “I’m so frustrated because I’m the only believer on the entire editorial staff.” I wrote back and said, “Let’s say that you weren’t on the newspaper staff but that you were a CIA plant in the politburo of the Soviet Union. Would you be complaining that you were the only one there? You would be rejoicing that your government had placed you in such a strategic position.” That is the attitude we ought to have. God has placed us in strategic positions no matter what our job is, whether we are employed or not. If we can catch that vision, if we can see ourselves as the spiritual equivalent of CIA plants and the world as the politburo, then I think we can get on fire for God and really do something significant.

Thus as pilgrims in enemy territory, we adopt a mindset as aliens; we fight a war against fleshly lusts; we maintain a lifestyle of good works, even when we are treated unfairly or wrongly by the lost.

4. To live as pilgrims, there is a day to remember.

Peter says that those who observe our good deeds will “glorify God in the day of visitation” (2:12). What is “the day of visitation”?...***In the context, he is saying that God will vindicate the Christian’s righteous behavior, apart from what happens to those who persecute us (see 2:15).*** Thus I take the day of visitation to refer to the future day of judgment. How, then, will pagans glorify God in that day? Some will be converted before that day because, humanly speaking, they observed the good deeds of Christians whom they persecuted. Thus they will glorify God for His saving grace and for the

faithfulness of His people. Others will stand before God with every excuse for their unbelief and rebellion knocked out from under them. At that point God will be vindicated and their once-defiant knees, too, will bow and their once-proud tongues then will confess that “Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father” (Phil. 2:9-11). ***For us, the point is that as pilgrims, we keep that great day of visitation in view. We live now knowing that one day everyone must stand before God, either for commendation or condemnation. Thus we should seek to live with that day in view, so that we will hear, “Well done, good and faithful servant!” And as we live with that day in view, we should seek to persuade those who are on the road to condemnation to receive God’s mercy before it is too late.***

Conclusion

It’s so easy to get caught up in the American lifestyle--to live for yourself, or perhaps for yourself and your family. Without even trying, you begin pursuing personal pleasure and affluence as the goals of your life....

Jonathan Edwards has a wonderful sermon titled, “The Christian Pilgrim” (The Works of Jonathan Edwards [Banner of Truth], 2:243-246). That great pilgrim wrote (p. 244):

God is the highest good of the reasonable creature; and the enjoyment of him is the only happiness with which our souls can be satisfied.-- To go to heaven, fully to enjoy God, is infinitely better than the most pleasant accommodations here. Fathers and mothers, husbands, wives, or children, or the company of earthly friends, are but shadows; but the enjoyment of God is the substance. These are but scattered beams; but God is the sun. These are but streams; but God is the fountain. These are but drops; but God is the ocean.-- Therefore it becomes us to spend this life only as a journey towards heaven, as it becomes us to make the seeking of our highest end and proper good, the whole work of our lives; to which we should subordinate all other concerns of life. Why should we labor for, or set our hearts on, any thing else, but that which is our proper end, and true happiness?

God is calling you to a radical way of life--the pilgrim life. You pursue God and the enjoyment of all that He is instead of living for this world’s pleasures or for self-fulfillment. Of course, it is the only way to true self-fulfillment as well, because, as Jesus said, if you seek your life, you’ll lose it; but if you lose your life for His sake, you’ll find true life indeed.

<https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-10-pilgrim-life-1-peter-211-12>

SERVANT OF GOD, WELL DONE!

Wesley wrote this hymn on the occasion of the death of clergyman George Whitefield. It was published at the end of Wesley's funeral sermon, preached November 18, 1770.

Servant of God, well done!
Thy glorious warfare's past;
The battle's fought, the race is won,
And thou art crowned at last.

Of all thy heart's desire
Triumphantly possessed;
Lodged by the ministerial choir
In thy Redeemer's breast.

In condescending love,
Thy ceaseless prayer He heard;
And bade thee suddenly remove
To thy complete reward.

Ready to bring the peace,
Thy beauteous feet were shod,
When mercy signed thy soul's release,
And caught thee up to God.

With saints enthroned on high,
Thou dost thy Lord proclaim,
And still to God salvation cry,
Salvation to the Lamb!

O happy, happy soul!
In ecstasies of praise,
Long as eternal ages roll,
Thou seest Thy Savior's face.

Redeemed from earth and pain,
Ah! when shall we ascend,
And all in Jesus' presence reign
With our translated friend?

Come, Lord, and quickly come!
And, when in Thee complete,
Receive Thy longing servants home,
To triumph at Thy feet.