21 Coptic Christians dressed in orange knelt with their hands tied behind their back. Behind them stood masked ISIS soldiers dressed in black brandishing razor-sharp swords. Moments later those dressed in orange shouted “O Lord Jesus!” as shimmering blades sliced their throats. Their blood poured into the sea.

Most Christians in the west will not face the choice to turn from their faith or lose their life. Every Christian will face times of suffering that can lead to such despair that they are tempted to walk away from God. How do we weather these storms of the soul? Where do we find hope in life’s hard times? The book of 1 Peter is packed with God’s wisdom on weathering these storms.

This work is a collection of sermons delivered at CrossWinds Church in Spirit Lake, Iowa. For this work, I owe a debt of gratitude to Kiley Roth. She is the patient editor that reviews my manuscripts. Without her, my rough drafts would never make print. I also owe thanks to Jordan Gowing, our Spencer campus pastor. He stepped in to deliver some of these messages as my mother died of cancer. Thank you for serving Christ with me.

I would also like to thank the CrossWinds family. It is a privilege to open the Word of God with you. I love you!

I hope and pray this series strengthens your love for Jesus.

Because of God’s Mercy,

Kurt
# Table of Contents

1 Peter 1:1-3 — Introduction to 1 Peter .................................................................4

1 Peter 1:3-9 — Ten Truths Every Christian Needs To Remember When Life Falls Apart.................................................................................................16

1 Peter 1:10-12 — Can I Trust The Bible?...............................................................27

1 Peter 1:13-21 — Sin-Free Living In A Sin-Filled World........................................40

1 Peter 1:22-2:3 — The Word of God Creates Love Between the People of God. ..........................................................................................................................51

1 Peter 2:4-10 — Why I Want To Be Part Of The Suffering Church..........63

1 Peter 2:11-12 — The Trial of Lust ........................................................................74

1 Peter 2:13-17 — God, Government and Me ..........................................................86

1 Peter 2:18-25 — How Do I Face Undeserved Suffering? ...............................95

1 Peter 3:1-6 — Ancient Beauty For The Modern Woman .............................107

1 Peter 3:7 — Men and Marriage .........................................................................119

1 Peter 3:8-12 — Called To Be A Blessing................................................................130

1 Peter 3:13-17 — How Do I Endure Unjust Suffering? .....................................142

1 Peter 3:18-22 — What Good Can Come From Unjust Suffering? ..............153

1 Peter 4:1-6 — Choose Suffering Over Sin ........................................................163

1 Peter 4:7-11 — How Do I Prepare For The End Of The World? .................176

1 Peter 4:12-19 — What Makes Suffering For Christ Unique? .......................189

1 Peter 5:1-5 — Humble Shepherds and Their Sheep ........................................202

1 Peter 5:6-14 — Stand Firm ..................................................................................216

Works Referenced .................................................................................................226
August 17, 2014

Good morning. If you are new, my name is Kurt. I am one of the pastors at CrossWinds. Before we begin our study, I want to remind you that next week, nobody will be here. The Spencer campus is coming north, and the Spirit Lake campus is moving south. We will meet in the middle in Milford at Florence Park for an outdoor worship service and a corn roast. This will be our first all-campus gathering. For many of us, it will be the first time we get to meet the new folks at our Spencer campus. It will be their first time meeting you. This is an exciting and important family gathering in the life of our church. We are providing the sandwiches, corn and the drinks; you bring a dish to pass, a lawn chair and a yard game.

As you can see, we have a new stage this morning because today we begin a new series from the book of 1 Peter called “Hope in Hard Times.” We will be in this book into 2015. It is a book that helps us when life is hard, which is something all of us need to hear. If your life isn’t hard now, just give it time, because it will be soon. This morning, I have a modest goal. We will cover the background of the book and the first two verses. That will set the stage for the rest of the series. Let’s begin by reading those verses together.

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood: May grace and peace be multiplied to you. 1 Peter 1:1–2 (ESV)

Let’s begin with the obvious question. Who wrote the book?

Who wrote 1 Peter?

I ask this question because some people, who are educated beyond their intelligence, will tell you Peter did not write the book, even though the letter begins with his name as the first word. To me, having Peter’s name as the first word of the letter is a clue that he wrote it. For many scholars who are looking to be controversial, that doesn’t suffice. Here is additional evidence:

• In 2 Peter, Peter talked about his first letter, which is a clue that he wrote two letters. This means if he authored 2 Peter, he also authored 1 Peter.

• Every church leader in the generation immediately following the apostles claimed the letter was written by the apostle Peter. Peter’s authorship was never in question. This includes Polycarp, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria and many more.

• In 1 and 2 Peter, we learn that the author was an eyewitness to the life and ministry of Jesus. This means the author was somebody that lived with Jesus for all three years of his ministry, and his name was Peter. The list of people...
who could write this letter is pretty short. I don’t know who it could be other than the apostle Peter.

**Why do some think Peter was not the author?**

Some people point to Acts 4:13, which says Peter was an unschooled common man, and they look at the educated Greek grammar and style of the letter then assume that Peter, a fisherman, couldn’t write this kind of the letter. There are a couple problems with this assumption.

- Not having a formal education doesn’t mean you are unintelligent. Bill Gates is still working on his college diploma but he seems to be doing pretty well without formal education.¹
- Acts 4:13 says that Peter and John were unschooled common men, but after people heard them speak, they noted they had been with Jesus.

> Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus. Acts 4:13 (ESV)

To me it sounds like Peter had the best education. Imagine living 24 hours a day for three years with the best Bible teacher that will ever walk the planet. Whenever you have a Bible trivia question in the middle of the night, you just ask him. A college education is four years but it is only a few classes a week. Peter had a three-year education that lasted 24 hours a day. I think Peter had a great education from rabbi Jesus.

- In 1 Peter 5:12 we learn Peter was writing with the help of a man named Silvanus. In the ancient world, it was common to have somebody skilled in linguistics serve as your editor. I write a lot. I am terrible at grammar. I have an editor who corrects my writing, and it is not uncommon for her to find 175 corrections in 12-15 pages. She makes me a much better writer than I actually am. If it wasn’t for her, things would not look good. I am forever indebted to her. I think we have the same thing in this letter. Peter told us he was using the help of a great editor.

- Peter was writing the Word of God under inspiration of the Holy Spirit. When the Holy Spirit is inspiring you to write something that God plans to place in the Bible, you tend to do things better than you normally would.

All this to say what I think should be obvious. The apostle Peter wrote the book. Don’t sweat it when somebody with too much education and no common sense tells you he didn’t.

**What were Peter’s qualifications?**

It is good for us to reflect on Peter’s qualifications. The Bible tells us he was married. We don’t know if he had any kids. He was a small business owner. He ran a fishing company with his brother Andrew. He didn’t use Facebook,

Twitter or Instagram but if they were around, he would have loved them. Peter was into social networking. Andrew, Peter’s brother, connected with John the Baptist. John the Baptist connected Andrew with Jesus. Andrew connected his brother Peter with Jesus. You can just picture these guys becoming friends on Facebook and clicking the “Like” button on each other’s posts.

Jesus hand-picked Peter to be one of his inner 12 that he poured his life into and spent 24 hours a day with him. Peter had three years of watching Jesus’ miracles. He saw the feeding of the 5,000, the feeding of the 4,000, the healing of the blind, and the healing of the lame. We are talking eye-witnessing hundreds, maybe thousands, of miracles, including raising the dead. He saw Jesus walk on water and, for a time, Peter walked on water, until he looked down.

Peter wasn’t just part of the elite 12, he was part of the inner three along with James and John. He was at the mount of transfiguration. He saw Jesus in his blazing glory. He met Moses and Elijah, and I am sure he got their autographs. That is impressive.

Peter was at the last supper when Judas betrayed Jesus. He was there when Jesus was arrested, falsely accused and beaten beyond recognition so he wasn’t recognizable as a human. Peter saw all of it. The Bible doesn’t tell us Peter was at the cross but it wouldn’t surprise me if he found a way to get a glimpse of Christ’s crucifixion from a distance.

The first to know Jesus rose from the dead was a group of women but the angel told them to go and tell his disciples, and Peter, that Jesus rose from the dead. The angel specified Peter by name. Nobody else had that kind of special treatment. Peter and John were the first disciples to run to the empty tomb and see the empty grave.

After Christ’s resurrection, Peter was the leader in the early church. Peter gave the first gospel sermon and altar call in Jerusalem where 3,000 responded and gave their lives to Christ. That is impressive.

The constant theme of Peter is, “I was there.” Peter has the ultimate Christian resume. This is probably why all he needed to do was mention his first name. Everyone who heard his name knew the rest of his story. It doesn’t get more infamous than Peter. When people heard they had a letter from Peter they pulled up their chairs, sat on the edge of their seats and turned their heads a little to the side to better hear what this famous man had to say.

Interestingly, while Peter could talk about himself and his qualifications, he didn’t. He talked about his readers and who they are because of Jesus. We are part of that group. Let’s see what Peter said about his audience.

**Where were the churches?**

Let’s begin with the location of the churches geographically. They were in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia. As you can see on the map, these are geographic regions, similar to what we would call states in America.
They are in modern day Turkey. In one sense, Peter was the pastor of these churches, and he was pastoring the churches throughout that region by preaching to them with the means of communication he had at his disposal, letter writing. His letter would have been read by an orator that would travel with the letter to the church. When the traveling orator read the letter it would be as if pastor Peter was there on Sunday. You could say Peter was the pastor of a multi-campus church, a similar strategy to the one we are using to reach our region with the gospel. Churches connected together for the cause of Christ and spiritual encouragement.

Peter called the people he was writing to *elect exiles of the dispersion*. That is a mouthful. It is important concept to understand if we are going to make sense of the rest of the book, so let’s examine it.

**How did he describe the Christians he writes to?**

**Elect**

Elect means they were chosen by God to be part of his family. The same is true for us. In the Bible, the focus is always on God choosing to love us, not on us choosing to love him. Some people will tell you God only chose to love those he knew would choose to love him. That isn’t true. The Bible says in Romans 3:11 that “No one seeks God.” Nobody chooses God. God chooses to love those who would never choose to love him. Look at the apostle Paul before Jesus got ahold of him on the road to Damascus. He was committed to destroying Christians. He would have never chosen Jesus. Jesus chose him.

God chooses the unlovely, the undeserving, the sinful and the wicked. God is on a rescue mission to save his enemies. We are not on a rescue mission to save ourselves. We are not deserving, but we are loved. We have done nothing to earn God’s favor but by his grace he gave it to us.

Let this sink into your heart. Some people fight the word elect, which means chosen by God. I didn’t put it into the Bible, God did! It is our identity. We are chosen to be loved by God. We deserve hell. Hell is fair. We get to be the most blessed beings in all of God’s creation for all of eternity because God chose to love us and chose to save us through his son when we couldn’t save ourselves.
Why did he do it? He did it all for his glory so we would praise him for his kindness for all of this life and all of eternity. This means the most reprobate sinner, the most bloodthirsty terrorist on the planet, is not too far from God. It never was about us reaching out to God and saving ourselves. It always was about God reaching us out of his love and supernaturally changing our hearts. God is about the business of taking his darkest enemies and transforming them into his closest friends. That is us.

God loves us not because of who we are but in spite of who we are. Some of you were never picked for anything. In gym class, you were always last. In your high school yearbook, they forgot your photo. You are passed over for promotions. Even if you were never picked, in the one thing that really matters, you were picked. You were picked by God to be the object of his underserving love for now and all of eternity.

This changes things. We live differently and we die differently because of this. We don’t die hoping or wondering if we are good enough. We die rejoicing that we will be with Jesus forever knowing that we don’t deserve it. The only reason we will be with Christ for eternity is we are elect. We are getting what we don’t deserve. That is the identity of the Christians Peter writes to and it is our identity as well.

**Exiles of the Dispersion**

Dispersion is an Old Testament term. It means scattered. The picture is putting down fertilizer with a rotator spreader. It was a term used in the Old Testament to describe God’s people when they were taken into captivity. They were living in a foreign land. They were living in a strange culture and a foreign world. They were scattered into a foreign land to live as exiles in a place they didn’t belong.

This is very important if we are going to understand 1 Peter. Peter tells us that our identity as Christians is that we are living as exiles in a foreign land. This world is not our home. At home, we don’t have cable TV but we do have an Apple TV unit that allows us to watch movies and television programs off the Internet. It is really hard to find a good movie. Almost everything is filled with sex and violence that we do not want to watch. Sex and violence is normative for our culture but it is not normal for Christians. We are different. God chose us and changed us. Now it feels like we are strangers living in a foreign land where most movies and television programs are built on a different set of values.

Where do we belong? The Bible tells us where we belong is with Jesus. Wherever Jesus is in charge, it feels like home. This means church should feel like home, because in the church the real senior pastor is Jesus so it should feel like a place where we belong. Eventually Christ will return and he will ultimately create a new heaven and a new earth and a new Jerusalem where heaven and earth are combined. Jesus will be the president, so everything will just work. Sin, sickness and death will be stripped away and we will dwell forever on a new physical earth in our resurrection bodies with Jesus. At that point, it finally feels
like home. Before then, we are living as exiles in a world fighting against us. That is why these Christians are exiles and why we are exiles living in a foreign land.

Let me give you an idea what Christians in these regions were facing. In that day, your primary allegiance was to your nation. We are talking heavy patriotism. The confession of a Roman citizen was, “Caesar is Lord.” They thought “he is the boss of my life. We live for Caesar’s fame and glory.” When you became a Christian, who do you say is your Lord? Jesus. More important than what Caesar thinks about them was what Jesus thought about them. They were not going to stand before Caesar when they died, they were going to stand before Jesus. Christians were not being unpatriotic. They would serve in the military and gladly pay their taxes but serving Jesus was more important to them than serving Caesar. Jesus was their Lord. That didn’t go over well. Christians in this part of the world were accused of being disloyal to their country. Some were eventually tortured and killed because they wouldn’t bow in worship to Caesar.

We see this today with Hobby Lobby and other Christian businesses not willing to go with government health care that funds abortions. Hobby Lobby feels like it is living as an exile in a foreign land because Jesus is Lord, not the government. Nothing has changed. Christians are exiles.

Christians were not just facing pressure nationally, they were feeling like exiles in their local cities. Every city had cultural traditions the citizens were expected to participate in. Christians didn’t want to participate in many of them because they were not in line with who God re-created them to be. They didn’t do Mardi Gras with the rest of their city. The drinking and drugs weren’t their new identity. They didn’t dress up as a witch on Halloween. Acting as a witch and casting spells didn’t feel biblical so Christians were looked at like they were weird. They didn’t get drunk on New Year’s Eve and wake up on January 1 with people telling them they were kissing their neighbor’s wife and they don’t remember it. That lifestyle may be the way their city lived but it wasn’t the new lifestyle Christians were created to live. They didn’t participate, so they were treated like exiles.

Some Christians were even losing their jobs because of their faith. In that day there was no Social Security system. There were no welfare or unemployment checks. You were part of a trade guild. Your whole family was a part of your guild. Ancient guilds were like powerful unions. The guilds had secret rights and rituals. Weddings and funerals took place in your guild and when you were unemployed, your guild looked after you. The guild in the ancient world was like the Masonic lodge. The Masons looks like a civic organization but when you get behind them you discover they are into witchcraft and demonology and are completely against Christ. In a similar way, the guilds of the ancient world had their gods and goddesses of the guild that you sacrificed to. Christians didn’t sacrifice to the gods of the guilds. As a result, some of them lost their jobs and the protection that came with being part of the guild. It was like becoming
unemployed and losing medical, dental, retirement and having no unemployment check. I think you get the picture. These Christians were facing hard times.

This is why Paul said we should realize we are exiles in this world. We won’t fit. We will suffer. We won’t fit in.

**How did they become Christians?**

Peter described how all three members of the Trinity worked in their lives to bring them into a relationship with God.

**According to the Foreknowledge of God the Father**

The reason they knew Christ was because of the foreknowledge of God the Father. This is often misunderstood. Some people say God looked down the corridors of time and God the Father foreknew that I would choose to love him so he chose to love me. That is not what it means. We just read the only reason we know God is he chose to love us. We are elect. What this means is God knew he would create me. He knew I would need a savior. He knew he would send Jesus to die for my sins. He knew he would supernaturally step into my life to save me. It means God the Father has a plan for our lives and he is carrying it out. Life is not random. God has a good plan that included saving us. We can trust him and his plan. The verse that removes all doubt that foreknowledge is talking about God’s master plan to save us is 1 Peter 1:20, which talks about Jesus as being part of God’s master plan.

*He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you.* 1 Peter 1:20 (ESV)

This is saying God the Father had a plan which involved his son saving us. It was in place before the foundation of the world. Jesus’ coming was only being revealed in the last days.

God the Father’s foreknowledge is incredibly comforting. It means God has a plan. It involved his son coming to save us. God the Father’s plan involves saving me and electing me. I don’t deserve any of it. When life gets hairy and weird and hard and out of control we need to remember that it is not outside of the Father’s plan. I may not understand his plan but I can trust his plan in everything from salvation to every other difficulty I face in my life. Even if my life is hard, like the folks Peter was writing to because they were losing their jobs for Jesus, it was not out of the Father’s control. It is all part of his good master plan to make his name famous through our lives. Some day when we get to heaven, he will spread out the master blueprints and we will see the role our troubles and trials played in our lives and how God used them for spiritual good in the life of others, and God the Father’s master plan will make sense. Until then we will often be confused by part of the picture because we can’t see the big picture.

**In the sanctification of the Spirit**

While the Father has a plan, we are not living the Christian life on our own strength. The Holy Spirit is in us. The Bible says he is the downpayment
guaranteeing the amazing future that is to come. This past week I talked with someone who was really struggling. I asked her how God changed her life. In the midst of her struggles she told me how she was a completely different person today than she was 20 years ago. The Holy Spirit was working. He changed her. The changes in her life didn’t come from her own strength. The Holy Spirit is the one who gave her new affections and desires. The things she thought were great, she now sees with God’s eyes and finds disgusting. They things she thought were stupid, she now sees with God’s eyes and treasures them. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says the Holy Spirit makes us into a completely new person. We are not making ourselves into a new person, the Holy Spirit is doing it.

Even when we struggle with sin, the power to beat sin doesn’t come from us. The answer to beat sin is not trying harder. It is not more religion. It is not rosary beads or hitting your head on the wall. The answer to beating sin is asking the Holy Spirit to help you become more like Jesus. It is leaning more on the Holy Spirit and asking him to change your desires and reshape you from the inside out.

God the Father has a good plan that involves saving us, even if life is hard, we are not outside of God the Father’s good plan. The Holy Spirit is leading us and transforming us. He gives us new affections and desires. What does God the Son do?

**Sprinkling with his blood**

This sounds like a bad horror flick. It sounds like “Texas Chainsaw Massacre” with blood splattering all over the wall. Don’t freak out with the blood. This is how you become a Christian. It is an Old Testament thing. In the Bible, blood typifies death. Sin is what produces death. In the Old Testament, the shedding of the blood of an animal was the only way to cover sin. In Exodus 24, when Moses inaugurated the Old Covenant with the people, he splattered blood over the people that signified they were participants in the old covenant. What we find in the New Testament, when Jesus died on the cross, it says his blood inaugurated a new covenant, a new relationship between God and his people, based not upon the animals sacrifices we make but the once-for-all sacrifice God made of his own son for us. Just like the people were sprinkled with blood in Exodus 24 to show their participation in the Old Covenant, in the same way, we are sprinkled with the blood of Jesus to show our participation in the new covenant through him.

How are we sprinkled with blood? It doesn’t happen literally. It happens figuratively. When we trust in Jesus to save us from our sins, we join in the new covenant.

All we need to have a restored relationship with God is Jesus. We don’t need karma, good works, Mecca or trying harder. We don’t need reincarnation, purgatory or doing better. It is just by faith joining the new covenant God has done for us through Jesus and we are figuratively sprinkled with his blood to
show our participation in it just as the people in the Old Testament were sprinkled with blood to show their participation in the Old Covenant.

For obedience to Jesus Christ

This is an important piece. God the Father has a good plan for our lives that involves saving us. God the Holy Spirit has an active role in our lives which involves transforming us into a new creation, and God the Son has an active role in our lives which involves a new covenant which pays for our sins and restores us into a relationship with God, the purpose of all this is so we live a life of obedience to Jesus Christ.

What can Peter teach us about hard times?

At first, Peter seems like someone that is hard to relate with. He walked on water. I can barely get out of bed in the morning. He saw hundreds to thousands of miracles, I am still waiting to see one. On his first sermon he had 3,000 come forward in the altar call. I am jealous. I can’t get those kind of results even after preaching for 20 years. He has the ultimate resume. I fail Jesus every day. What would a guy like Peter have to say to someone like you and me, who fail Jesus under pressure every day?

I think the reason God chose Peter to write this letter to people who fail under pressure is because Peter knows what it is like to fail under pressure. Peter had this incurable desire to be liked by people around him. He failed Jesus repeatedly under pressure because of it.

After Jesus was arrested, before his crucifixion, Peter was lurking around the temple courts waiting to see what would happen. He was warming himself by a fire when a junior high girl started saying, “Weren’t you with Jesus?” He said, “No.” She kept insisting he was one of Jesus’ friends so he began swearing up and down that he didn’t even know Jesus. He cursed! After three years living with Jesus and watching hundreds to thousands of miracles and walking on water, he caved under the pressure of a junior high girl. The Bible tells us that Jesus turned and the eyes of Peter and Jesus met in this moment. Peter ran away in tears. He was a miserable Christian failure. I can relate to that. I think you can too.

In a similar way, God gave a supernatural dream to Peter involving a sheet and unclean animals to supernaturally show Peter that all unclean things and gentiles were now made clean because of Jesus. The separation between the Jews and Gentiles was gone. Peter, the good Jewish boy, could present the gospel to Cornelius, a gentile. Peter did that and saw the evidence of the Holy Spirit transforming their lives. The barriers of needing to follow the Jewish religion and culture were gone. All people needed was faith in Jesus.

Paul told us in Galatians there was a group of Jewish Christians called the Judaisers that wanted Gentiles to not just follow Christ but they said Gentiles also needed to follow Jewish culture and practices. Rather than standing up to them, Peter caved under pressure and agreed with them. This is the same guy
God gave a vision to supernaturally explain to him that all you need is Jesus. He still caved under people-pleasing pressure. Peter was once again a miserable Christian failure. In Galatians we find the apostle Paul had to publicly get in Peter’s face over this issue.

Peter, just like us, failed Jesus miserably on many occasions. He knew better. The good news is that in spite of those failures, Jesus was incredibly kind and loving. When Peter repented, Jesus restored him and kept on using him. Jesus didn’t use Peter in a little way but continued to use him in a big way for his kingdom. Peter remained the leader of the early church and Peter ultimately became the leader of the church in Rome in spite of his glaring sins. He became such a leader that even today the Roman Catholic church looks to flawed Peter as its founder.

In this book, we will see that Peter understood hard times. He understood the pressure to conform. He faced it and failed at it multiple times. Peter’s life is an incredibly encouraging testimony to each of us that even when we fail Jesus miserably, when we repent, Jesus is incredibly kind and loving. He will restore us and continue to use us. He will not write us off but will continue to use us in big ways, even if we fail him again and again.
Life Group Work Sheet
1 Peter 1:1-2

June 8, 2014

Getting to Know Each Other

1. Hope is an important part of our Christian lives. How would you define hope? Share a time when hope helped you get through a hard time.

2. Share a time when your hopes were realized. How did this feel? Conversely, share a time when you or someone you know lost hope. How did this feel?

Into the Text

3. Read 1 Peter 1:1-2. In these verses, Peter refers to Christians as “elect exiles.” What does it mean to be an elect exile?
   a. Have you ever experienced a time when you felt like an “elect exile”?
   b. Consider the Christians in Iraq who are suffering at the hands of the terrorist group IS (formerly ISIS). How would Peter’s statement here be good news for them?
   c. In these verses, Peter states that we Christians have been chosen by God. How does this truth give us hope?

4. Consider how 1 Peter 1:1-2 gives hope to people in the following situations:
   a. The man struggling with depression.
   b. The only believer in a family of unbelievers.
   c. The couple who are struggling to have children.
   d. The woman who doesn’t enjoy her job.
   e. The couple who lost their child in a traffic accident.

Throughout his letter, Peter makes mention of being “exiles” in this world. This is an important word for our understanding of how we relate to the world as Christians. With that in mind, read through 1 Peter and notice all the ways that he refers to our primary allegiance belonging to God in heaven, not to the country that we live in. Answer the following questions.
1. **Read Philippians 3:20-21.** What does it mean that “our citizenship is in heaven”? Think of your own context. What does that mean for you?

2. **Read John 18:33-37.** What does Jesus mean when he says that his kingdom is “not of this world”? Should this statement reflect the political involvement of Christians? In what way?

3. While we are certainly blessed to live in a country with many religious freedoms, the United States of America is not our home. List three or more ways that God has blessed you by allowing you to live in the United States. List three or more ways that this nation is certainly “not our home.”

4. Think of your vocation. How does your status as an “elect exile” affect the way that you work?
1 Peter 1:3-9 — Ten Truths Every Christian Needs To Remember When Life Falls Apart

August 31, 2014

Is life falling apart? Maybe your spouse is battling cancer. Maybe your son or daughter is in rebellion? Maybe your life is falling apart relationally. You are single and wishing you were happily married. Maybe you are married and wishing you were still single. Are you struggling to make ends meet?

As Christians, what does God want us to know when life falls apart? Do Christians face hard times in a different way from the rest of the world? Today we find those answers.

If you are new, I welcome you. My name is Kurt. I am one of the pastors. Two weeks ago we began a series in 1 Peter called Hope in Hard Times. The book of 1 Peter has a lot to say about life when it falls apart.

Our first study in 1 Peter simply examined the background of the book, the history of the apostle Peter and the background of the churches to which Peter wrote the letter. This morning, we will study 1 Peter 1:3-9. In these opening verses, Peter gave us 10 truths every Christian needs to remember when life falls apart. These truths reframe Christian suffering and help us make it through those times when life falls apart.

Let’s read the text before we dive in.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls. 1 Peter 1:3–9 (ESV)

Let’s dive into this list.

1. Remember God the Father loves me, chose me and won’t let go of me.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 1 Peter 1:3 (ESV)

Out of God’s incredible kindness and mercy, he caused us to be born again. If you are a Christian, you are not a Christian because you chose God
and are holding on to him. Everyone who has a heart that is soft toward what God has done for him through Jesus has that love for Jesus because God the Father chose him and gave that soft heart to him.

Religion is man pursuing God and hoping to catch him. Christianity is God pursuing us, saving us, holding on to us, even when we don’t deserve it, and never letting go. In eternity past, God put us together in his mind with Jesus, his son. He planned for us to hear about Jesus. He used the gospel message about Jesus to soften our heart and draw us to himself. When that happened, we were born again.

That phrase born again is used by Jesus with Nicodemus in the Gospel of John. Born again literally means born from above. Peter’s point was simply that just as we are not the source of our physical births — we didn’t will ourselves into physical existence — we are not the source of our spiritual births. Both physical life and spiritual life are supernatural gifts from God. John covered this in his Gospel.

But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. John 1:12–13 (ESV)

Peter also said we are born again to a living hope. That is a strange phrase. What is living hope? It is Jesus. Just as we are confident Jesus is alive and the object of God the father’s affection, we can be confident that we will be alive with Jesus eternally. Just as Jesus is the object of God the Father’s affection, since we were chosen by God to be Jesus’ adopted brothers and sisters, we will also be the object of God the Father’s affections for all eternity.

As Christians, when life is falling apart and we are not handling it well. When we are failing Jesus and we wonder if God will throw us away because we are such miserable fools, we need to remember in the middle of our trials that the only reason we know God is not because we are holding him but because he chose to hold on to us. We have a hope for all of eternity that is not based on us, our failures or our weaknesses but it is based on God the Father and his incredible strength to hold on to us. His incredible mercy promises to never let us go.

When you have cancer and death is approaching and doubt creeps into your mind, you wonder, “Will Jesus will really forgive me? Will Jesus welcome me home?” You need to know that your relationship with God is, and always was, a gift from God. Our resurrection and eternal life is as guaranteed as Christ’s resurrection and eternal life because we are literally connected to Jesus in the eyes of the Father.

When our lives are falling apart, God the Father’s love for us and ability to hold on to us in the middle of the storm, is what we need to hear. He promises to bring us safely home. That is a truth we need to remember.
2. Remember the future God has in store for me.

...to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you... 1 Peter 1:4 (ESV)

The best way to endure something is fixing your thoughts on the prize at the end. I am not a runner. I do not like to run. Running is painful. When I go running in the morning, the only way I make it through is I keep thinking about how much better I will feel when it is over! The prize is the feeling of accomplishment and feeling better the rest of the day. When there is a reward it enables us to endure hard times. Peter told us that when the wheels fall off in life, don't just remember that God chose us and loves us and no matter what storms of life hit you he will never let us go but also remember that as Christians there is a great prize at the end of life which awaits us. He called it our inheritance.

He borrowed that phrase from the Old Testament and the Promised Land. Ancient Israel lived anticipating the Promised Land. That is how they endured the hardships of the wilderness. They kept focused on the prize at the finish line. One day they would not be in the wilderness where God fed them with manna every morning because there was no food to be found. One day they were going to be in an amazing land filled with crops, beauty and pleasantness. In the same way, when life falls apart and we are wandering in a harsh wilderness season, we’re just like ancient Israel. In those times, we need to fix our eyes on the inheritance we look forward to. The inheritance for ancient Israel was Promised Land. For us it is our heavenly home. For ancient Israel, the Promised Land was good but imperfect. Animals attacked. Locusts ate the crops. It lacked rain. It was invaded by armies. There was indescribable bloodshed. The Promised Land they looked forward to was good but very imperfect. The Promised Land we look forward to is in heaven and it is very different.

Peter didn’t describe it by telling us what it is like, he told us what it is unlike.

It is not perishable. That means indestructible. One of the most painful things to watch is to see a new sports car that gets dropped off the car carrying truck as they are trying to put it on a dealer’s lot. It hurts to watch a $60,000-$70,000 car ruined right before anyone has a chance to enjoy it. Even if that same car was purchased, and lasted a decade or two, it would still fall apart.

In a much greater way it hurts to see a young man or woman struggle with a life-debilitating disease. It especially hurts if they die before they reach their potential. Even when someone lives to an old age, nobody lives forever. Our bodies may last 90 years, but they will fall apart. Everything about this world perishes. Our bodies can perish in their prime or in old age but everyone and everything perishes.

Everything about the inheritance God has prepared for us, including our resurrection bodies, is designed to last forever. That is the Promised Land we
look forward to. Imagine a new creation where everything, including us, doesn’t get old and worn out.

**It is undefiled.** Defiled means polluted. It means unstained by sin. This word in the Bible was sometimes used to describe a young woman who was an absolutely pure virgin. There was nothing impure about her. The new creation God prepared for us is like this. It is completely free from sin. It is pristine purity and wholesomeness forever. There is nothing evil or negative about it. No thieves, no earthquakes, no flu, no Ebola, no Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, no cheaters, no unsatisfying work. Imagine life completely free from sin. That is the life we look forward to in the new creation with Jesus in charge of it all.

**It is unfading.** That means something loses its freshness with time. When I go to the store with my daughter, she is a stickler for checking the date on everything. She checks the expiration date on the milk, the eggs and even the crackers. When we get to the new creation, she will be out of a job. Freshness dating is passé. The vegetables will last on the shelf for months. The milk and eggs could be left in the car for a year and they would still be fresh. Everything is unfading.

God has an inheritance that he will give us with his son that is the new Jerusalem and the new creation and it will never be destroyed. It is imperishable. It is undefiled, which means it will be perfect because it will never be marred by sin. It is unfading so its brilliance doesn’t fade with time. Other passages of the Bible teach us that the new creation’s brilliance actually gets better over time.

When life is hard and things fall apart, remember what we look forward to. This life is only a brief moment. Eternity with Jesus in the new creation makes every trouble we face today insignificant by comparison.

That is what we look forward to when we close our eyes in this life. That makes the trials of this life more bearable when we are so blessed in the end as a gift from God. It is just like running. If we remember the finish line, we can make it through.

**3. Remember God promises to protect my faith in my trials.**

…who by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. 1 Peter 1:5 (ESV)

God is not only protecting our future but he is protecting us to make sure we get to our future. Peter said we are being guarded by God’s power. That is a military metaphor that means surrounded by a garrison of soldiers so no one can touch you.

Here is where it gets interesting. Sometimes we face trials and temptations that are incredibly hard. In my opinion, Christians are not protected from trials. I think the opposite is true. Christians seem to face more trials than the rest of the world. I don’t see God protecting us. What is this verse saying?
This is very important. While God does filter the temptations and trials we face, this verse doesn’t say God is protecting us from trials — he is protecting our faith in the trials.

We will go through very difficult trials in life. There will be times when there is absolutely no earthly reason to keep our faith in Christ because there are no benefits to following him.

We were faithful to Christ and maintained our sexual purity now we are a single and lonely while the rest of our fornicating friends are married. What do you do when you don’t see an earthly payoff for purity?

How do you keep your faith if you are a Christian in Iraq and ISIS moves into town. Keeping your faith will cost your life or the life of your wife and children. Why not just give up and walk away from Jesus?

Remember where we began. Our faith is a gift from God. God chose us. We didn’t choose him. Since God is the source of our faith, in extreme trials, God promises to guard our faith and supernaturally strengthen our faith when there is no earthly benefit that comes with trusting him. God promises to guard our faith and keep it from being destroyed. When we go through hard times and lose our jobs, lose our spouses, lose our health and our life looks like Job, when even our wives tells us to curse God and die, Christians won’t walk away from Jesus, because in those tough times God supernaturally protects and strengthens our faith to meet the trial at hand. Remember, our faith was a gift from God in the first place so it needs to be sustained by God no matter what we face.

4. Remember trials are temporary

In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials... 1 Peter 1:6 (ESV)

When I am sick with the flu, this is what I tell myself: I will not be hanging my head over the toilet forever. Twenty-four to 48 hours and I will be better. When I remember my sickness is temporary, it helps me get through. All the trials we face are temporary. They may last five minutes, five days or five years. The trials we face may even last our entire lives, like a debilitating disease. Our trials may even take our lives, but they are all temporary, especially when compared with our inheritance that is imperishable and unfading and lasts forever.

For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison... 2 Corinthians 4:17 (ESV)

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. Romans 8:18 (ESV)

All of our suffering, even life-long suffering, is nothing more than a temporary inconvenience when compared to the wonderful eternity that awaits us. We are guaranteed all of this through Jesus as a gift from God.
Live with a biblical view of eternity. For the rest of the world, this life is as close as they will be to heaven. For those who know Jesus, this life is as close as we will ever be to hell. Suffering is always temporary.

5. Remember trials must happen.

In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials... 1 Peter 1:6 (ESV)

This is a little tricky. It says various trials will happen in our life only if necessary. I began wondering, what makes them necessary? If I could find out what made them necessary, I could avoid that and avoid the trials. In my research, I checked the Greek for the phrase if necessary. It literally means is necessary or is inevitable. Life in a fallen world means we will face trials. There is no way to escape it. Our bodies will ache as they deteriorate because of sin. People will rip us off. There will be war. There will be death. There will be cancer. As Christians, we will be persecuted.

Trials and difficulties are an inevitable part of living in a fallen world. Persecution is also an inevitable part of living in a world that is under the power of Satan, sin and death. Jesus died on a cross. All but one of the apostles were martyred. If we live a godly life in Christ, we will be persecuted. Don't get thrown off your rocker when life falls apart. This world is broken because of sin. Trials will happen. It is a fact of life.

6. Remember trials prove that my faith came from God.

...so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire... 1 Peter 1:7 (ESV)

In the Greek, the phrase tested genuine is one word. It means to prove something is what it claims to be. It was often used about metals. One of the ways people ripped others off is they took gold mixed it with other metals and made an alloy that looked like gold but wasn't pure gold. Many times, before gold was purchased, it needed to be tested to be genuine. It was put in a kiln and heated. If it was an alloy, the other metals rose to the surface and were scraped off. If impurities were added to it, they were burned off. The gold that was tested by fire and came out of the furnace weighing the same as it went into the furnace was proven genuine.

God brings trials in our lives that act like the fire of a furnace. When we go through hard times, and we find ourselves relying on Christ all the time and actually growing closer to him, not falling away from him, our faith is proven to be genuine. How we handle the furnace of trials is evidence that our faith is the genuine article. It is the real deal. We are not following God because of the benefits package. We are following God because he chose us, he changed out hearts and we love him because of it. Trials prove to us and others that our faith is genuine because it is supernaturally sustained by God. Jesus tells us about this in the parable of the soils.
And the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe for a while, and in time of testing fall away. Luke 8:13 (ESV)

Trials proves to us, and to everyone else around us, that God is the source of the faith in our lives, because in a times of testing, we don’t fall away.

7. Remember God uses trials to purify my faith.

…so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire… 1 Peter 1:7 (ESV)

Just as heat purifies gold, trials purify our faith. Before our trials, we often find ourselves distracted from God. We don’t have time to read our Bibles. We don’t have time to pray. We are busy most weekends and skip church. We are very interested in the things of this world rather that the things of God. God, in his love for us, brings trials into our lives. It doesn’t take long for all the foo foo in our lives to burn up when faced with a trial. We start focusing on God and calling out to him with laser-like precision. We make time for his Word. We make time for church and to be with God’s people. Just as fire purifies gold, hard times purify our faith.

The most spiritually mature people have gone through very hard trials. Most people who have gone through hard times will tell you they would never want to go through them again but they wouldn’t trade away the spiritual maturity God brought to their lives through them.

Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin… 1 Peter 4:1 (ESV)

8. Remember faith proven by trials is the most precious possession in the world.

…so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire… 1 Peter 1:7 (ESV)

Who would like to own the most precious possession in the world? Today that might be owning Microsoft, like Bill Gates, or owning Apple Computer, like Tim Cook. In the ancient world, gold was the most precious possession. Peter reframed this. If you have a faith that has gone through trials, been tested by trials and grown stronger through trials, you know you have real God-given faith. You know without a shadow of a doubt that you are chosen by God and will be with Jesus for all eternity. You will be the object of God’s affection for all of eternity in the new creation. You have the most precious possession in the world.

You may be dirt poor, but you are filthy rich. You would rather have faith proven by trials than be Bill Gates. That faith is the most precious possession in the world.
9. Remember that faith tested by trials will be richly rewarded at Christ’s return.

…so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. 1 Peter 1:7 (ESV)

God promises to reward us for how we endure our trials at the return of Christ. This is helpful for when we are enduring trials. We will be rewarded in eternity for how we endure our earthly adversities.

And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him. Hebrews 11:6 (ESV)

Our God is a rewarding God. He loves to reward us. When we endure trials of our faith in this life, we will be rewarded by Jesus for it in the next life. That is great motivation to please Christ in a trial.

This really reframes our picture of suffering, especially suffering as a Christian. I love the way Peter talks about suffering for his faith.

Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. Acts 5:41 (ESV)

What a privilege to suffer for Jesus. The more I faithfully suffer for Jesus, the more richly I will be rewarded by Jesus in the next life for suffering faithfully in this one.

10. Remember that in trials, God gives us joy that can only come from him.

Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory… 1 Peter 1:8 (ESV)

When we are facing trials, our earthly joy can be sucked dry. Sometimes there are no earthly joys to look forward to. Our bodies will only become sicker as we prepare to die, not healthier. There is nothing to look forward to. In those moments, where do we find joy when all hope is gone?

God gives us joy that comes from him. There is an inexpressible joy that God gives us in our trials that comes only from knowing him, the source of all joy.

You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore. Psalm 16:11 (ESV)

Peter couldn’t explain it. I can’t explain it. The Bible tells us it exists. God gives us joy that comes directly from him in our trials when there is no source of joy in this world.

In addition, we know about our glorious future. When all the joys and pleasures of this life dry up in death, joy and pleasures beyond our imagination await those who love Jesus because they are loved by Jesus.
It is not because of our goodness or our behavior but all because of God’s immense kindness through Jesus that we have any of this.

This is why we love God above all earthly things. This is why we adore Jesus. This is why we gather on Sundays to worship from the bottom of our hearts. God is good. He completely transforms our trials. When life is falling apart, for those who love Jesus, these 10 truths completely change the way we suffer.

My prayer for you this morning is that these 10 truths give you hope in hard times. Trials for a Christian are different than trials for the rest of the world. Let these verses help you to think about your trials biblically, not from a worldly point of view.

**Conclusion**

Over lunch, I want you to talk about these 10 truths with your friends or family. Choose one that is the most important to you. Tell your friends and family why it is significant for your life. At the end of lunch, take a few moments to thank God for these truths that completely change the way we face life when our world falls apart.
Life Group Work Sheet  
1 Peter 1:3-9  
August 31, 2014  

Getting to Know Each Other  

1. Were you able to go to the All-Church Picnic? What was your favorite part of the service?  

Into the Text  

2. **Read 1 Peter 1:3-9.** What are some trials you have experienced?  
   a. “Trial” seems to indicate God is at work. What did God teach you in the moment of trial you just mentioned?  
   b. Did you feel close to God or distant from God in this situation? How do trials bring us closer to God?  

3. **Read James 1:2-4.** What are some similarities and differences between 1 Peter 1:3-9 and James 1:2-4?  
   a. Why does James tell us to “count as joy” our sufferings? What does this look like?  
   b. Think of a past experience where you faced a trial. Were you able to “count it as joy”? If not, what would it look like to have joy in this situation?  

4. In this section, Peter talks about proving your faith genuine in suffering. At the Spencer campus, we called this “not wasting your suffering.” What does it mean to not “waste your suffering?” What does it look like?  

5. Consider the following areas. How would these trials help someone to prove their faith genuine? What would a genuine faith look like in these situations?  
   a. A woman loses her job.  
   b. A man is underemployed (working in a position that he is over-qualified for).  
   c. A high school student suffers a sports injury and has to sit out the season.  
   d. A woman is diagnosed with cancer.
How many times have you received a text on your phone with the phrase, “God is not Dead”? The God Is Not Dead movie is the fictional story of a college student debating his philosophy professor over the existence of God. The end of the movie challenges you to text your friends the phrase “God is not dead” when you leave the movie.

While atheistic philosophers debate the existence of God on college campuses, an even more pressing debate on college campuses today concerns the Bible. College professors tell our children the Bible is a random collection of disconnected stories about God and that we can’t trust it.

Even on Christian college campuses this debate rages. Some Christian college professors tell their students that only parts of the Bible are relevant today. They tell our children the Bible has mistakes and contradictions and that the biblical writers occasionally heard God wrong. Christian college professors publish books claiming actual words of the Bible are not inspired by God, just the general concepts. They tell their students that the biblical writers occasionally inserted their own ideas instead of God’s.

On many Christian college campuses, the Bible is considered a good book but certainly not the authoritative infallible Word of God. What do you think? Pick up your Bible. What do you hold in your hand? How you answer that question is one of the most important decisions of your life.

This morning, we are asking the Bible what it has to say about itself. Does it claim to be the infallible word of God? What does the Bible say about itself? That is the question 1 Peter 1:10-12 answers. Let’s read it together.

Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look. 1 Peter 1:10–12 (ESV)

What does the Old Testament say about itself?

Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. 1 Peter 1:10–11 (ESV)

The Old Testament considers itself the flawless words of God.

Peter began by talking about our salvation. God has a plan to save us from our sins. It was all about sending his son. The whole Bible is a Marvel
Comic movie, like Captain America or Spider-Man. We are hopelessly defeated against our powerful enemies called Satan, sin and death. Sin drags people into deeper, darker and grosser levels of wickedness, like ISIS and the beheading of Americans. We cannot save ourselves. Like a good Marvel comic movie, we need a superhero that is similar to us but more powerful than us, who can ride to the rescue and save the day because we can’t save ourselves.

The superhero that conquers Satan, sin and death is God’s own son, Jesus. This is the salvation the prophets of old anticipated. This is the grace we don’t deserve that they were trying to understand.

It says the prophets prophesied about this. Who are the prophets? The prophets were men raised up by God to be his spokesman in their generation. Many of them preached God’s Word. Many of them wrote God’s Word. Some did both. What makes the Bible unique is that upwards of 25 percent of it was prophetic when written. This means the Bible was all about the future and what God would do in the future. This makes the Bible unique among all religious books. The Quran, the Bhagavad Gita and the Book of Mormon are not filled with prophecy. It just isn’t there. Since the Bible is filled with prophecy, there is huge opportunity for it to be wrong, but amazingly, the Bible hasn’t been proven wrong. It has only proven right again and again. This is what sets the Bible apart from all other religious books.

Biblical prophecy is revelation not speculation. Speculation is guessing at the future. Revelation is God telling people how the future will unfold because he knows it and controls it. Only God holds the future. This is why the Old Testament prophets said more than 3,800 times a version of, “Thus saith the Lord.” The prophets were speaking for God. They were very aware of it.

How could the Old Testament prophets speak about the future with accuracy? Peter said “the Spirit of Christ was upon them.” That is the Holy Spirit. Just as the Holy Spirit was upon Jesus and it was Jesus’ complete dependence upon the Holy Spirit in his humanity that enabled him to live a perfect life, the same Holy Spirit was upon the prophets of old and he enabled them to prophecy perfectly. As Jesus lived perfectly, they prophesied perfectly. Peter was saying the only perfect thing we have on the planet today is the Bible.

This is what we believe at CrossWinds. We believe the words of the Bible are flawless and without error in their original writings. We believe that if God couldn’t communicate what he wanted to communicate to us without error, then he isn’t God.

Theologically this is called Verbal Plenary Inspiration.

- **Verbal** means we believe all the words of the Bible, not just the concepts, are inspired by God. They are without error.
- **Plenary** means all of the Bible is inspired, not just parts of it. Many people criticize this. We stand by this because that is what the Bible says about itself.
We will learn more about this in a moment. God doesn’t stutter. God doesn’t mumble. God doesn’t make mistakes when he speaks.

- **Inspiration** means it is inspired — that is written — by God.

**The Old Testament is about Jesus.**

Peter said the spirit of Christ wasn’t simply inspiring the prophets to speak prophecies about their immediate future. The Holy Spirit inspired the prophets about the coming of Christ in the distant future. The Holy Spirit inspired the prophets to prophecy details of his suffering, resurrection and subsequent glories.

If we look at the Old Testament, we should see Jesus woven into its fabric because Peter said the entire Bible is about Jesus. The Holy Spirit inspired the Old Testament prophets to say exactly what God wanted foretold about Jesus.

Let me show you some of the ways Jesus shows up in the Old Testament.

**Jesus shows up in direct prophecy.**

_Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel._ Isaiah 7:14 (ESV)

We read this one at Christmas. Isaiah was writing 700 years before Christ. He told us about the arrival of the great hero of the Bible. This is how you can recognize him. Look for a pregnant virgin. That is a clue. This doesn’t happen every Wednesday. This pregnant virgin will have a son. His name was to be Immanuel, which means “God with us.” A virgin who gives birth to a baby boy who is called “God with us” is a sign you should be looking for. That sounds like it would be hard to fake. This was prophecy about Jesus 700 years before he came.

_But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days._ Micah 5:2 (ESV)

Here is another contemporary of Isaiah, writing 700 years before Christ. This savior, the hero of the Bible, was to be born in Bethlehem. This was a small dumpy rural town where everybody married a cousin because nobody else lived there. That was where the hero of the world was to be born. Even though he was a newborn baby, his was not new. His origins were from eternity past. Literally this says his origins were from eternity because _he never had a beginning_. That is a sign to look for. The hero that saves us from Satan, sin and death was to come from the dumpy rural town of Bethlehem but he was God because he always existed. This was prophecy written 700 years before Jesus arrived!

_“Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts.”_ Malachi 3:1 (ESV)
Malachi was also writing hundreds of years before Jesus. He said there was to be a messenger who would prepare the way for the hero of the Bible before he arrived on the scene. We know this messenger was John the Baptist. When the hero came, he would suddenly come into the temple.

What makes it interesting is this prophecy could not be fulfilled today. There is no temple. The temple was destroyed in 70 A.D. and the Dome of the Rock built over it by Muslims a few hundred years later. For this prophecy to be fulfilled, it needed to transpire before 70 A.D. because you need a temple for the hero to come into. The hero needed to come before 70 A.D. and Jesus fit the bill.

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy. For waters break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert… Isaiah 35:5–6 (ESV)

When the hero came, you would know he arrived because he would be busy healing people. Blind people would see. Deaf people would hear. Lame people would walk. Mute people would sing. You would know the hero when he arrived because he would push back the curse of sin on this earth that ruins peoples lives. Is anybody seeing Jesus in this? The reason Jesus did so many miracles of healing is because that was the sign that God in the flesh, the hero of the Bible story, had arrived on the world scene. The Holy Spirit inspired Isaiah to write this 700 years before Jesus came!

Then I said to them, “If it seems good to you, give me my wages; but if not, keep them.” And they weighed out as my wages thirty pieces of silver. Then the Lord said to me, “Throw it to the potter”—the lordly price at which I was priced by them. So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the Lord, to the potter. Zechariah 11:12–13 (ESV)

The hero of this story would eventually be betrayed for 30 pieces of silver and the money, when it is received, would be thrown into the temple. There are a couple things that are interesting. Judas betrayed Jesus for 30 pieces of silver, just like the Holy Spirit inspired Zechariah to tell us, not 29 or 31… 30! It was very specific. It was pieces of silver, not gold, not dollars, not pesos, not Visa, not MasterCard or American Express. It was silver. When it was received, it was to be thrown into the temple, which is exactly what Judas did. It also meant it needed to transpire before 70 A.D. because the temple was gone after 70 A.D. Do you see how the Holy Spirit was guiding the prophets to lace prophecy about Christ throughout the Old Testament?

For dogs encompass me; a company of evildoers encircles me; they have pierced my hands and feet... Psalm 22:16 (ESV)

What was talked about in this Psalm was the death of Jesus. This Psalm spoke of Jesus dying by crucifixion. The problem is crucifixion wasn’t invented until hundreds of years after this Psalm was written. Do you see how the Holy Spirit wove this prophecy about Jesus into the Old Testament? The Old
Testament prophets were saying exactly what the Holy Spirit wanted them to say and they were trying to put the pieces together, but like a jigsaw puzzle with missing pieces, they could only put together part of the picture.

He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearsers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people? And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth. Isaiah 53:7–9 (ESV)

We could spend a lot of time on these verses. Isaiah 52-53 is line by line of detailed prophecy about the life and death of Jesus. Just like it says, Jesus suffered his crucifixion and death in silence. Just like it says, he made his grave with the wicked. Christ died between two thieves. He was with a rich man in his death. Joseph of Arimathea, a rich man that was a secret disciple of Jesus, gave his tomb for Jesus, just as the Holy Spirit foretold through Isaiah 700 years before it happened. We could go on for a long time. Line after line of Christ’s life is prophesied in the Old Testament because the prophets were not speaking by speculation; they spoke by revelation exactly what the Holy Spirit wanted them to say without error.

Jesus shows up as the Angel of the Lord.

In addition to direct prophecy about Christ, Jesus showed up multiple times in the Old Testament in cameo appearances. He was the angel that walked with Abraham. He appeared to Moses in the burning bush. He was with Shadrack, Meshack and Abednago in the fiery furnace.

A few years ago we did a study on “the angel of the Lord” in the Old Testament. This angel is described as having all the qualities of God. In the Old Testament, he was described in a very similar way to Jesus in the New Testament. The Angel of the Lord was Jesus showing up in the Old Testament. A few years ago I gave a detailed message on this called, “Where was Christ before the manger?” I included a link to that message in your notes if you want to learn more about this. In the interest of time, we need to keep moving.

Jesus shows up in the Old Testament in figures and events that are types of Christ.

• The priesthood, which enabled God’s people to relate to God, prefigured Christ, our great high priest. He is the ultimate priest who enables a much better relationship with God than any earthly priest ever could.

• David, and other Old Testament kings, prefigured Jesus, the once-for-all great king of all kings who will rule God’s people forever.

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• Moses, the great prophet who spoke for God prefigured Jesus the greatest prophet of all who spoke for God.

• Animal sacrifices prefigured the once-for-all perfect sacrifice of Jesus for all our sins.

• The temple, which represented God’s presence among his people prefigured Jesus who is the ultimate expression of God dwelling among his people forever.

• Unlike the first Adam who failed his test in a garden, Jesus, the second Adam, passed his test in a garden.

• When Isaac carried his own wood and laid his life down to be sacrificed according to the will of his father, he prefigured Jesus who would carry his own wood and lay his life down to be sacrificed according to the will of his father.

• Joseph served at the right hand of the ruler of the world and he used his power to forgive his brothers who betrayed him and he saved their lives. Jesus served at the right hand of the ruler of the world and used his power to extend forgiveness, and he saved the brothers and sisters who betrayed him.

• Just as Moses inaugurated a covenant between God and man, Jesus is the greater Moses who inaugurated a new and improved covenant between God and man.

• Just as Job suffered at the hands of the devil so God might be glorified while Job’s dumb friends were of no help, Jesus suffered at the hands of the devil so God might be glorified while his friends were no help.

• Jesus was the greater Jonah who spent three days in the grave instead of three days in the belly of a fish to save a multitude much greater than the vast city of Ninevah.

• Jesus is the greater Hosea who married an unfaithful wife that he continued to pursue and love even when she was constantly unfaithful to him. That is the heart Jesus has for us, his unfaithful bride — the church. He continues to pursue and love us even when we are unfaithful to him.

Peter’s right. The entire Old Testament is not speculation. Every bit of it is revelation inspired by the Holy Spirit so the Old Testament prophets said exactly what God wanted them to say, and much of it was about Jesus.

How did Jesus view the Old Testament?

Rather than creating our own view of the Old Testament, if we can trust Jesus to save our souls when we die, we should be able to trust Jesus’ opinion of the Old Testament. Let’s see how Jesus viewed his Old Testament.

Jesus viewed the Old Testament as the flawless words of God.

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.” Matthew 5:17–18 (ESV)
Jesus claimed that he fulfilled everything in the Old Testament. He claimed not an iota or a dot will pass away until every detail in the Old Testament is accomplished. Jesus literally said not the smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet or the smallest vowel mark in the Hebrew alphabet, which is only a dot, will pass away until all of it is accomplished. Jesus claimed the actual letters and vowels of each each biblical word were accurately written by the Holy Spirit of God and all of the Bible is important.

‘I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? He is not God of the dead, but of the living.” Matthew 22:32 (ESV)

In context, Jesus was arguing with the religious leaders about the existence of life after death. Jesus argued for the existence of life after death based on the present tense of a Hebrew verb because Jesus believes the actual words of the Old Testament are the Words of God. Just like the letters and vowels are exactly what God wanted to say, so are the tenses. It is “I am the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob” not “I was the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.” That is how Jesus argued for the existence of life after death!

Jesus viewed the Old Testament as all about him.

You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me... John 5:39 (ESV)

In context, Jesus was arguing with the religious leaders of the day and telling them they didn’t know their Bibles. These religious leaders were big brains. They didn’t just learned their AWANA verses, they memorized large portions of the Old Testament in Hebrew — at least the first five books! We have a hard reading the Bible in English. They memorized it in Hebrew. Jesus told them if they would look in their Old Testaments, they would see Jesus all over the place. Jesus said the entire Old Testament is all about him! We just did a brief fly over a few minutes ago to show you that. The entire book is about Jesus, not just the New Testament. Unfortunately, even though these religious leaders memorized huge portions of the Bible, they missed the main point of the Bible.

And he said to them, “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. Luke 24:25–27 (ESV)

After Jesus rose from the dead, he walked along the Emmaus road with some disciples. They were confused and perplexed about Jesus’ death and resurrection. Jesus began explaining to them everything from the Old Testament to show them God spoke about this in the Old Testament hundreds of years before. Nothing was out of control. This is exactly the way God planned it to happen.
Application: Don’t look at the Bible the wrong way.

There are two ways to look at the Bible. Some people view the Bible as a bunch of good principles and stories. The idea is to act like the good people. Don’t act like the bad people. Find the heroes of the story and act like them. Don’t act like the villains. That is called moralizing. That isn’t what the Bible is about. The Bible says every single one of us is a villain. Every single person in the Bible, except one, deserves death. Since everyone is a villain, we all die and deserve hell. The only one who is not a villain is Jesus. We killed him.

Don’t look at the Bible the wrong way, thinking it is a bunch of cute stories with nice Hallmark principles. The Bible is about us and our sin, and there is one hero that the entire book points to who rides to the rescue like a Marvel Comic hero — his name is Jesus.

What does the New Testament say about itself?

It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look. 1 Peter 1:12 (ESV)

Now we move from the Old Testament prophets to the New Testament apostles and the things that were announced to you by those who preached to you the good news to you.

Just as the prophets were God’s chosen spokesmn in the Old Testament, the apostles were God’s chosen spokesman in the New Testament. Just as the prophets of the Old Testament were inspired by God to speak exactly what God wanted spoken, the New Testament apostles were also inspired by God to speak what God wanted spoken, plus they were eyewitnesses of Jesus.

It is hugely important to remember the New Testament was based on the eyewitness accounts of the apostles. If anybody knew what happened with Jesus, they were the ones. They were the eyewitnesses. Professors, philosophers and teachers coming 2,000 years later do not have better comprehension about Jesus than the eyewitnesses who lived with him for three years. Some books in the Bible, like Luke, were not written by an apostle but they were authenticated by an apostle. For instance, Luke traveled with the apostle Paul who authenticated and endorsed his Gospel.

For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,” we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. 2 Peter 1:16–18 (ESV)

Peter said the apostles and writers of the New Testament didn’t make stuff up. They were eyewitnesses to the miracles, to Christ’s death, Christ’s beatings and his resurrection. Jesus is alive. By the way, Peter said he was there on the
Mount of Transfiguration when Jesus met with Moses and Elijah and revealed some of his glory. Peter heard God the Father say Jesus was his son. Note to self, when God speaks, we should listen. When God says Jesus is the one who is the hero, the savior of the world, go with it.

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness… 2 Timothy 3:16 (ESV)

This means all of the Bible is literally the breath of God. The entire Bible is God speaking. It is literally God’s words. While the Bible was written by men, it was also written by God because God’s Holy Spirit used the writers’ personalities, experiences and backgrounds and then inspired them, that means carried them along like wind in the sail of a boat, to say exactly what the Holy Spirit wanted them to say so we would have a perfect record of what God wanted us to know.

…knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. 2 Peter 1:20–21 (ESV)

Here we have the same message. Peter said nobody made the Bible up. A guy wasn’t smoking weed in a cave and came up with an idea of a pregnant virgin giving birth to God so everybody would get a holiday with presents. Nobody made up the fact that everybody is a sinner going to hell apart from Jesus and our simple trust in him. If you are making something up, you make something up that everybody likes.

Peter said no part of the Bible is speculation. It is all revelation from God via the Holy Spirit carrying the prophets and the apostles along so they said exactly what the Holy Spirit wanted them to say. If the Bible wasn’t exactly what God wanted spoken, why would there be so many detailed prophecies, Christophanies and biblical types of Christ that are accurate with razor sharp precision? If the Bible wasn’t accurate, why would Jesus argue for its accuracy down to letters, vowels and tenses of verbs?

And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures. 2 Peter 3:15–16 (ESV)

Some people say that while the Old Testament is the Word of God, the New Testament shouldn’t be. They claim it is was only hundreds of years later that men gathered at councils and declared Peter’s letters, Paul’s letters and other parts of the New Testament to be part of the Bible. If Peter, Paul and others knew their writings were added to the Bible and considered authoritative Scripture, they would be mortified.
Look what Peter said. Paul’s letters were circulating. Paul’s letters were considered by many to be authoritative Scripture but not everyone agreed on this. People were asking Peter, the head of the apostles, the leader of the early church, what they should do with Paul’s writings. Should they listen to them?

What did Peter say about this? Peter called Paul’s writings Scripture. Peter considered them on the same level of authority as the Old Testament Scriptures. *Paul’s letters were considered authoritative Scripture from the very beginning. This means Peter considered them to be infallible and inspired by the Spirit of God just like the rest of the Old Testament.*

The Bible has a very high view of itself. The church councils eventually did publish lists of the books that were accepted as the Word of God. They didn’t create the New Testament, they only stated what was already recognized by the people of God as the New Testament Scriptures.

**Application:** Don’t put yourself over the Bible. Put yourself under it.

There are two ways to look at the Bible. Many people put themselves over the Bible. They stand as judge and jury over it. They choose parts they believe are wrong and don’t apply to their lives. If something makes them uncomfortable, they cross it out. That part about homosexuality was just cultural, we can ignore it. That part about love your neighbor, that doesn’t apply to me because my neighbor is hard to get along with.

If they don’t understand something, they assume the Bible is wrong rather than assume the Bible is right and they have to grow in their understanding of it. That is arrogance. That is pride, but that is the default position of most people when it comes to the Bible. Don’t assume you have all knowledge and can correct or reinterpret God’s Word and that the writers of the Bible were a bunch of idiots. Assume you have to learn, grow and understand. Accept what the Bible has to say about itself in both the Old and New Testaments. It is the very words of God and it is all about Jesus from beginning to end.

Let me give you an example from the Evangelical Lutheran Church. They hold this position:

*We sometimes conclude either that the writer’s culture or personal experience (e.g., subordination of women or keeping of slaves) seems to have prompted his missing what God was saying or doing, or that God now is saying or doing something new.*

That is unbiblical. At CrossWinds, we believe the opposite. We put ourselves under the Bible. It has authority over us. We believe the Bible is what it claims to be, the very infallible words of God. If we don’t understand something, we study it and submit to it. *We assume the Bible is right, not assume the Bible is wrong.* We want to submit to the Bible and let it rebuke us, correct us and show us more about Jesus.

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3 [http://www.elca.org/What-We-Believe/New-or-Returning-to-Church/Dig-Deeper/The-Bible.aspx](http://www.elca.org/What-We-Believe/New-or-Returning-to-Church/Dig-Deeper/The-Bible.aspx)
Conclusion

The movie God is Not Dead made the case that atheism doesn’t make sense. For many people today, it is not God that is on trial, it is his Word. Believe what the Bible says about itself. It can be trusted. It is the very words of God to us down to the letters, vowels and tenses of the verbs being exactly what God the Holy Spirit inspired the prophets to say. We can trust it. The God Is Not Dead movie closed with people texting “God is not dead” to their friends and neighbors. If we were doing a similar ending, what would you text your friends as a summary phrase of what we learned today?

I think we would text something like this. “The Bible can be trusted and it is all about Jesus.” That is what it claims to be, the infallible Word of God that is all about Jesus from beginning to end.
Life Group Work Sheet
1 Peter 1:10-12

September 7, 2014

Getting to Know Each Other

1. What was your favorite story as a child? What made it a great story?
2. What makes the gospel a great story?

Read Matthew 5:17-20

3. We live in a culture that likes new philosophies and teachings. Many people are quick to throw out teachings they believe are outdated. What teachings in the Old Testament are people quick to throw out?
4. Instead of throwing out the Old Testament, how does Jesus tell us he relates to it?
5. Read Hebrews 7:23–8:6 and Acts 2:22-36. What does it mean to say Jesus fulfilled “the Law and the Prophets”?
6. If Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament through His life, death, and resurrection, what purpose does it serve today?


7. What were the disciples’ expectations of Jesus (vv. 20-21)?
8. These men knew Jesus. Why didn’t they expect He would rise from the dead? How did Jesus combat their confusion?
9. Genesis 3:15; Psalm 22:15-31; Isaiah 53; Zechariah 12:10; and Matthew 17:22-23 are some Old Testament passages that predict Christ. Read them together and discuss how they connect to Jesus.
10. What significant realizations did the disciples come to after their eyes were opened (v. 31)?
11. What can we learn from the disciples actions when they realized he was alive and his resurrection was prophesied in the Old Testament? (vv. 32-35)?

Application Questions

12. How does Jesus fulfilling the Old Testament change the way I read the Bible? How does knowing what Christ has done help me follow His commands?
13. God’s salvation by his son Jesus is the most fascinating topic in the angelic world. What is my plan to learn more about it by reading the Bible at least four times this week?
What sins do you struggle with? Maybe it is materialism. You have a burning desire for something new. You need new things to make you happy. Once you buy them, the thrill is gone so you need something else. Now your closets are full of clothes you don’t wear. Your garage is filled with junk you don’t need and you are a candidate for “Hoarders” on A&E.

Maybe you struggle with sexual sins. You feel pressured to be in a relationship because everybody is dating somebody. Everyone on television is hooking up or shacking up except you. You are starting to feel weird because you are single. Maybe you struggle with the sexual sin of lust. The Internet is filled with eye candy just waiting to sink its hooks into your psyche so you can sin greatly with just the click of a track pad.

As Christians, we are under a lot of pressure to live sinful lives in a sinful world. How do we resist the tidal wave of temptations and sinful pleasures pressing against us? How can we strive for sin-free living in this sin-filled world? That is the question we will answer this morning.

If you are new, my name is Kurt. I am one of the pastors. We are in a series of studies in the book of 1 Peter. The series is called, “Hope In Hard Times.” We are learning how to make it through the trials of life. In previous studies we looked at the trial of suffering and 10 things we need to know when life falls apart. Last week we looked at the trial of biblical trust. What do we need to know about the Bible when a college professor tells us we can’t trust it as the Word of God? This morning, we move to the trial of living in a sinful society. How do we live for God in a world that is against him? If you struggle with temptation, this message will do you immense good. Turn with me in your Bibles to 1 Peter 1:13-21 as we read together. It is found on page 1,014 of your pew Bible.

Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.” And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one’s deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was
made manifest in the last times for the sake of you who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God. 1 Peter 1:13–21 (ESV)

In these verses Peter gives us seven action steps to live for Christ in a world that is against him. The first one is the key to understanding the remaining six.

1. Set my heart on living for Christ's return

…set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. 1 Peter 1:13 (ESV)

What is the hope of your life? What are you living for? If you are a college student, you are probably hoping for graduation, a good job and getting out of your parents’ basement. If you are single, your hope is to get married to Mr. or Mrs. Right and have children. If you are in debt your hope is to get out of debt and have money in the bank. If you are working, your hope is to save for retirement when you are too old to work. There is nothing wrong with having those hopes for the future. The problem with every one of them is when we obtain them, they will disappoint us. We may get a job but we will lose a job. We may get married but our spouse will not be perfect. Our marriage will frustrate us. We can save for retirement but the stock market can swallow the whole thing. Every earthly hope will disappoint.

Peter said that we are to set our hope on the grace that will be ours when Christ returns. When Christ returns, we will receive grace. You think you received grace now because Christ changed your life and made you a new person? You haven’t seen anything. All the changes we have now are just the appetizer, only the aroma of the meal that is in the kitchen. When Christ returns, the Bible tells us in Ephesians 1 that God will unleash on us so much grace that we cannot imagine it. Christ has chosen us to be the most blessed beings in the universe. We are with Christ and under Christ in eternity. We are raised higher than the angels for all of eternity. Satan is very jealous.

He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Romans 8:32 (ESV)

We are recipients of the maximum amount of grace God will ever, has ever or can ever display. It is all for us through Jesus. We deserve none of it!

That is something to look forward to when you are down in life, when you are facing death, when you are tempted by sin, look at the finish line. That helps us make it through the hard times in this world. No matter what we face, we may be disappointed or struggling, but it is nothing compared to what God will give us when he returns.

What are your thoughts fixed on? Are you living to make the starting line-up on the football team? Are your hopes to graduate from college and get a good job? Marriage? Children? They are all good things to hope for but they will disappoint. We need to live for something beyond what this world has to
offer. We need to fix our eyes on a pleasure that is greater than this world can ever give, the day we will see Jesus.

2. Prepare my mind for action

Therefore, **preparing your minds for action**… 1 Peter 1:13 (ESV)

Peter told us to prepare our minds for action. Some of you have a translation that says “gird up your loins.” That sounds concerning. You are not sure if you can identify your loins and you certainly are not sure if you want to gird them. Gird up your loins is a Hebrew idiom that means prepare for action. In the ancient world men wore long robes. You couldn’t run in long robes. To get ready for action they pulled their robes up and tucked them in their belt making the equivalent of a male mini-skirt.

Peter said we should get our minds ready. We need to train our minds to be ready for the pressure we will get from a sinful world. Our minds need training to know more about Jesus, the day we will see him and the incredible grace that will be ours when he returns. If we aren’t training our minds with this information, we will fail in the face of the temptations and the pressures of the world every time. When we don’t know about our greater pleasures in Jesus, we cannot live for them.

If we want to fix our eyes on the future, we need to learn our Bibles. We need to study the Bible. If we don’t train our minds in the Bible, we will only live for the lesser fading hopes of this world rather than the amazing hope we have in front of us when God blesses the socks right off us.

How can we go into training? Here are a few suggestions:

**Make church a priority.** We live in a mobile society. It is easy to skip church on the weekend. The church is kind of a big deal. The church is God’s plan. He gave us the church so we can encourage one another. We need to remind one another about who we are in Jesus and the future we have in Jesus.

There is no such thing as a lone-ranger Christian. Christians who isolate themselves will not mature. They will not stay on track. It is very hard for them to grow spiritually and live for the future. Some people do church at home and isolate themselves. They sit on their front porch, call it church and think it is biblical. Some of you avoid church because they have annoying people. Do you know why there are annoying people in church? God put them here to help you grow. God sends annoying people to church because he loves you. He wants you to learn to love the hard to love people, and he will mature you through them. If you only spent time with people that were easy to love, what spiritual good would that do?

**Read the Bible.** God’s Word is the way God changes lives. Reading the Bible changes hearts. If you don’t have a Bible, take one out of the pew. It is a gift from me to you. If you want a different color, go to the Connect Center in the foyer and you can choose your color and even take the cellophane off. Just pay
the price you can afford. The only way you can put your mind into training about the future is to read the Bible.

**Memorize the Bible.** The Bible says when we hide God’s Word in our hearts God will use it to keep us from sin. He brings the Bible back to our minds at just the right time we need it.

It is trendy for Christian kids to tattoo Bible verses on their body. I am all for tattooing verses on the body. When you tattoo a Bible verse on your body, you have it for life. My personal thoughts are that it is not worth tattooing verses on the outside of your body because you run out of real estate space, it costs too much, and it is painful. Besides, it is a real hassle to lift your shirt to share your favorite Bible verse on your chest with your friends.

I am all for tattooing Bible verses on your heart. That is called memorizing them. God brings them to mind and reminds us of our new identities and reminds us of our amazing future and steers us away from sin when we keep bringing the words we memorized back to mind. Tattoo verses on your body. Tattoo them on the inside of your body, your heart.

**Study the Bible.** Go to CrossWinds University. There are classes, like the Pentateuch, which teaches us about Jesus in the Old Testament. In CrossWinds University you will discover truth about Jesus you would most likely never discover on your own.

Another great way to study the Bible is to redeem your commute. Many gifted pastors have their messages available on the Internet. You can download their podcasts and listen in the car on your commute. I recommend pastors like Tim Keller, Matt Chandler, and John Piper. Study the Word on the go. Talk radio kills brain cells. Good Christian teachers build brain cells.

**Use good Bible software.** Some of you know I love Logos Bible software. The Bible study program is free for all computers and smartphones, although the books cost money. They are worth it. If I could afford it, I would buy every one of you an electronic Logos library. I love to study on the go. Logos is great stuff. I am a Bible study junkie and almost all of it is through my computer, phone and iPad.

**Discuss God’s Word.** This is very important. Too many of us do Bible study alone. We don’t discuss the Bible with our spouses or our kids. Some of us neglect studying the Bible with our Life Groups. This is unhealthy.

Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another. Proverbs 27:17 (ESV)

We need each other to grow. We must study the Bible with other people. You will learn much more. The Holy Spirit works among his people when they gather around his Word. He uses other people to help us see things in the Bible we wouldn’t normally see on our own. I encourage you to try a Life Group for your own spiritual good. As some of you know we are working with LifeWay

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5 [www.logos.com](http://www.logos.com)
Christian Resources, having it help build our Life Group material. LifeWay is giving us great quality stuff, and I encourage you to use it.

It is in preparing our minds with the Word of God that we can keep our minds focused on the future that is ours, otherwise we will live for lesser earthly pleasures, become easily distracted, discouraged and ultimately live unproductive lives for Jesus.

3. Avoid the mental distractions that cloud my spiritual judgment

…and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. 1 Peter 1:13 (ESV)

Sober-minded literally means don’t get drunk. It means more than just avoiding the bottle. Just as alcohol clouds our judgment so we make stupid decisions and just live for the moment, we are to avoid anything that clouds our spiritual judgment and causes us to make stupid spiritual decisions.

What clouds your spiritual judgment and causes you to live just for the moment? Some people are intoxicated by power. They are living for Christ but if they have an opportunity for a promotion, they throw their spiritual senses to the wind. No need to pray over the opportunity, they just jump at the promotion because they will do anything and hurt anyone, including their families, so they can have higher positions in the company. For others, they get drunk on relationships. Some girls are this way. They are living for Christ and things are fine until they meet guys. All of a sudden they don’t want to read their Bible. They can’t make time for their friends. All they can think about, text about and tweet about are the new guys in their lives. The guys make them completely lose control. Everything they promised themselves in the way of relational barriers and safeguards goes out the window because they are intoxicated on men. Some people get intoxicated on sports. They are singing “Holy, Holy, Holy” on Sunday morning but rip on the ref with a different four letter word from the stands on Monday night. They are not sober-minded. Sports cloud their minds so they don’t use spiritual judgment.

For some of us it is is late night television or the Internet that clouds our better spiritual judgment and leads us to live for the moment. When we are tired and lonely we find ourselves tempted to look at things we know are unhealthy. We start living for the pleasure of this world and not to please Jesus. Peter said, “Stay sober-minded.” Avoid the things that cloud your spiritual judgment and distract you from living for the future. Get off the Internet at night. Don’t turn the television on after 9 p.m. or save yourself a ton of money and get rid of cable altogether.

This week, ask yourself what clouds your spiritual judgment and takes your eyes off living for the amazing grace that will be ours the day we see Jesus?

Peter told us that if we plan to live God-honoring lives in an ungodly world, we need to be careful about the things in this world that captivate us and cause us to take our eyes of Jesus and cut those out of your life.
4. Don’t get squeezed into the passions of this world.
As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance... 1 Peter 1:14 (ESV)

When Peter talked about passions, he was talking about lusts. Those are the things we think we must have to be happy. For you, it may be designer jeans. You must have them to be happy. For others, it is a premium automobile. You must have it to be happy. You wouldn’t be caught dead in a Ford or Chevrolet. For many Americans it is a bigger house and toys to keep up with their neighbors. To get there, you go into debt. There is incredible pressure to live for the passions of this world, toeep up with others our age. For others, it is an expensive trip or vacation. Everybody else goes on expensive trips, we need to go on expensive trips.

I am not saying cars, houses, boats and vacations are wrong. What is wrong is telling ourselves we need them to be happy because other people have them. Other people need boats, cars, houses and vacations to be happy because that is all they have to look forward to! All of those things are nothing when compared to what God will shower on us when we see Jesus. Those were the things you lived for when you were ignorant. Now we know better. Live for the future.

I ask you, what is it that you just must have to be happy? Is it the new iPhone 6 or the iWatch? Be careful you aren’t getting tricked into taking your eyes off of being with Jesus. Being with Jesus is more than enough. Everything else this world has to offer is peanuts by comparison.

5. Make holy living the passion of my living.
…but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.” 1 Peter 1:14–16 (ESV)

Some people make healthy living their goal. They eat only natural food. They are health store nuts who eat no preservatives, all organic, no sugar, high protein foods. You know them because their conversation always drifts to the latest salads and soybeans. Some people have fitness as their life passion. Their conversation always drifts to the latest CrossFit routine at the YMCA. They have weights in their basements and Fit-Bits on their wrists. Other people are sports nuts. Five minutes into any conversation they are talking about the stats on their favorite sports team. They have the logo of the Hawkeyes on their blankets, their cups, their plates, it is mowed into their backyards and the logo of their favorite sports teams fly on flags in their front yards. Because they are fans, everything in their lives drifts to their favorite sports team.

There is nothing wrong with eating right, working out or enjoying sports but those are all life goals that will die. If we are a fan of Jesus, the way we root for him is not through wearing Christian T-shirts. The way we show our team colors is through holiness. We let holiness become the passion of our lives. Our conversations don’t just drift to diet and exercise, they drift to purity and what it
means to follow Christ in this world. Our conversations focus on being with Christ in the future and the incredible reward that will be ours when we see him.

Sexually we are set apart and pure because that is who we are and who we were created to be. We have holiness in our speech. It is without swearing. It doesn’t tear people down but builds them up. Our speech is holy because it is filled with gentleness, not abrasiveness toward others. There is holiness in my finances because my money is not just for me, it is a tool given to me for blessing others and doing spiritual good. My business dealings are not primarily about profit but they are first and foremost about integrity and keeping promises before God. We are committed to honesty and integrity to live a holy life and represent Christ in the world. Our school lives are about holiness. When others cheat and carry in crib notes to the test, we don’t cheat and we take the lower grade because our goal is not acing a test but living a holy life. Holiness of mind, thoughts, attitudes and actions is our goal and our passion. When holiness is our hobby and our team, we avoid sin in this life as we focus on the future.

6. Remember the future judgment.

And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one’s deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile… 1 Peter 1:17 (ESV)

The Bible reminds us that as Christians, even though we are completely forgiven by Christ, we will still be judged by Christ for how we lived. God’s judgment is perfect. He knows about our attitudes, our motives and everything there is to know about us. There is no way we can pull the wool over the eyes of God. When we are taken advantage of and cheated in this world, God will make it right someday when we stand before him.

This is a great motivation to live holy lives now. I sometimes hear people rationalize, “Why not sin? It feels good. God will forgive me for it.” or “I know premarital sex is wrong but God will forgive me for it.” There is truth and lie in that statement. Does God forgive us completely for our sin through Jesus? Yes! The problem is we will still be judged by Jesus for our sins. God is a rewarding God. He doesn’t just delight to forgive us of our sins through Jesus but he promises to reward us in eternity for how we avoided sin in this world and lived for Christ. Look what we can learn from Moses.

He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward. Hebrews 11:26 (ESV)

Moses was willing to identify with his people, the Israelites, rather than the identity of the son of Egypt’s pharaoh because Moses was looking for the future reward he would receive based on how he lived then.

So then each of us will give an account of himself to God. Romans 14:12 (ESV)

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil. 2 Corinthians 5:10 (ESV)
...knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free. Ephesians 6:8 (ESV)

When we suffer now, know God will reward us in eternity for trusting him and obeying him as we suffer. The reward we receive in eternity will be greater than any earthly suffering we endure, or it wouldn’t be called a reward. It would be called a white elephant gift.

When you are tempted on the Internet or tempted with your girlfriend or tempted to say something nasty to get even, know that when we choose sin, we will be forgiven of our sins but we will also forfeit part of our eternal reward from Christ. What we forfeit is always a reward that outweighs and outlasts any pleasure sin can offer. When we say, “No” to sin, we are saying “Yes” to greater pleasure — our rewards from Christ. The greater the temptation to sin, the greater the reward in eternity from Christ for avoiding it.

7. Remember the cost of my freedom and future.

...knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. 1 Peter 1:18–19 (ESV)

Peter told us we get strength to turn away from sin by remembering what God paid to redeem us from sin and our sinful ways.

In the ancient world, when slaves were bought out of slavery, the payment for their emancipation was usually not paid directly to the slave owner. Their payment was usually made through a local temple, and the temple had a nice transaction fee for processing the payment. When the slave paid for his or her freedom through the temple, that slave was considered liberated to serve the God of that temple.

Peter picked up this cultural practice and tied it into the Christian life. He said you were in slavery to sin. You were in slavery to living for the passions of this world because that is all you had to look forward to. That is all you were capable of living for. God, out of his great love for us through Jesus, bought us out of slavery. He didn’t do it with a few pieces of gold or silver but he did it with the very precious blood of his own son, Jesus Christ. There is no more precious blood in all the universe than Jesus’.

He freed us by his precious blood so that we would live for the God who freed us. He freed us to live for the future that will be ours and the mind-blowing
amounts of grace and kindness and exaltation that will be ours when we see him face to face.

Conclusion

Today we live in a society that wants to press us into its mold. We are told to live for bigger houses, better cars and fancy vacations. We are told to live for our sexuality, materialism and pride.

Peter gave us a different picture. The way we find the ability to focus on a sin-free life in a sin-filled world is we set our thoughts on the day we will see Jesus and the incredible blessing and honor that will be ours in that moment. It is all beyond our wildest dreams and is given to us by Jesus. We need to study God’s Word so we know about this future or we will never live for it. We need to avoid the distractions in life that take our eyes off of our future. We need to be conscious about not letting the world, the television, our friends and society squeeze us into their molds by telling us to live for things that aren’t of ultimate importance. We need to make holy living the passion of our lives over health, fitness, cars and hobbies. We need to remember the future judgment and the rewards that can be won or lost based on how we live our Christian lives. We need to remember the incredible price paid for our freedom with Jesus’ own blood. It all shows us God loves us much more than we can ever comprehend.

My friends…, for sin-free living, fix your eyes on the day we will see Jesus. It is the only way to survive in this sin-filled world.
Life Group Work Sheet
1 Peter 1:13-21

September 14, 2014

Getting to Know Each Other

1. For those who have planned or taken part in a wedding, how much preparation was involved? What was the most frustrating part? The most rewarding part?

2. Other than a wedding what is something you are intentional about preparing for? How does your preparation impact your excitement about that thing?

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

3. What is the “day of the LORD”? What does this day represent for believers (4:13-18; 5:10)? What does this day represent for nonbelievers (v. 3)?

4. Why is it important to remember that the day of the Lord will come “like a thief in the night”? Why shouldn’t believers be surprised by this day?

5. How might being mindful of this day help us to passionately pursue holy living? What are some practical ways we pursue holiness in preparation for Christ’s return?

6. Paul says believers are “children of light.” How might seeing yourself as a child of light change your perspective on your day-to-day life?

7. What does sleep represent? What can we do to ensure that we are “awake”?

8. On Sunday, we were challenged to avoid the mental distractions that cloud our spiritual judgement. What most commonly distracts you from holy living? What helps you regain your focus on Christ?

9. What is the relationship between armor (such as a breastplate and helmet) and faith, hope, and love? Why do you think Paul included these three ideas here?

10. A Roman soldier was instantly recognized by his breastplate and helmet. How can Jesus’ followers be instantly recognizable?

11. Why did Jesus die for us (v. 10)? How does this understanding impact our pursuit of holiness?

Application Questions

12. How does a sense of urgency for Jesus’ return affect the way I live day to day? The way I relate to other people?
13. What would change in my daily life if I lived every day as if Jesus was coming back?

14. Accountability is one way that Christians “keep awake” and pursue holiness. Have I considered seeking accountability with other believers? What might this look like in my life?
Life is lonely. Studies say we are the most connected generation ever to walk the planet with our cell phones, the Internet, Facebook and Instagram. We are also known as one of the most disconnected generations. We are so busy with life that we barely have time for friendships. We don’t have time for a cup of coffee or to sit on the porch with our neighbors just to talk about life.

This world can be a lonely place. What makes this world even lonelier is what we talked about last week. As Christians, we live in a sin-filled world that presses sinful values and practices into our lives through movies, magazines, books and business. As Christians, we find we don’t fit. As Peter said in the opening of this letter, we feel like exiles living in a foreign land.

What are we supposed to do when we are lonely in this world? What are we do to when we are not sure we belong? This morning we will find the answer.

If you are new, my name is Kurt. I am one of the pastors at CrossWinds. We are a multi-campus church with a campuses in Spirit Lake and Spencer. Across both campuses we are studying the book of 1 Peter. The title of our series in 1 Peter is “Hope in Hard Times”. The book of 1 Peter has a lot to say about how God carries us through the rough patches in life. Last week we looked at the trial of living in a sinful society. How do we strive for sin-free living in a sin-filled world? This week, we look at the antidote to the loneliness we feel when we discover this world isn’t the place we belong. Our text is 1 Peter 1:22–2:3. We will read it together.

Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart. For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. For, “All people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord endures forever.” And this is the word that was preached to you. Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good. 1 Peter 1:22–2:3 (NIV)

In these verses Peter began his discussion about the antidote to loneliness by talking about the Word of God. After he set the Word of God as our foundation, he showed us how the antidote to loneliness connects to it. We will build our study under those headings.
What is the Word of God?

...since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God... 1 Peter 1:23 (ESV)

The Word of God is living.

I know this sounds strange but your Bible is alive. Some of you will want to put your head to the cover to see if you hear a pulse. You won’t find one. Others will check for breathing. You won’t find it. In one sense the Bible is just a book so it can be published on paper, the Internet or via carried electrons on our phones. In another sense, this book has more life than a junior high boy. The Bible is simply words but it is God’s words. Unlike our words, God’s Word contains authority and power our words do not possess. I ask my children to pick up their rooms. How much authority and power do my words possess? In Genesis God said, “Let there be light.” God spoke and light was created out of nothing. That is power. That is authority. The Gospel of John tells us the greatest expression of God’s Word to us is Jesus. Jesus’ words carry the authority and power of his father because Jesus is one with his father. This is why in John 11:43 all Jesus needed to raise Lazarus from the dead was to speak the words, “Lazarus, come forth.” If he hadn’t qualified it with Lazarus, all the other graves would have opened. God’s Words are different from ours. They are alive. They contain authority and power. God’s Word creates life.

In the same way, in the book of Revelation, when Jesus goes into battle against the Satan and all the forces that oppose him, he does battle with the sword that comes from his mouth. It sounds like Jesus is some kind of mutant with a long tongue. In apocalyptic literature, like the book of Revelation, the sword in Jesus’ mouth is simply another way of focusing on the power of Jesus’ words. Just as the Word of God is so powerful and authoritative that it created the universe out of nothing, the words of Jesus have the authority to destroy Satan and the vast army that is opposed to Jesus when Jesus simply speaks the word. The armies of heaven don’t break a sweat. Nobody even tears a nail. Into the Lake of Fire will go the devil, the false prophet and everyone else lined up with him when Jesus simply speaks the word.

Peters’ point was that just as God created the universe with his word, he creates spiritual life within us by his Word. The words of the Bible are the way God creates spiritual life within us.

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. Hebrews 4:12 (ESV)

When we read the Word of God, God uses it to convict us. He uses it to show us our sin. He uses it to call us to repentance. God’s Word cuts into our hearts. We suddenly realize God knows all about our lives and we are led to repentance. This cutting, conviction and repentance doesn’t happen with any of our words because our words are just words. They don’t have authority behind them like God’s words carry.
Try this with Newsweek, Time magazine, Fox News or MSNBC. You don’t find yourself convicted of your sin through those words. You don’t find yourself repenting of your selfishness, arrogance and pride through those words. It is only through the life-giving, convicting power of God’s Word in the Bible that this happens. I tell you, this book is alive.

If you are waning in spiritual enthusiasm. If you are declining in spiritual motivation. The answer is not a hot shower. The answer is not another cup of coffee. The answer is more time in the living Word where you meet the living God, and God will use it to make your spirit alive. Why do we spend time in the Bible? It is not because we have to but because we want to. We do it out of joy. We love to let God’s words breath spiritual life into us.

The Word of God is alive. It is the only book that has the power to convict us. It has power not because it is words on a page but because God is the one who spoke the words.

**The Word of God is abiding.**

Abide means persevere. The Bible has persevered throughout the course of history. The only way we can persevere through the course of our history is by being in the persevering Word of God.

Peter made his point by quoting from Isaiah 40.

…for “All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains forever.” And this word is the good news that was preached to you. 1 Peter 1:24–25 (ESV)

All people, cultures and nations are simply like grass waiting to be mowed. They are here today and gone tomorrow. All nations and peoples will go away, but the Word of God will stand forever. When Peter wrote to the churches in Asia, some of them were under threat of persecution from the Roman Empire. That was the most powerful empire in the world. It was all run by Caesar, the most powerful man on the planet. Guess what. Rome is gone. Caesar is dead, but the Word of God continues on. There will be a day when the USA is gone, when our president’s name is a distant memory, but this book will carry on. People will still study it.

The only way to be spiritually alive is to come to the living Word. The only way to persevere spiritually is to stay in the persevering Word. All nations and people will come and go but this book will remain forever.

The Bible is translated into more than 3,000 languages. It is read by more people on the planet than any other book in the history of the world. Many times men tried to wipe it from the face of the planet. Everyone failed.

In the Roman Empire, shortly after the time of Peter, they began persecuting Christians, telling them not to read their Bibles. They stretched them out on racks and used tongue pinchers, thumb screws and whipping trees to get Christians to put down their Bibles. Some Christians were burned, others were
boiled and still others beheaded. Others were drawn and quartered by horses all because they refused to put down this book.

In 300 A.D. decrees were sent out by the Roman government. Diocletian, the ruler of Rome, said the Bible was outlawed and every copy was to be burned and destroyed. Christians were to be executed. Today Diocletian is gone. The Roman Empire is a vague memory. The Word of God marches on. Even though Diocletian and others tried to exterminate the book, we still have hundreds more copies of the Bible than any other book from the ancient world, even though they tried to outlaw the Bible, ban it and burn it out of existence. All flesh is like grass but the Word of God remains forever.

John Wycliff was roasted alive like a hog over a fire because he translated this book so people could read it. Ulrich Zwingli was cut in five pieces then burned alive because he translated this book so people could hold it in their hands. William Tyndale was burned alive and strangled at the same time because he tried to get more copies of the Bible into people’s hands. Why did these men endure such hideous deaths to translate and print this book? They knew the Bible isn’t just a book. It is God’s book with God’s words. God’s words have the power to raise the dead both literally and spiritually. Getting this book into people’s hands is something worth dying for. Charles Spurgeon was once asked to defend why he taught from the Bible. He said, “You don’t defend a lion. A lion can defend itself. All you need to do is let it out of its cage.” The Bible is alive. Powerful people and nations will come and go but this book will remain. You can’t kill it.

My favorite example of this is the French philosopher Voltaire who in 1728 said that within 100 years the Bible would cease to be read and it would pass out of existence. Fifty years after his death the Geneva Bible Society bought his house to use his printing presses because the society couldn’t keep up with the demand for this book.

Bible critics will come and go. They will mock the book. They will try to destroy the Bible but in the end all their efforts are like fists pounding into a steel anvil. You can strike it as hard as you want but you will lose every time. This book isn’t going anywhere.

The Word of God is pure spiritual food.

Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation. — 1 Peter 2:2 (ESV)

The Word of God is spiritual food. It is essential for life with God. We may trust in Christ but apart from filling our lives with the word of Christ we will be weak. We will get distracted from the truth. We will spiritually drift. God’s Word is the nourishment we need to sustain our spiritual lives. This is why we try to read it every day. Try skipping a meal and tell me how healthy you feel. This is why we memorize God’s Word. We can recall God’s Word to give us needed spiritual nutrition on the road like a granola bar in your backpack. This is why we
preach the Word of God. There is nothing better to feed the hearts of God’s people than the Word of God.

The Word of God is called pure spiritual milk. In the ancient world they diluted wine to make it go farther. Sometimes they diluted milk. The problem is giving children diluted milk filled their stomachs but it didn’t give them the nutrients they needed to grow their body. They would be weak and emaciated children even though their stomachs were full. The Word of God is like pure spiritual milk. It is pure spiritual nutrition. I challenge you to get the good stuff. Get undiluted milk. Go straight to the Word.

One area we can apply this is with our devotional readings. There are many devotionals on the store shelves. Some of them are very good. Many of them are entertaining. They have nifty covers and good stories. A number of them have a fragment of a verse on the top of the page then three or four paragraphs on a story and brief thoughts about the verse for the rest of the page. These are not all bad. There is some spiritual nutrition in them. I submit to you that having just four to six words of a verse as all of your time in God’s Word will leave you surviving on diluted milk. There was so little of God’s Word on that page and so much of man’s words that you may be running short on spiritual nutrition. There is too much filler.

It is like trying to survive on cheese puffs, hot dogs and white bread. It may taste good but it is all filler. There is no nutrition. We need to eat our spiritual veggies to grow healthy and strong.

But he answered, “It is written, “‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’” Matthew 4:4 (ESV)

The Word of God needs to be preached.

“And this word is the good news that was preached to you. 1 Peter 1:25 (ESV)

We need preaching. Preaching is not culturally acceptable. Many churches hold a low view of preaching. When you hold a low view of preaching, you inevitably find a low view of the Bible that goes with it. The lower the view of the Bible, the more unconvincing and unconvicting the sermon in the church. We hold a high view of the Bible and a high view of preaching. That isn’t a high view of the preacher but a high view of hearing from this book.

The book of Acts chronicles the growth of the church in the ancient world. Every time the church grew it was described as the spread of the Word of God. The spread of the Word of God was through preaching the Word of God. Preaching the Word of God is what grew the church. Nothing has changed. This is why we value Bible preaching. God’s Word are powerful and authoritative. They create spiritual life.

So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith. Acts 6:7 (NIV)
But the word of God increased and multiplied. Acts 12:24 (ESV)
When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. And they had John to assist them. Acts 13:5 (ESV)

What does the Word of God do in the people of God?

The Word of God creates and grows spiritual life.

...since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God... 1 Peter 1:23 (ESV)

Let me explain how the Word of God creates spiritual life. The Bible says we are born sinful. We are not a blank slate. We begin our life evil from the moment we are conceived. We are not connected to God.

Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me. Psalm 51:5 (ESV)

...among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. Ephesians 2:3 (ESV)

I realize some of you don’t like this. You fight this. You think you are a good person and a kind person. Belief in your goodness vaporizes once you hit your finger with a hammer when pounding a nail. Our sin nature floats to the surface very clearly in those situations. You can fight this but you won’t win. It is like gravity. Even if everyone on the planet voted to outlaw it, nothing would change. Everyone is sinful at the core.

Some of you were born into a Christian home, that doesn’t mean a thing. Some of you were baptized as a baby. I am thankful you got wet. The Bible says those who were born physically must be born spiritually. Religion is about me trying harder, doing better, trying to alter my conduct and transform my own heart. It never works.

Being born again by the Word of God is when God gives me a new heart, new desires, a new identity, new community and a new eternity. It is all as a gift. We have just as much participation in our spiritual births as we do in our physical births. We didn’t birth ourself. If there is any discussion on this point, ask your mother. She did all the pushing and all the screaming. Trust me on this one. You were just along for the ride. In the same way, we didn’t choose God. He chose us. We were spiritually dead before God made us alive.

Just as the first inclination of a child that is born physically is to breath and cry, the first inclination of spiritual birth is to repent of our sin and call out to Jesus for grace and forgiveness. Just as crying out physically is the sign that a baby is physically alive, crying out to God spiritually for forgiveness of our sins through Jesus is the sign that someone is spiritually alive. It all happens through the Word of God.

We have nothing to brag about when it comes to knowing God. God doesn’t call us to himself because we are smarter than others or better than
others. It is all a gift that God caused us to be born again so we call out to him for grace and mercy.

Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation— if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good. 1 Peter 2:2–3 (ESV)

In the same way that God’s Word creates spiritual life, it sustains spiritual life. It is what we need every day. Peter said that if you have been born by God, one of the signs of spiritual life is a craving for the Word of God so you can grow up in Jesus.

The Word of God creates love between the people of God.

Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God… 1 Peter 1:22–23 (ESV)

This brings us full circle to where we started. As Christians, we are lonely and disconnected from others in this world because we have a heart that desires holiness. Peter said, “Now that you have purified your souls by obeying the truth of the Word of God so you have a sincerely brotherly love for one another…” As Christians obey the Word of God and live holy lives they will find brotherly love among them. Church will feel like family. Sunday will feel like a reunion. Some of your best friends will become your church friends. Then Peter challenged us to “Love one another earnestly from a pure heart.”

The word for love here is a different word than brotherly love. You were loving each other like brothers, like friends. Peter took that up a notch and used the word agape for love. That is the kind of passionate and committed love God has for us. God chose to love us. We are to love others in the church like God loves us. How are we to love others? He said we are to love earnestly. Earnestly means intensely.

While the world is a lonely place for Christians, the church is to be the place where we love one another intensely and purely and passionately like God loves us. While we don’t have a sense of belonging in the world around us, in the church we are to love each so passionately, intensely and honestly that we feel even closer than family in the church.

Where does this kind of love we are to have for one another come from? You guessed it. The Word of God. You were not born of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding Word of God. Just as the quality of God’s Word is imperishable and indestructible and perfect and pure and it lasts forever; the qualities of the Word of God are the qualities of the love amongst us.

This means at church we don’t show up late and leave early because we are trying to get the church box checked off. We show up early and stay late...
because loving the church family is very important to us. The Word of God creates love between the people of God.

Folks, we need each other because we don't fit in the world. The apostle John spoke about the same thing. The Apostle John saw intense love between Christians as one of the signs we are born again.

*We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death.* 1 John 3:14 (ESV)

The Christian life is never one of isolation. It is always one of loving community where we show deep love to one another. This is why Peter challenged us to put away from our lives the qualities that were part of our past that destroyed community.

*So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander.* 1 Peter 2:1 (ESV)

**Malice** — Malice is general unkindness or meanness toward people. It is not just the actions we take on the outside but it particularly refers to the things we think on the inside. It is what we say under our breath when nobody is looking. It is when we say to ourselves, “They are jerks.” It is saying things in private about people you would never say in public. That is malice. When you role play in your mind how you will get even; that is malice. Put that all away. That is who we were. The Word of God re-created us to love each other intensely and deeply.

**Deceit** — This means manipulating people to meet my needs. It is bait and switch. It is saying one thing and doing another. It is promising something but not keeping your word. That is who we were, not who we are. We are to love one another intensely and purely with the same kind of love God has for us.

**Hypocrisy** — This literally means acting two-faced. It is having a public life that is different from your private life. It is watching an R-rated movie on Saturday night while singing praises to God on a Sunday morning and thinking about the scenes from the movie while the preacher is talking about God’s Word. Jesus reserved some of his most stinging criticism for the religious leaders of his day who were hypocrites. They wore long robes and made big public prayers when in reality they didn’t love God. They just loved the public praise of their position.

**Envy** — This is the inability to rejoice with those who rejoice. Rather than being happy for people, you covet what they have or the experiences they enjoy. We covet their spouses, their money, their homes, their beauty, their intellect or their accomplishments. Don’t rejoice with people and join with them in giving thanks to God for his good gifts.

**Slander** — Slander is trying to make ourselves look good by trying to make others look bad. We always look for points of criticism or attack. We look for ways to fault others. Rather than praying for people, we speak evil of people.

These are all ways of our old lives that are no longer who we are. They are not who we were re-created to be. Just as the Word of God is living, pure
and permanent, God’s Word creates between us a love that is living, pure, intense and permanent.

One of the best ways I recently watched this being lived out is with my mother. As many of you know, my mother is dying of cancer. She is in a nursing care facility in Pennsylvania. Cindy and I are taking turns living in Pennsylvania to help care for her. It is impossible for one of us to be there all the time. Where would she be without her church family? While this doesn’t happen every day, some days she has as many as nine visitors. They sit with her. They come in to feed her. They talk with her because I am an only child that lives in Iowa. At the beginning of the summer when our family drove to Pennsylvania to be with her when she was first diagnosed, her church pulled together to give us a house to stay in for free. The ladies of the church stocked the house with food. When we arrived, the refrigerator was full. When Cindy stayed for the summer people in the church gave her a car to drive for free for almost the entire summer. This past week some ladies from the church wanted Mom to have something more comfortable than her wheelchair and bed so they took up and offering and bought her a La-Z-Boy-type chair and brought it to the nursing facility. They accompany my father to doctor’s appointments. They help Mom in and out of the car. They check on my father during the day. When my mom had a panic attack this week she called Christians and neighbors. These ladies dropped what they were doing with their family and came to be her side.

You don’t find that kind of love in the world. You only find this kind of pure, intense love in the church among God’s people because the Word of God creates it among us.

I also want to brag on CrossWinds. We are so thankful for the love we have in our church family. When the ladies of the church learned Cindy was gone for the summer and I am a terrible cook, they began bringing over meals. My children were thrilled and they learned in a new way the importance of a church family. Daniel grew like a weed over the summer. It wasn’t because of my cooking. It was only because the ladies of the church fed him so well. I can’t thank you enough for the cards, the continual concern of so many of you. Somebody even anonymously gave us some money to help offset the costs of the airline tickets. Where do you find that kind of love? It isn’t in the world. It is only in the church. The Word of God creates love between the people of God. The church is the cure to the loneliness so many of us feel.

Conclusion

As we go, I want to challenge us to put away all the junk of our old lifestyle and love each other intensely. That may be serving as an usher or a greeter or at the coffee bar. I know it is inconvenient to arrive a little early but it is a baby step toward loving people like God loves us. I want to challenge you to get involved helping with AWANA or youth groups. Yes, it is hard to love kids but the kids need us loving them like Jesus. Don’t just meet people in the foyer and forget about them until next week. Build relationships. Care about people. Ask them out to breakfast. Ask them to come over sometime for lunch or dinner just
to be friendly. No hidden agenda other than to love on them like Jesus loves us. That is who we are, the people of God. The church is kind of a big deal.
Life Group Work Sheet  
1 Peter 1:22-2:3  
September 21, 2014

Getting to Know Each

1. On Sunday, we learned that our generation is the most connected generation, and yet it is also the loneliest. Why do you think that is? Why hasn’t social media produced deeper relationships?

2. What does the Bible say about how we can cultivate meaningful relationships with others? How have you experienced this?

Read Psalm 19

3. What do the heavens say about God (vv. 1-2)? Who has God revealed Himself to through nature (vv. 4-6)?

4. Why do you think David transitioned from praising God for revealing Himself in nature (vv. 1-6) to praising God for revealing Himself in His Word (vv. 7-14)? Which of these two sources is more reliable in terms of learning who God is?

5. Make a short list of how David described the Word of God and the benefits we receive from it (vv. 7-10). Which of these is most meaningful to you? Why?

6. How can God’s instructions “make the heart glad?” How might God’s commandments give us “insight for life” (v. 8)?

Read 2 Timothy 3:14-17

7. Verse 16 teaches us that all Scripture is God-breathed. Why is the divine inspiration of Scripture important?

8. Read verses 14-17 and highlight each area of the Bible’s usefulness. Many of the uses Paul mentions imply Christians are living in community. Why is studying the Bible essential to developing meaningful relationships in the church?

9. Why is it essential that we study the Bible if we hope to grow in our love for one another at CrossWinds? How have you seen the Bible impact your relationships?

10. Read Hebrews 4:12. What does God’s Word have the power to do in our lives, according to this passage?
Application Questions

11. What is one thing that distracts me from daily studying the Word of God? What habit or routine needs to change in order for me to prioritize the personal study of the Word?

12. What step can I take this week to prioritize studying the Bible with my family? Friends? Church members?

13. In what areas of my life has Scripture proven profitable? How? Is there a specific area in which I need direction right now? How can my Life Group pray for me?
1 Peter 2:4-10 — Why I Want To Be Part Of The Suffering Church

September 28, 2014

Statistics tell us that more than one in 10 suffer from depression. Life is hard. Life can be particularly hard for Christians. Last week we learned why Christians can feel incredibly lonely in this world. We don’t fit into this culture. A desire to live a holy life doesn’t mesh with modern society. Last week we also learned the great antidote to a Christian’s loneliness in the world. It is the church. The church is a place where the Word of God creates intense love between the people of God. If you want deep community and loving friendships, the place to find them is the church.

This week we move from a loneliness that is cured by the church to suffering because we are part of the church. Paul wrote:

Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted… 2 Timothy 3:12 (ESV)

Why do Christians suffer? Is there any hope in our times of suffering? What good can Jesus possibly bring out of our suffering? These are all questions we will answer this morning.

If you are new, my name is Kurt. I am one of the pastors at CrossWinds Church. We are a multi-campus church with campuses in Spirit Lake and Spencer. We stay in sync across all campuses to do together what we couldn’t do alone. Both of our campuses are in a series of studies in the book of 1 Peter called Hope in Hard Times. In this study we are learning how God carries us through the tough spots of life. This morning we are in 1 Peter 2:4-10. Let’s read this passage.

As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it stands in Scripture: “Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.” So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,” and “A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense.” They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do. But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. 1 Peter 2:4–10 (ESV)

We will study these verses under three headings. They are: Why is Jesus called the cornerstone? Why is suffering part of the church? Why is a suffering church the place I want to be?

**Why is Jesus called the cornerstone?**

As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious... 1 Peter 2:4 (ESV)

You hear them at airports. Beep. Beep. Beep. When you hear that sound you know a motorized cart is behind you. These overgrown golf carts help those with trouble walking make it to their next flights. When I travel I inevitably find one of them heading straight for me. I need to make a choice. Do I jump to the left or the right? The one place I cannot stay is the middle. The drivers of those carts will hit you. Jesus is similar to one of those motorized carts. You have to decide what you believe about him. Do you reject and hate him or embrace and love him? There really is no middle ground. This is what the Bible means when it talks about Jesus as the cornerstone.

**What is a cornerstone?**

For it stands in Scripture: “Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.” 1 Peter 2:6 (ESV)

Peter quoted from Isaiah 28:16 where we learn that God promised to lay a stone in Zion. Zion simply means Jerusalem. Isaiah told us God promised to do something in Jerusalem that was going to be the cornerstone for a new people of God. Whoever believes in him, not an it, because this cornerstone is a person, will never be put to shame.

To understand where Peter was heading with his stone illustration we need to understand the way ancient architects designed buildings. Buildings in the ancient world were typically made of rocks that were individually cut and shaped to create walls and the floors. The architect designed the building so every stone in the building measured off one stone, the cornerstone. The cornerstone determined the rest of the stones. It was the most important stone in the building. It needed to be laid exactly level because the level of the others bricks were determined from it. It had to be in the perfect location. The cornerstone was connected to everything.

What Isaiah and Peter taught is that in Jerusalem God laid a cornerstone to a new building called the church. The cornerstone of the church is Jesus Christ. As members of the church, each of us is a stone in God’s new building, God’s new people. Everyone in the church derives his or her identity in the church from Jesus, just like every stone in a building was connected to the cornerstone.

Isaiah also said whoever believes in this cornerstone, Jesus Christ, will never be put to shame. If Jesus is the cornerstone of your life, you will never be ashamed. That is a promise from God. If Jesus is to be the cornerstone of our
lives, everything in our lives must be measured off him. This means money cannot be the cornerstone that determines our lives or we will fail miserably. Our children cannot be our cornerstones. If you live for your children you will crash and burn. A spouse cannot be a cornerstone. If you live for your spouse, he or she will disappoint you. A job cannot be our cornerstone. If we live for our jobs, we will be fired. Nothing else can hold the weight of being the cornerstone in our lives other than Jesus.

**Those who reject Jesus will stumble over Jesus.**

As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious… 1 Peter 2:4 (ESV)

So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,” and “A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense.” They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do. 1 Peter 2:7–8 (ESV)

Peter quoted from Psalm 118:22 and Isaiah 8:14. The Old Testament doesn’t simply tell us God would send a cornerstone to Jerusalem that everyone should build their lives upon. The Bible also tells us that many people will reject Christ. People will not simply ignore Christ but they will be offended by him. They will hate Christ. They will persecute Christ and ultimately kill Christ.

The picture Peter gave us from Isaiah is somebody walking down the path in their sandals. A rock is sticking up in the path and he strike his toes on the rock, falls on his face and knocks out his front teeth. Blood is running out his nose. He is screaming in pain holding his toes. What would you do to the stone in the path? I would take a sledge hammer to it in my anger. This is the kind of reaction that Jesus produces in some people. He is offensive. He makes them angry. This is the kind of reaction the Jews had to Jesus. They wanted to snuff him out at all costs.

As the people of God, just as the cornerstone was loved by God but rejected by this world, as living stones in God’s house who are all connected to the cornerstone we are also loved by God but rejected by the world. The world will hate us because we are Christians, just like it hated Jesus. There is no middle ground on this. People will either love or hate Jesus. They will either hate or love you because of your connection to Jesus. Jesus is like a motorized cart in the airport. Beep! Beep! Beep! What will you decide?

**Is Jesus your cornerstone or your stumbling stone?**

The Bible doesn’t give us a lot of wiggle room on this one. Is Jesus your stumbling stone so you find him offensive? Do you discount his words? Do you not believe he will answer your prayers? Do you think you can trust him? Are you willing to build your sex life, home life, business life and family life measured off him as the cornerstone of your life? That is the Christian life. If we are part of God’s house, Jesus needs to be the cornerstone of all things.
This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved. Acts 4:11–12 (ESV)

You may not want Jesus as your cornerstone but there really isn’t much discussion on this one. That is the way God chose it to be.

**Why is suffering part of the church?**

...you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. 1 Peter 2:5 (ESV)

In Peter’s language he inferred there is a close parallel in this world between Christ as the living cornerstone and the rest of us who are stones in God’s house, the church. Just as Jesus was precious to God and chosen by him, as living stones in God’s house, we are precious to God and chosen by him. Just as Jesus suffered because people hated and rejected him, as living stones of the house we must expect they also will suffer a portion of what Jesus suffered. Suffering will be part of the Christian life.

**Just as Jesus experienced suffering in this life before receiving glory from the Father, as living stones in his house, we can expect to experience suffering in this life before we receive glory from the Father.**

We must expect the pattern of our lives will follow the pattern of Christ’s life. We will experience earthly suffering before we receive heavenly glory.

Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church... Colossians 1:24 (ESV)

Paul said that Christ’s sufferings were not all of the sufferings that the church, God’s house, would endure. Paul was thankful he was privileged to suffer for Christ and add to what was lacking in the total sufferings of God's people. Clearly Paul expected the church to suffer just because it is the church and connected to Christ.

One of Peter’s consistent themes in 1 Peter is that just as the sufferings of Christ preceded the glories of Christ, as living stones who are part of God’s house connected to the cornerstone we will experience suffering in our lives before God gives us glory. Our lives will follow the same patterns as Jesus’. Let me show you some of the verses in 1 Peter where Peter taught this again and again.

…inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. 1 Peter 1:11 (ESV)

Peter told us the prophets of the Old Testament predicted these two aspects of Christ’s life. Sufferings first, glory second.
But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. 1 Peter 4:13 (ESV)

Peter said we should be thankful for the privilege of suffering for the sake of Christ because it whets our appetites for the day when Christ is revealed. When life is soft and comfortable, we don't look forward to the day when Christ returns. Suffering whets our appetites for Christ's return and his glory is revealed. We are recipients of it.

Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you... knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen. 1 Peter 5:6–11 (ESV)

At the end of his book, Peter acknowledged we will go through times of suffering. He doesn’t say they are all limited to persecution for the sake of Christ but we will have times of anxieties, worries and depression. We will have times where our hearts are broken. As Christians, life will be hard.

When we go through those times he tells us to remember a few things.

1. Remember we are not suffering alone. We have brothers and sisters around the world going through times of anxiety and suffering just like us. Be encouraged. If they can make it by relying on Christ, so can we.

2) Remember hard times do not last forever. All hard times are only for a little while. Even if hard times last for the rest of our earthly lives, in the grand scheme of things from the perspective of eternity, they are just a little while.

3) Remember God promises to restore, strengthen and establish us forever in his eternal glory. When all is said and done, we will be basking in God’s presence for all eternity. We are recipients of the maximum amount of glory and grace that God can display. That makes eternity sound pretty good! The pattern is always earthly suffering followed by heavenly glory. That is something to look forward to.

In my mind, I always ask the question, “Why?” Why does God want his people to go through times of earthly suffering before he gives us heavenly glory? Here are some reasons:

God has a good purpose in hard times.

1. We learn obedience through suffering.

Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. Hebrews 5:8 (ESV)

The sufferings of Christ taught him obedience to his father. When we suffer it teaches us to obey our heavenly father. We learn to seek God more in suffering. God uses suffering in our lives to increase our obedience to him.
Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep your word. Psalm 119:67 (ESV)

If we never suffer, trust me, we would not be very obedient to God and his Word.

2. Suffering puts an end to sin.

Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin... 1 Peter 4:1 (ESV)

We all know what it is like to dabble in sin. We know what it is like to get full of our ourselves, to become proud and egotistical. We know what it is like to rebel against God. When God brings suffering in our lives, it clears our heads. We get humble in a hurry when someone we love is diagnosed with cancer. We get humble when we are sick. We are quick to repent of our hidden sins. We are quick to get on our knees and find time to pray when we were too busy for prayer. God uses suffering in our lives to strip our lustful, sinful desires from us like a vacuum sucking dirt out of a carpet.

3. Suffering helps us to comfort others.

For as we share abundantly in Christ’s sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation... 2 Corinthians 1:5–6 (ESV)

When we suffer, God comforts us in our suffering. One of the reasons God comforts us in our troubles is so we can comfort others in their troubles. If we never suffered, we would be very egotistical people with absolutely no compassion. Once we have suffered, we weep with those who weep. We cry with those who cry. We take time to comfort others with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. Suffering makes us incredibly useful to God when it comes to our ability to help others in their suffering. Suffering teaches us compassion. If you have never suffered you will be an irritable stuck-up snot that does little spiritual or practical good for others with your life.

4. Suffering teaches us to rely on God rather than ourselves.

For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. 2 Corinthians 1:8–9 (ESV)

It is good for us to come to the end of our ropes. When we come to the end of our ropes we discover God is the one holding us, not our ropes. When we have nothing in ourselves left to rely on, we discover that God is the one who gives us our daily bread. I have faced those end-of-the-rope moments. Some of you have faced those moments. In one sense I wouldn’t wish them on anyone because they are hard. In another sense, I wouldn’t trade away those times because it was in those times I learned that God is large and in charge and he
cares about us. He is actually involved in life. He rescues his children because he loves them. It is by passing through those moments that God does his deepest and most significant character changes in our lives.

The pattern of all stones in God’s spiritual house is suffering first with glory to follow. Do not despair. God always has a good purpose in our hard times even when they are not easy.

The reaction at this point for many people is to play it distant from the church. Why would you want to be a living stone in God’s house if that guarantees you will suffer because you are connected to Jesus? Peter told us the glory that comes from being part of the church outweighs the sufferings of the church.

**Why is a suffering church the place I want to be?**

Peter assembled a constellation of texts from the Old Testament that describe the incredible blessings given to ancient Israel in the Old Testament. He told us they all apply to the church.

**The church is a chosen race.**

But you are a chosen race…that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. 1 Peter 2:9 (ESV)

Peter quoted from Isaiah 43:3 where Isaiah told ancient Israel that they were God’s chosen people. In that passage God said through Isaiah that he would rescue his people out of exile in ancient Babylon. He would rescue them from their suffering because God chose them out of all the people of the earth. They didn’t earn it. They don’t deserve it. It was all by God’s amazing love. That is the church. Everyone in the church is chosen by God and loved by God. We don’t deserve it. It is all a gift from God’s love. Isaiah went on to say why God was rescuing them.

…the people whom I formed for myself that they might declare my praise. Isaiah 43:21 (ESV)

The reason God chose to love and rescue ancient Israel was so the Israelites would always speak of the greatness of God. They were to always talk about God’s excellencies and kindness. One of the reasons God lets the church go through times of suffering is because when he rescues us, we will forever talk about his greatness and kindness for rescuing us.

Think of this in regard to ancient Israel’s exile in Egypt. It was the exile, the hardness of Pharaoh’s heart and Pharaoh’s insistence on the genocide of the Hebrew babies that brought ancient Israel to the point of sheer desperation. That was the workbench God needed to fashion a famous rescue that would make his name famous forever. God brought one of the most powerful nations on the planet to its knees through plague after plague. The plague of death of the firstborn and the splitting of the Red Sea so Israel could walk on dry ground followed by the swallowing of Pharaoh’s army was all ultimately done to make God’s name famous forever through the great rescue of the people he loved.
This way God’s people would speak about the greatness of their God forever. One of the reasons God has suffering as part of the life of the church is so we find ourselves at points of desperation so God has something to rescue us from and make his name famous in our lives and through it.

My friends, nothing is different for us today! We will suffer now so in this life, or for sure in the next one, we will forever sing God’s praises for the rescue God gave us when facing hopeless circumstances or a hopeless eternity. That is why you want to be part of a suffering church. He is writing a story of his amazing rescues through our lives.

**The church is a royal priesthood and a holy nation.**

...you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel. Exodus 19:5–6 (ESV)

God’s plan is that the people of his church would be close to him. They would be priests. In most religions you have some people who are closer to God than others. You have levels. God’s plan is that all of us can be intimate with him. We are to be a people where everyone is a priest and can go directly to God. In addition, God’s plan is that all of us would be holy and not dominated by sin in our lives.

It was God’s plan that the ancient Israelites would be close to him and their lives would not be dominated by sin. That didn’t work for ancient Israel. The people rebelled. Peter said that where ancient Israel failed, it is now fulfilled in the church. We are people where everyone is close to God. We are people that are not dominated by the cancerous life-taking affects of sin.

This is why I want to be part of the suffering church. Everyone in the suffering church is close to God and everyone in the suffering church has Christ’s victory over the power of sin in their lives.

**The church is God’s personal possession.**

...a people for his own possession... 1 Peter 2:9 (ESV)

This is great. Peter quoted two Old Testament texts that say ancient Israel was God’s personal possession. Ancient Israel was like God’s wallet. A wallet is very personal. You keep the photos of your loved ones in it. You keep your credit cards in it. You keep your money in it. You never leave the house without it. In the same way, as members of the church and part of God’s household, we are his prized personal possession. We are close to God’s heart. He loves us and will never leave us. We are precious to him.

Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine... Exodus 19:5 (ESV)

the people whom I formed for myself that they might declare my praise. Isaiah 43:21 (ESV)
As the suffering church, we are a chosen race that was chosen by God for rescue so we would forever proclaim his amazing kindness and love. We are priests that can directly talk to God and a holy people that is not dominated by sin. We are loved by God more than anything else in his vast created universe. We are his own personal possession because we are identified with Jesus.

**The church is God’s restored bride.**

It gets even better! In the days of ancient Israel, the heart of God’s people turned away from God. Many times God sought his people but they ran away. God raised up a prophet named Hosea who had an interesting ministry. He was to marry an adulterous woman named Gomer. Even though he loved her, she kept leaving him for other men. I am thankful God didn’t give me that ministry. Hosea’s faithful love for his unfaithful wife was a living picture of God’s faithful love to his unfaithful people.

There were three children born in Hosea and Gomer’s marriage. They were given interesting names by God. The second child was named No Mercy. God was about to be done extending mercy to his adulterous people. The third child was named Not My People because God was done with calling his adulterous people his own. Shortly after Hosea’s ministry the Assyrian’s conquered Northern Israel. Israel was wiped out and annexed into Assyrian territory, just as Hosea predicted. God was done having mercy and he was done with his people.

In the book of Hosea there is an interesting twist. God tells us he will not be done with his people forever. There was coming a day in the future where God was going to show mercy upon his people again and he was going to take his unfaithful people and bring them back to himself and he would passionately love them like a husband loves his wife on her wedding night.

Peter quoted from Hosea and said that day is now.

*Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.* 1 Peter 2:10 (ESV)

Why do we want to be part of the church that suffers? Through Jesus, the cornerstone of God’s new building, God is restoring his people to himself. The time of God withholding his mercy is over. The time of God putting away his unfaithful people is over. Through the cornerstone of Jesus, who paid for our sin, God is creating a new people that he loves with the same kind of passion as a groom on his wedding night. That is how much God loves us. That is you and me. *The suffering church, just like the cornerstone, will go through suffering before glory, but there is no better place to be.*
Getting to Know Each

1. When was the last time you went out of your way to help, support, or encourage someone you love? Has someone done this for you lately?

2. When you are going through a hard time, how do you prefer people treat you? How do you want others to help you?

Read Acts 4:1-12

1. Peter and John landed in jail because of their testimony about Jesus (4:1-7). Why does sharing the gospel of Jesus provoke people to oppose both the message and the messengers?

2. How did those in the temple listening to Peter and John react to their message (vv. 3-4)? What various responses have you seen from people when you’ve shared about your relationship with Jesus?

3. What motivated Peter to again share the gospel with the religious leaders? What is the main point of his testimony in these verses?

4. Peter referred to Jesus as the “cornerstone.” What did Peter mean by that? How do Peter’s words and actions demonstrate that Jesus was the cornerstone of his life?

5. On Sunday, we learned that Jesus must be the cornerstone of our lives. What things, other than Jesus, are you tempted to center your life around? Why is it dangerous to do so?

Read Philippians 1:27-30

1. Paul speaks of suffering in verse 29 as a privilege. Why can suffering be beneficial (see also 2 Corinthians 1:5-6)? How have you experienced this?

2. How might the way you handle adversity encourage believers (see also 2 Corinthians 1:8-9)? How might it impact unbelievers?

Application Questions

1. Peter and John were fishermen, and yet in Acts 4 they boldly proclaim Christ in the face of opposition. How can I proclaim Christ this week? How can I prepare to face opposition?
2. How might suffering provide me opportunities to share Christ? To serve others?

3. What am I willing to risk in order to share the gospel? What is one practical step I could take this week to grow in my love for Christ and my commitment to the church?
The Internet is changing relationships. Statistics tell us half of us know a couple whose relationship started online. One in four know someone whose offline relationship ended because they met someone new online. The Internet is a game-changer when it comes to dating, sex and romance. What makes the Internet so powerful? It is the Internet’s ability to cater to our lusts.

The temptation to lust is everywhere. It is the woman on the billboard when you drive down the road. It is the life-size airbrushed woman holding a diet coke on the poster at Subway staring you down while you eat lunch. The opportunity to lust presents itself at work where people look their absolute best. Sex appeal means better business. An opportunity to lust presents itself at the YMCA. Can anyone say spandex? Of course there is the beach, the boat and bikinis. Seduction is calling out to us in the advertisements on our computer screens. Soft-core lust and hard-core lust, called Internet porn, are only a mouse click away. The temptation to lust is everywhere.

More money is spent in America on Internet porn than what we spend on pro baseball, basketball and football combined. Americans spend more money on Internet porn than the combined revenues of ABC, NBC and CBS. I would say lust is a big problem. This morning we need to talk about it.

Lust is primarily, but not exclusively, a male problem. God wired men to respond visually. That makes life in the modern world especially difficult for men. Lustful images can thrust themselves in front of eyes in a split second from anywhere in the world on our phones, tablets or computers. This morning’s message is geared toward men, but women, listen up. Many of you are also visual and you struggle with lust. If you are a woman who doesn’t struggle with lust, listen close because the man you married or will marry finds lust one of the biggest struggles in his life.

If you are new, my name is Kurt. I am one of the pastors at CrossWinds. We are a multi-campus church with campuses in Spirit Lake and Spencer. On both campuses we are in a series of studies on the book of 1 Peter called Hope in Hard Times. Today we come to 1 Peter 2:11-12. I ask you to take your Bibles, cell phones or tablets and turn to that passage. If you need a pew Bible, these verses are found on page 1,015.

While you are turning, you need to know these verses begin a turning point in the book. In earlier verses we learned how our identity in Christ carries us through trials and suffering. Last week we ended by learning that our identity as Christians is to literally inherit all the Old Testament promises to ancient Israel.

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7 [http://mashable.com/2013/02/14/love-lust-digital-age/](http://mashable.com/2013/02/14/love-lust-digital-age/)

8 [http://www.solomononsex.com](http://www.solomononsex.com)
God’s plan is to make us the most blessed beings in the entire universe through Jesus.

This morning we begin a new section of this book where we learn ways that who we are because of Jesus changes the way we live for Jesus. In the weeks that follow we will talk about the ways our faith in Christ changes how we relate to the government, how it changes our marriages and how it changes the way we work. Today we begin this exciting and intensely practical portion of 1 Peter by learning how Jesus changes the way we live in a sexually saturated society. Let’s read this morning’s passage before we begin.

Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation. 1 Peter 2:11–12 (ESV)

Our verses divide into two pieces. The first part tells us we are to avoid the passions of the flesh. The second part tells us what we should be doing with our lives instead of occupying ourselves with the passions of our flesh.

Avoid the passions of the flesh.

...abstain from the passions of the flesh... 1 Peter 2:11 (ESV)

What are the passions of the flesh?

Lust and its unbridled expression known as pornography are considered by some men to be a sign of manliness, a right of passage to manhood. I want to propose the exact opposite. Men who give themselves to lust are not displaying masculinity, rather they are showing their lack of masculinity.

Puritan writer John Milton wrote the book *Paradise Lost*. In this fictional work, the biblical Adam was shown the great mass of men that would be seduced in the future by women. In classic Adam fashion, Adam instantly blamed Eve for the problem. It was Eve’s fault for having such beautiful posterity. In the book, the angel showing Adam this vision disagreed with him. The angel explained to Adam that the men’s seduction by women was their own faults. The angel said they were seduced because of their *effiminate slackness*. A man who is seduced to lust after a woman is displaying femininity and weakness — *effeminate slackness*.

The heart of masculinity is self-sacrifice, headship and leadership. A man possesses authority to lead himself and discipline his body. His leadership should rise to the point where he is not just capable of leading himself but he is also capable of sacrificing himself to lead and care for a wife and provide for his children. Men are designed by God for self-discipline and sacrifice so they can lead and protect those entrusted into their care, a wife and children.

The word seduction comes from the Latin word *seduco* which means, *I lead*. When a man allows himself to lust after a woman, either an actual woman in front of him or a virtual woman in a magazine or computer screen, he is abdicating his manliness. He is letting a woman lead him away from his wife and
family rather than disciplining himself to exclusively love his wife and family. He is not displaying the self-discipline and leadership of a true man.

If a man is not married and he lusts after a woman this doesn’t get him off the hook. By lusting after women he is not practicing the discipline necessary to be a married man. He is sowing seeds of lust that dishonor his manliness, dishonor his future wife and can lead to the destruction of his future marriage. When a man lusts after a woman, he is failing in his masculinity as he allows another woman to lead him into sin. If you struggle with lust, it doesn’t come from too much testosterone, it is comes from your effeminate slackness, your unwillingness to be a true man.

Do not give your strength to women, your ways to those who destroy kings. Proverbs 31:3 (ESV)

In this passage, King Lemuel’s mother warned her son that even though he was a king and could have countless women in his life, giving himself in lust and love to many women would not build his manliness. It would destroy it. He would find his kingly leadership and masculinity destroyed by a mind saturated with lustful images of different women. Ancient kings that had their masculinity destroyed by polygamy are the ancient equivalent of modern men who have their masculinity destroyed by pornography. Lust always leads to a man’s ruin.

In marriage, sexual expression by a husband to his wife is the opposite. It enhances a man’s masculinity as he learns to love, sacrifice and lead his wife. Lusting after other women besides a wife destroys your masculinity, making your sexuality primarily about self-gratification. In marriage sex is about self-sacrifice and blessing your spouse.

The phrase Peter uses, passions of the flesh, has a long and rich history that stretches all the way back to Plato. In those days philosophers began writing about the destructive power of men given over to lust. Peter picked up this phrase as he wrote to the Christians in Asia about the trial of living in a sexually-saturated society similar to our own and he said, “We agree! Lust destroys!”

Let me give you a little sense of sexuality in the ancient world. Almost all Roman emperors were bisexual. Nero was known as every man’s woman and every woman’s man. If you wanted to advance your political career, you adopted the sexual practices of the emperor. The Spartan army even had an elite legion called “The Lovers,” where the men join in pairs, homosexual pairs. The theatre of the day was similar to our movies but you were actually watching people in bed. It was a sexually-saturated world.

Peter gave us two reasons to steer clear of lust. Since this is such an important topic, I will give us additional reasons to help us understand the grave danger of lust with crystal clarity.
How can I avoid the passions of the flesh?

Remember the passions of my flesh wage war against my soul.

...abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. 1 Peter 2:11 (ESV)

He doesn’t say the passions of our flesh, our lusts, wage war against our bodies and the danger to avoid is a venereal disease. The real danger is our souls. The literal picture is our passions are soldiers attacking the city of our souls, seeking to destroy us from the inside out. Every time we take a second look, every time we use our imaginations to fantasize about someone of the opposite sex, every time we think we are enjoying ourselves in the safe confines of our minds, the truth is we are destroying ourselves from the inside out.

In Proverbs 5, a father is teaching his son. He begged his son to be very careful about forbidden women. This father warned against lust that leads to a literal adulterous relationship. If the Internet was around, I am confident he would have warned against it since so many adulteries start online. Our fantasizes are only one step removed from our realities. Listen to his words.

For the lips of a forbidden woman drip honey, and her speech is smoother than oil, but in the end she is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword. Her feet go down to death; her steps follow the path to Sheol... Proverbs 5:3–5 (ESV)

A man lusting after a woman he can’t have, or shouldn’t have, looks great on the front side but it leads to death on the back side. If a woman is drop-dead gorgeous and is in the February edition of Sports Illustrated but she isn’t his wife, lusting after her will only lead to bitter pain and disaster. Lusting after her is using a shovel to dig your own grave.

And now, O sons, listen to me, and do not depart from the words of my mouth. Keep your way far from her, and do not go near the door of her house... Proverbs 5:7–8 (ESV)

This father warned his son to not to even entertain thoughts about a woman he shouldn’t have. Don’t even let yourself think about the lady. The way lusting after a woman works is lust plants an image of a woman in a man’s mind. It is a seed. Even if you successfully avoid sinful actions in the moment, when you least expect it, because the lustful image rooted itself in your psyche, that mental picture returns in living color when you are tired and weak. It is very difficult to steer away from sin the second time around.

...lest strangers take their fill of your strength, and your labors go to the house of a foreigner... Proverbs 5:10 (ESV)

Very practical. If you give yourself to lusting after a forbidden woman, you will waste your money on lust, not just your time. Like we discussed earlier, Americans spend more money today on Internet porn than the revenue of pro baseball, basketball and football combined.
I am at the brink of utter ruin in the assembled congregation. Proverbs 5:14 (ESV)

What a great summary of the end game in lust. It leaves you on the very edge of ruin. How many marriages are ruined from the seeds of lust that began by a hand engaging in a little harmless lust? How many families are torn apart and how many children grow up in a split home all because a man chose to engage in harmless lust that he thought nobody else would know about? How many men found their net worth decimated through court costs and divorce settlements? It all began with what they thought was innocent lust.

On the flip side, because many young men give themselves to lust they never mature to be a self-disciplined, self-denying good husband and father. They never learn to do more than serve themselves and be a slave to their hormones. Look at King Solomon.

For when Solomon was old his wives turned away his heart after other gods, and his heart was not wholly true to the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father. 1 Kings 11:4 (ESV)

The reason we avoid the passions of the flesh, the reason we don’t lust is because our very souls are on the line. Don’t think you can lust and not pay the consequences. Solomon, the smartest man in the world, was outsmarted by his own lusts. Samson, the strongest man in the world, was destroyed his lust. If Solomon and Samson were destroyed by tinkering with a little harmless lust, what makes you think you are any different?

Remember lust is deceptive and temporary.

…to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires (passions)… Ephesians 4:22 (ESV)

The word desires is the same word used in 1 Peter 2:11 translated as passions. Lust is a deceitful desire. Lust promises satisfaction but in the end it leaves men bitter, angry and disgusted with themselves. The classic example is Amnon in the Old Testament. Many of you remember he fell in love with a very beautiful girl named Tamar. Unfortunately, she was a relative. He didn’t discipline himself to get her out of his head. He kept lusting and feeding the passions of his flesh. Lust took deep roots in his heart, and like a drowning swimmer grasping for air, to satisfy his lust he raped Tamar. Look what happened.

But he would not listen to her, and being stronger than she, he violated her and lay with her. Then Amnon hated her with very great hatred, so that the hatred with which he hated her was greater than the love with which he had loved her. And Amnon said to her, “Get up! Go!” 2 Samuel 13:14–15 (ESV)

Lust is deceptive and temporary. Men who give themselves to lust will do wicked and foolish things in an attempt to satisfy those lusts. When I lived in Michigan a young man in our town proposed to a girl. He told her would just die if he couldn’t marry her. She wasn’t ready for marriage so she turned him down.
He told her that if he couldn't have her he would just die. He ran in front of a car and killed himself. As he lay in the road dying all he kept saying was, “How could I be so stupid?” He was right. That was a royally stupid move. Give yourself to lust and you will act like a fool. You will hate yourself for doing it. Lust isn’t harmless. It is effeminate slackness, a lack of manliness.

**Remember God promises to judge sexual immorality**

Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous… Hebrews 13:4–5 (ESV)

The marriage bed is where our sexual desires should be satisfied. Satisfying our sexual desires through lust dishonors God. God tells us to save our sexual desires for our wedding night. Fornicating before the wedding night and if you are married, not confining your sexuality to your marriage invites God’s judgment upon your life. While this is certainly talking about extramarital and premarital sex, it is also talking about extramarital and premarital lust. The Greek word for sexual immorality in this verse is the word *pornea*, from which we get our English word pornography. Look at what Jesus says is the standard for Christian sexuality.

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” Matthew 5:27–28 (ESV)

God’s standard for Christian men is absolute purity. That includes our eyes, our thoughts and our dreams. This is a very high standard that apart from the Holy Spirit’s work is not possible. Why does God say this? God is not a prude. Remember our fleshly passions are like soldiers seeking to destroy us. God’s high standard of purity is for the sake of our souls, the success of our marriages and the blessing of our lives. An entire life can be destroyed from what we call harmless lust.

**Remember God sees the same things I see.**

For a man’s ways are before the eyes of the Lord, and he ponders all his paths. The iniquities of the wicked ensnare him, and he is held fast in the cords of his sin. He dies for lack of discipline, and because of his great folly he is led astray. Proverbs 5:21–23 (ESV)

These verses come from Proverbs 5, which is the passage where a father warns his son about staying away from seductive women. He tells his son that when he lusts after a woman, God knows exactly what his eyes are looking at. That is a scary thought. There is no hiding our inner thoughts from God.

A man’s lusts are described as literal a trap that ensnare him like he is a raccoon that catches his paw in a trap. Once a man starts to give way to his lusts they are very difficult to escape. He may ultimately die because of them.

I have made a covenant with my eyes; how then could I gaze at a virgin? Job 31:1 (ESV)
Job, who was one of the most righteous people to ever walk the planet, made a covenant with his eyes that he wouldn’t dress down a young woman. He wouldn’t lust after a woman. He was richly blessed because of it. God sees everything and knows everything we are thinking.

Robert Murray McCheyenne was a famous minister that lived a few hundred years ago. I memorized one of his quotes when I was young. It is a great reminder to strive for absolute purity and what happens when we don’t. According to a man’s holiness, so shall be his success.

Don’t expect God to use your life in a mighty way if you are caught in the trap of lust in your heart. God can’t raise you up on the outside because you can’t handle the weight on the inside.

**Remember lessons from the Bible so you don’t have to repeat them.**

The Bible is full of examples of men whose lust got the better of them. We already mentioned Solomon and Samson and there are many more.

*We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day.* 1 Corinthians 10:8 (ESV)

In this example, the men of Israel began going after Moabite women. Moabite women were an easy catch. Catching a Moabite woman was like catching sunfish off a dock in the summer, you don’t even need to put a worm on the hook they are so eager to bite. Moabite woman were accustomed to promiscuity and seduction so they were an easy trap for Israelite men. God judged Israel with a plague that killed 23,000 in a day because they gave in to their lusts and practiced effiminate slackness. We think ebola is bad. Learn from the examples of Bible history. God disciplines his people for lust and sometimes quite severely. If you are a guy that finds yourself not taking lust seriously, think again. Today is the day to repent and change and take lust seriously.

**Remember the grace of Christ.**

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age... Titus 2:11-12 (ESV)

Growing in our understanding of how much Jesus loves us and forgives us is something that literally changes our hearts. Going to church helps men beat lust. Reading the Bible and reflecting on what Christ has done for us will help men beat the sin of lust.

This is very important. The grace and forgiveness of God is what turns us away from all forms of sin. Skip church and struggle with sin.

**Remember physical discipline helps build spiritual strength.**

But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified. 1 Corinthians 9:27 (ESV)
Paul spent a lot of time building his physical discipline to help himself stay spiritually disciplined. There is a connection between the two. I think everybody knows I am married. Our three kids were not adopted. We made them at home the old-fashioned way. Unfortunately, Cindy has not been around this summer and a portion of this fall. She is gone so much that this week a lady at the YMCA asked me if we were separated. Of course the answer was, “No!”

Most of you know she spent the summer and part of the fall at my parents’ taking care of my mother who is dying of cancer. I fly out tomorrow to be with my amazing mother in her final days.

All that to say a summer and fall without a wife is no fun. One of the things I learned years ago from high school and college sports is the connection between high levels of physical discipline and spiritual discipline. Part of keeping myself spiritually healthy for when I am emotionally weak is I exercise. There were times this summer when I went to the YMCA for three-hour workouts. Other times I went to the YMCA three times a day. It burns stress. It helps me organize my thoughts. It helps keep me spiritually-disciplined. It is all biblical.

Get married.

Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth, a lovely deer, a graceful doe. Let her breasts fill you at all times with delight; be intoxicated always in her love. Proverbs 5:18–19 (ESV)

This is that same passage in Proverbs where a father is giving sexual advice to his son. In the previous verses he told his son to avoid lusting after a seductive woman that he can’t have. Don’t even let yourself think about her. What is this young man to do with his sexual desires? Get married and express them! God gave men and women a strong sex drive for a reason. It is to drive men and women toward marriage where they can express their sexuality. God is honored when a man passionately and selflessly makes love to his wife. God wants a man to literally be intoxicated by his wife’s love. God is very pro sex. It was his idea. He just wants all the energy to be focused with laser-like precision upon a wife or a husband, not diffused in a hundred different directions through lust. That will kill you.

But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion. 1 Corinthians 7:9 (ESV)

Paul said that if a young man is struggling with lust, don’t fornicate. Get about the business of finding a Godly woman who loves Jesus even more than she loves you and get married. I tell my boys I am not opposed to them getting married in college if they meet the right woman. Their earthly father and their heavenly father do not want them fornicating before marriage. Their heavenly father and earthly father want them passionately making love to a wife in marriage. A good marriage is a great guard against lust. You won’t be shaking your neighbor’s peach tree if your wife is serving peach pie every night after dinner. A great marriage does not automatically solve all sexual temptations but it is a huge help.
Run!!

Every time the Bible describes a serious struggle with lust, the answer is run. Don’t sit and negotiate with sexual sin. Don’t even stay in the same room when tempted to lust. You literally need to run.

In Genesis 19, when Potiphar’s wife was trying to seduce Joseph he ran. Paul told Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:22 to flee youthful passions. In 1 Corinthians 6:18 Paul told the Corinthians to flee sexual immorality.

When you are struggling with lust on television don’t keep sitting on the couch with the remote in your hand negotiating with your passions. Don’t keep sitting in front of your computer screen. Turn them off and literally run from the room before you talk yourself back into sin.

As Christians, we are to be known for abstaining from the passions of the flesh, effeminate slackness. To successfully win the battle with lust, we don’t just need to avoid lust, we need to replace it with something. We are to replace it with good works.

Pursue a life of good deeds.

Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation. 1 Peter 2:12 (ESV)

Christians who take a hard stance against lust will be called weird for not watching R-rated movies. They will be called sexual prudes. They will become the targets of demonic temptation and taunting by their peers. It is hard enough dealing with the lustful desires on the inside of our heart. It is a real struggle to face persecution from outside our lives. How do we counteract this? Peter’s answer is that we are to be a people devoted to good works. We are not to be a people devoted to sitting at home feeding our lusts through media but we are to be known for getting out of the house, getting off the phone and serving others like Christ served us. Everywhere you cut the Bible it bleeds this theme. ISIS is know for its bad works. As Christians we are to be known for our good works.

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. Ephesians 2:10 (ESV)

God has good works prepared for us to do. If you are sitting home lusting, you are failing to do a good work God has already planned for you to do some place else.

…who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works. Titus 2:14 (ESV)

We are to be zealous for good works. Don’t whine about having people over for dinner. Don’t say you are too busy. Don’t think of a good work as inconveniences in your schedule. Be zealous to love and serve people. If you
are busy serving people, you won’t have nearly as much time to serve your lustful thoughts and desires.

See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone. 1 Thessalonians 5:15 (ESV)

So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith. Galatians 6:10 (ESV)

Our good works are not to be confined to the church but we are to do them in the church first, then the community. Whenever we have the opportunity, we are to do good for others. Here are a few suggestions:

• Find somebody you don’t know at church and ask them out for lunch or over for dinner. The best church is the church where people actually play together outside of church. Take one or two nights a month and invite someone from the church over your house for dinner. Stop just being a Sunday-only Christian. God is calling some of you to repent.

• Volunteer to be a woman that makes a meal. Many women bring meals to those in crisis. It is a great ministry. It made a huge different with my kids this summer. Don’t just serve yourself. Serve others. Be zealous about this.

• Volunteer to help in the community by coaching a sport at the YMCA.

• Visit a nursing home. Set a date in your schedule once or twice a month and read the Bible to people in the lobby.

• Offer to help in the student ministry or AWANA on Wednesday night.

• If you are in college, organize a Bible study or time of prayer in your dorm. Write a note of encouragement to a teacher or coach thanking them for investing in you. I know you will tell me that you are already too busy. Replace some of the time you use for lusting with serving.

**Conclusion**

As Christian men at CrossWinds we are to have a reputation. We are to be known for abstaining from the passions of our flesh. We are not men given to pornography and lust. We steer clear of the effeminate slackness that rules the men of the world, destroys true masculinity and wages war against the soul. We have strong passions but we are to be known as one-woman men that focus our passions with laser-like precision on our wives in marriage. We don’t pander to serving our lusts but we are known for serving others both inside and outside the church community. That is what we are to be known for. If you will join me, will you stand as I close in prayer?
Life Group Work Sheet
1 Peter 2:11-12
October 5, 2014

Getting to Know Each
1. On Sunday we learned that “almost everyone wants to be a better person.” What are some of the popular methods of self-improvement in our culture? Which of these have you tried?
2. Can any of these methods guarantee that they will result in making us better people? Why or why not?

Read Romans 6:9-14
1. What does it mean to be “dead to sin” (v. 11)? Knowing that, what do you think it means to be “alive to God in Christ”?
2. What is Paul’s basis (and ours) for believing we will live with Christ (vv. 9-10)? How has Jesus “put death to death” (see also vv. 20-21)?
3. What aspects of a Christ follower’s identity does Paul mention in this passage? How do you see them as part of your identity?
4. What two things are believers to refuse to do (vv. 12-13)? How do you interpret both of these instructions?
5. Read Romans 8:12-13. Why do we need to take such a severe attitude toward our sin? What do you think that looks like?
6. Do you think of yourself as an “instrument for righteousness”? What might change in your life if you began seeing yourself this way?

Read Romans 6:19-23
1. How does a person move from being a slave to sin to being a slave to righteousness?
2. What is Paul referring to when he talks about spiritual fruit? Read Galatians 5:22-24 and 2 Peter 1:5-8 for some examples. Which of these fruits do you most want to fight for?
3. Read John 15:1-4. What one action must believers do to produce fruit? How does this help you better understand the slavery analogy of Romans 6?
Application Questions

1. Why do I often fear surrendering my life completely to God, allowing Him to be my Master? What do I need to do to fight that fear?

2. Does my daily life reflect Christ living in me? Where is there room for improvement?

3. What is one step I can take toward living as an “instrument of righteousness” this week?
1 Peter 2:13-17 — God, Government and Me
(by Jordan Gowing)

October 12, 2014

In Germany during the 1930’s and 1940’s, the church was faced with a crisis. How should they faithfully live out Christianity under the thumb of a government that was not only anti-Christian but one of the most destructive regimes in history? One of the biggest faces of evangelical Christianity in Germany during that time was a man named Dietrich Bonhoeffer. As a leader in the German church, how would he help the church remain faithful to the gospel while at the same time respecting the government of the Nazis?

Chinese Christians in the late 1940’s up until the present day find themselves wondering the same thing: in a communist country that is largely anti-religion, how can they respect the government authorities while respecting the call of the gospel to go and make disciples?

Martin Luther King Jr. and many evangelical Christians in the 1960’s found themselves in a similar situation. In a society ruled by Jim Crow Laws and racial discrimination, how could they speak out against the injustices they experienced and witnessed while remaining dutiful citizens to the United States?

Throughout history, Christians have had to wrestle with this intersection between faith and politics. This is one of the most crucial areas of application for our faith, but it is also one of the most volatile. Recent studies show that we are living in the most bi-partisan time in our nation’s history. Liberals have become more liberal. Conservatives are increasingly conservative. Our nation has shifted from merely disagreeing with people of a different political persuasion to demonizing them.

This morning, we are going to be in 1 Peter 2:13-17. In this passage, Peter addresses our relation to the government as Christians. This is quite relevant to us right now, with the elections just a month a way. You may think I am crazy, but I actually love election season. It’s not because of the ads: I despise them. I love election season, because it seems that without fail, no matter which political party is in power, we see gas prices lower for a month and a half. Frankly, I think we should have elections more often!

Both political parties contain biblical truths that are good and helpful for us, but they miss others. Republicans do an excellent job of identifying passages and—rightly, I might add—defending the sanctity of marriage, the sanctity of life, and the need for morality in our society. But at the time, many neglect biblical truths that command us to care for those who cannot help themselves, especially outsiders.

The same can be said of Democrats: they identify biblical truths about righting injustices but often miss the boat on other areas.
I believe that if you get offended this morning, that’s a good thing. The gospel comforts us with the grace of God. But it also confronts us, challenging us to conform more to the truth of Scripture.

We won’t be talking about political candidates this morning. We won’t be endorsing a political party this morning. Peter does not tell us a lot about how the government should act. Instead, he focuses on how we should act toward the government. To some extent, what the government believes and does is irrelevant. Peter’s words here are not conditional on how much we like those who are in office.

If you were with us last week, you remember that we began new section from 1 Peter. In this new section, the rubber really meets the road of our call to holiness. Peter tells us what holiness looks like, first by removing the passions of the flesh from our lives and also by living good and holy lives. We saw that this calling is true even in the midst of suffering and how we are called to good regardless. And this calling continues here: while we are suffering—even at the hands of the government—we must continue to good. We are called to submit to the government whenever possible, especially when we don’t want to.

That’s what our passage is really about this morning: our allegiance to God makes us respectful citizens. This calling is true when “our guy” is in office. And it is especially true when he is not. Our allegiance to God makes us respectful citizens whenever possible. Now just a note of clarification: I use citizen not to refer to people who have official citizenship but rather to refer to people who dwell here. If you live in the United States, whether a citizen, here with a green card, undocumented, or something else—this calling is true for you. Your allegiance to God leads to respectful living in regard to the government.

Peter describes this calling in three ways, first by looking at the calling of Christians in respect to the government. Second, by looking at the reason for this calling, and finally by looking at what this looks like in our lives relating to government.

I mentioned that we are going to be in 1 Peter 2:13-17. If you have a Bible, I invite you to open up to that passage and follow along with me as I read aloud. But before we do that, let’s pause for a moment of prayer.

Dear God, we pause before coming to your word, knowing that you are a sovereign God. We know that you love all your people, whether Republican or Democrat. We ask that you would refine us, God. Align us not with a political party but first and foremost with the truth of your gospel. Dwell with us this morning, O God. In Jesus’ name, amen.

First, please join me in 1 Peter 2:13-14:

"Be subject for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good." (1 Peter 2:13–14 ESV)
Peter starts by telling us what our calling is as Christians: to submit to all authority for Jesus’ sake. We live in an anti-authoritarian society. We don’t like being told what to do. The only government we want to follow is the one we make up. But as Christians, we are called to something different. We are called to submit to all authority that God has placed us under.

This certainly means submitting to the government, but it means much more than that. It means submitting to the authority of police when they stop you for speeding. Students, it means submitting to the authority of your teachers even when they are frankly undeserving of respect. It means submitting to the authority of your boss even when that is hard. And countless other examples of authority that God places us under.

But we don’t submit to this authority because we like it. We don’t submit to it because of inherent power in a position or a personality, even though that may be true. Why do we submit to the authority God has place in our lives? We do it for Jesus’ sake.

I want you to imagine with me for a second—and this probably won’t take too much imagination—that there is corrupt politician in office. They lead a promiscuous lifestyle, they pass laws that are detrimental to you, cutting tax breaks you were expecting, they are arrogant, proud and rude. You are not going to want to submit to them because of who they are. They aren’t worthy of your respect. You aren’t going to want to submit to them because of their position: you certainly didn’t vote for them. But you submit to them nonetheless. Why? Because Jesus wants you to.

Peter is telling us an essential principle about our involvement in politics as Christians: your involvement in government is first and foremost about you and God. God is pleased when you submit to authority. It’s the way that he has structured things in this world. He has given us these sources of authority for our good.

Now before you object, remember Peter’s context. Peter is likely writing this letter from prison. He was imprisoned for no reason. And yet he tells us to submit to the government anyway! Is he crazy? Is he a coward? It can’t be the second. If Peter were a coward, he wouldn’t have ended up in prison in the first place. He tells us to submit to the government because that is what God wants us to do.

Peter continues by telling us what the purpose of the government is in verse 14: to limit evil and promote good. No matter how good or bad a government is, Peter recognizes its worth. Peter reminds us that even the worst government is better than anarchy. Just talk with citizens of Sudan who experienced the Civil War. When asked, “Which is worse: anarchy or a bad government?” The majority of them will say anarchy. Even the worst government is used by God to limit evil and promote good.

Of course if you are like me, your mind instantly goes to the extreme situations. “There have got to be times when you can’t submit to the
government, right? After all, didn’t Moses lead a rebellion against the Egyptian government? So when is it right to disobey a government?”

You’re right. There are times when Christians cannot submit. But the times are much fewer than we would probably expect. Consider what Peter himself says in Acts 5:

“But Peter and the apostles answered, “We must obey God rather than men.”(Acts 5:29 ESV)

Peter himself says that when what God says contradicts what humanity demands, we must obey God each time. This is what it means to submit for the Lord’s sake. We don’t do so indiscriminately, but whenever we do, it is out of our primary obedience to God.

Martin Luther King Jr. sheds a little more light on this topic in his famous Letter from a Birmingham Jail. In jail for peaceful civil disobedience, King writes a letter to the other pastors in the area, telling them why he is protesting. In this letter, he points out that there are just and unjust laws: just laws find their root in God’s own law, while unjust laws go against this eternal law. If the laws of the government go against what God himself says, then we cannot obey.

What is our calling as Christians? To submit to all forms of human authority. We do so when we want to. We do so when we don’t. But whatever the case, we do so because of a love and honor for God above all. Let’s keep reading and see the reason why God calls us to this:

“For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God.”(1 Peter 2:15–16 ESV)

Peter continues his exhortation by telling us what the will of God is: to do good. The people that Peter was writing to were experiencing hardship at the hands of others. They were mocked and ridiculed for their faith because they didn’t follow the masses. The Roman empire was a very immoral place, even though there were laws in place to structure morality. And yet Christians lived moral lives anyway. No one else did, but they sought to live good, holy lives. And they were mocked for it.

In the same way, it was required for all people living in the Roman empire to offer incense to the emperor. This wasn’t exactly a form of worship—it was more like an intense version of the pledge of allegiance. But Christians refused to do it even though everyone else did. And they were mocked for it.

In the midst of all this slander, what does Peter say? That we should continue to do good deeds. The best way to silence critics is through good deeds. We see this throughout church history. Christians were actually known for how well they cared for the sick and poor in the Roman empire. They did this for their own and for pagans while Romans abandoned their own.

You see, it is God’s will for us to be good citizens. God is not glorified in us when we complain about those who are in government positions. God is not
glorified when we mope about those who make the laws of our land. God is glorified when we live out holy lives in spite of all the slander we experience.

A great example of this is Dan Cathy, the man who is the CEO of Chic-fil-a. Cathy is a strong Christian, and a few years came under heavy fire for his “bigoted” stance against homosexuality. Under heavy fire from the media and the left, Cathy continued to live out the principles of his faith.

As a part of his Christian walk, he extended an invitation to an open homosexual to attend a football game with him. The man agreed, and was blown away by the love that he was shown by Cathy. Cathy may not have agreed with his lifestyle, but it was Cathy’s lifestyle that changed the man’s mind about him. God is glorified through our good deeds.

Last week we talked a bit about why we do good works, and Peter addresses that here as well. He first points out that we do good because we are free people: God has freed us from the chains of sin, and that leads us to live lives of holiness. In the letter to the Romans, Paul addresses this same topic: we were all once slaves to sin, but when Christ died in our place, he freed us. This freedom does not lead to sin, but is rather used to glorify God. Why? Because we are now God’s servants, just as Peter points out.

The thing is, it is God's will for us to do good deeds and good works. Period. It doesn’t matter what the political or social climate is like. We may not be able to control the society, but we can control our response to it: and Peter tells us that we should respond by doing good.

God uses our good deeds to silence the critics. The language Peter uses here to describe those bad-mouthing Christians is harsh: he calls them foolish people. They are foolish because the have not responded to the gospel in faith. But as we saw last week, God can use our good deeds to cause this sort of response in the people he surrounds us with. Let us continue to do good works for God’s glory.

Let’s read the final verse of our passage this morning:

“Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.” (1 Peter 2:17 ESV)

This verse serves as a summary of everything that Peter has said so far on the topic of government. In a way, this verse is the tangible application of how to live out submission to government in our lives. I love this verse, because it is so radical and counter-cultural, but at the same time, it is surprisingly simple.

As Peter closes his discussion on government and authority structures that we must submit to, he gives us four simple commands that we are to follow. These commands are related to one another, each dealing with our interpersonal interactions. And as we will see, these commands would have been earth-shattering for Peter’s audience.

In these four commands, Peter raises the bar for how Christians should deal with others. People often wonder about the way that Christians should deal
with politics. They are looking for a clear description of whether they should vote Republican or Democrat. The Bible doesn’t give us a clear command of how to vote as a Christian. But what Scripture does do for us is give us simple commands on how our faith should influence our approach to politics. Let’s take a look at each command one by one.

As a citizen of God’s kingdom, I honor everyone. Peter starts off by saying how we should interact with all people: we show them honor. Notice the motivation for showing them honor that I mentioned here: we are citizens of God’s kingdom.

The last few weeks, Peter has been reminding us of our identity as Christians. A few weeks ago, he referred to us as a chosen race: a group of people selected by God to accomplish his mission here on the earth. Last week, he called us sojourners and exiles: he was reminding us that our citizenship does not primarily belong to the United States but to heaven above.

Here, Peter is reminding us that just because we are citizens of God’s kingdom doesn’t mean that we neglect the here and now. It’s unfortunate that some Christians understand that we are a part of God’s kingdom and so they detach from the world that we currently are in. They don’t care about what happens here, because they have already punched their ticket to God’s kingdom.

But Peter shares these commands to make sure that this doesn’t happen to us. Just because we are citizens of God’s kingdom doesn’t mean that we neglect the here and now. We engage the government as God’s servants, recognizing that whatever government rules over you, it is not ultimate. Every government, whether good or bad, will fail. The book of Revelation tells us that we should actually rejoice in this truth: that the United States will one day no longer exist, because God’s kingdom is here.

This is why Peter tells us to honor everyone. This truth—to show indiscriminate honor—would have been unheard of in Peter’s day. Showing favoritism was the norm, because you would want to do things for people who could do things for you.

In contrast to this society, Peter tells us to show honor to everyone. Why? Because everyone is created in God’s image. Every single human who has ever walked the planet and will ever walk the planet is created in God’s image. Humanity is unique in all of creation, in that we bear God’s image. And because we carry his image, we have an intrinsic worth.

Why do we value human life? Because we are created in God’s image. Why do we show the same level of honor and respect to all people we meet? Because we are made in God’s image. Let us honor everyone that we encounter, indiscriminately.

Second, Peter tells us that as a citizen of God’s kingdom, I love every Christian. Peter tells us that we are to honor everyone because they carry the image of God. But we are supposed to do more than just honor Christians; we
are called to love them. Peter is using concentric circles here. First he mentions all of humanity, but within that group of humanity are our Christian brothers and sisters. And Peter tells us that because they are Christians, they are deserving of intentional, sacrificial love.

As Christians, God commands us to treat our brothers and sisters differently than the way we treat non-Christians. Why? Because they are family! Paul puts it this way in the book of Galatians:

“So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.” (Galatians 6:10 ESV)

We are first and foremost responsible for showing love to fellow Christians. There are a number of evangelical Christians who are liberal. A number of evangelical Christians are conservative. Ask yourself: who do you love more? Christians with differing political views or people of your political party with different beliefs?

For far too many of us, I am sure that we would say the second: we find ourselves sharing more in common with those of the same political persuasion than those of the same faith. Friends, this cannot be! Conservative Christians cannot show greater love for someone like Mitt Romney—a non-Christian—than they would with Jim Wallis—an evangelical who is outspokenly liberal. Let us love one another. Whole-heartedly. Sacrificially.

Third, as a citizen of God’s kingdom, I recognize God is the true king. Notice the command that is given here: we are to fear God. In the New Testament, we are never commanded to fear other people. This past week I looked at each of the different uses of “fear” in the New Testament, and there are two primary categories that everything falls into: those who fear God. And those passages where God commands us not to fear.

The New Testament makes it very clear that God alone is the true ruler. God alone is the one who is in charge. God alone is the one who is ordaining the things that happen. God alone is the one who chooses who is leading each nation on the face of the planet. In a way, the western concept of democracy is misleading. It makes us think that we the people choose our leader. But God uses our democratic processes to bring into power the ones that he chooses.

Take a look at the Old Testament story of Nebuchadnezzar, for example. Nebuchadnezzar was for all intents and purposes a terrible person. He destroyed God’s chosen nation and destroyed God’s temple. But in the Old Testament, God speaks of Nebuchadnezzar as his instrument. God chose Nebuchadnezzar to be the leader of Babylon. That doesn’t mean that Nebuchadnezzar was above God’s judgment or that he had God’s unconditional favor however. Scripture tells us that even though God ordains governments that are evil and bad, those in leadership positions will be held accountable for their poor stewardship of their office. Nebuchadnezzar will be held accountable for his office, as will every single US president, every Senator, every governor, down to every city council person.
The thing is, it doesn’t matter how wicked a government is: God calls us to submit. We know that he is in charge and that he will hold everyone accountable. This provides great motivation to submit when we don’t want to: knowing that God is in charge and will mete out justice in the last day.

We honor everyone. We love other Christians. But the greatest respect and honor and reverence is saved for God alone. This is the ruling principle in our lives. We must fear God before anything else. If your devotion to God—your commitment to fear him—is compromised by honoring the government, you must disobey the government. Because God is the only one worthy of greatest respect.

Peter closes by saying that as citizens of God’s kingdom, we will respect our elected officials. Notice what Peter does here: up to this point, he has been building up to higher and higher devotion. But now, when talking about the highest office in the Roman Empire—the Caesar—Peter tells us to show him the same respect as we would anyone else.

This would have been massively subversive in Peter’s day, to say that both Caesar and a slave deserve the same honor from us. But this isn’t lowering the bar for how we treat Caesar; it is raising the bar for how we treat everyone else. Today in the United States, our elected officials deserve our respect, not because of any inherent sense of worth in their positions, but because of their inherent sense of worth as humans.

How many of us here pray for the government regularly? How many of you pray for President Obama specifically? If not, then you have no right to complain. And not only that, if you are not praying for our elected officials consistently, then I believe Peter would say that you are neglecting your Christian duty. It doesn't matter if you like President Obama or not. God is not amused when we do not take our citizenship seriously, and that includes praying for our President, Congress, Governors, and other elected officials.

Do you see what Peter is doing here? In each of these verses Peter talks about our relationship to human authorities. But at the same time, he is talking about our relationship with God. He is telling us that all Christian politics must be God-centered. Everything we do as Christians is centered on our relationship to him.

We cannot neglect our duty to God in the realm of government. That means taking the sanctity of life seriously. It means taking the sanctity of marriage seriously too. But it also means taking the command to take care of the outsider seriously. It means to take care of the helpless seriously. It doesn't mean that you have to be Democrat or a Republican. It means that we have to take all of what God says in Scripture seriously. Who God is is central to all that we believe as Christians.

Friends, our allegiance to God makes us respectful citizens. Peter is arguing that the best citizens in the Roman empire were Christian citizens. And the same can be said today too. The best citizens in the United States are
Christian citizens, those who seek God and from there seek to submit to the government. To honor everyone. To love their brothers and sisters. To fear God. And to show respect to elected officials.

That doesn’t mean you have to agree with everything an elected official believes. There are many policies that I do not agree with President Obama over. And so as I speak out against his stance on abortion, I continue to pray for him. No matter what, because that is my Christian duty.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the pastor that I mentioned in the beginning of our time this morning, shows us the right balance. In the 1920’s and 1930’s, Bonhoeffer was passionately German. His German-ness was a big part of his identity, and there isn’t anything intrinsically wrong with that. But even as he was passionately German, he was even more passionately Christian. This led to him eventually giving his life for the gospel and as he stood up against the Nazi regime. But he first tried to live out 1 Peter 2:13-17 faithfully in Germany.

The United States today is not Nazi Germany. We don’t have a clear, black and white law for us to disobey. The United States today is not a Muslim country, where Christians must disobey law to follow God faithfully. We are not in Peter’s context, where worship of the emperor was required for all citizens. But we do live in an increasingly neo-pagan society. And so in this society, let us seek to remain faithful. Let’s try to be the best citizens that we can be. Let’s seek God and his kingdom before anything else. And from that place, let it influence our citizenship, by respecting all, loving fellow Christians, and worshiping God alone.

Let’s pray.
1 Peter 2:18-25 — How Do I Face Undeserved Suffering?

November 16, 2014

Sometimes life isn’t fair. You come home and your spouse yells at you. You have no idea what you did wrong. In anger you say to yourself, “What did I do to deserve this?” Maybe you are a high school football player. You practice hard in and out of season. You are a decent player, but the coach rarely gives you time on the field. It seems to you that he plays his favorites. Life isn’t fair. At work you have a great idea to increase productivity. You share it with your boss. He shares it with his boss and it gets implemented in the company. At the end of the year, your boss gets credit for the idea. He gets a raise while you are given no credit. Life isn’t fair. Every day we deal with situations like this. What should we do about it?

Should we get angry and give people a piece of our minds? After all, they have it coming. Should we clam up and stew in a rage? Should we take matters into our own hands and get even? Should we file lawsuits? What should Christians do when life isn’t fair? Today we will find the answer.

If you are new, my name is Kurt. I am one of the pastors at CrossWinds. We are a multi-campus church with campuses in Spencer and Spirit Lake. On both campuses we are studying the book of 1 Peter. For the last few weeks we paused the study while I dealt with my mom’s death from cancer. She is now in the presence of Jesus and we are back in town, so we are returning to Peter. We are in 1 Peter 2:18-25. Turn to that passage in your Bible. Let’s read it together. I ask for you to stand out of reverence for God’s Word and follow along in your Bible as I read. If you need a Bible, 1 Peter 2 is found on page 1,015 of the pew Bible.

Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls. 1 Peter 2:18–25 (ESV)
In this section of 1 Peter we learn one of the important ways our Christian faith works its way out in everyday life is by our submission to those in authorities over us.

In our last message, Pastor Jordan talked about the importance of Christians submitting to the government authorities, even if we don’t like them. This can be difficult because there are plenty of things I don’t agree with when it comes to our government. A critical spirit comes naturally when we look at some of the choices made by our country’s leadership. That is not the way Christians live. We are to have a reputation for submitting to and supporting our government, even when we don’t agree with our government.

Can we vote for change when we have the chance? Of course! Can we take legal action if our government asks us to sin? Yes, we can. Hobby Lobby did this when the Obama health care plan forced it to pay for its employees’ abortions. It won the lawsuit.

We may disagree with our leaders but as Christians we still submit to them, respect them and support them. This is the way Christians live their lives.

Today we move from submitting to government authorities to submission in the work environment — our bosses at work. Peter gave special emphasis to handling difficult bosses, cruel bosses and crooked bosses who don’t treat us fairly and we face undeserved suffering because of it.

Respect my boss, even if he isn’t fair.
Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. 1 Peter 2:18 (ESV)

Who are the servants?

I want to begin with the word servants. Some of you have a translation that uses the word slaves. For many of us the word slaves brings to mind the kind of slavery that transpired in American. It conjures up images of men, women and children torn apart, ripped from their homeland, stuffed like cattle into boats and brought to a foreign land where they are sold like animals. American slavery was primarily racial. It was lifelong. It involved human trafficking. It was unjust and cruel.

There is a big difference between slavery as it was practiced in America and slavery in the ancient world. The Bible describes the kind of slavery our country practiced as one of the most heinous forms of evil.

We also know that the law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, for the sexually immoral, for those practicing homosexuality, for slave traders and liars and perjurers—and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine… 1 Timothy 1:9–10 (NIV)

Slavery in the ancient world was not right but it was vastly different from American slavery. First, slavery in the ancient world was not based on race.
People from different races would be slaves. Second, slavery was not a lifelong obligation. If you saved your money, you could buy yourself out of slavery.

There was no welfare system in the ancient world. When people were down on their luck, they sold themselves to be slaves of wealthy land owners as a way of providing for their immediate needs. The upside of this type of slavery was it prevented free-loading and living off the government. You don’t work, you don’t eat. Slavery was a huge part of the ancient economy. Scholars estimate that more than half the population of Rome were slaves.

The downside of ancient slavery is that slaves had few rights. They were considered property. Slaves could not vote. Slaves were literally owned like cattle. They could be bought and sold. Slaves could be whipped or beaten. If your owner wanted you working 16 hours days, you had no recourse. If he treated you poorly or fed you almost nothing, you were stuck with it.

In Rome there were two types of slaves. There were the uneducated field slaves. They are similar to the migrant workers from Mexico. They were not highly educated but they worked hard. These common slaves were an important part of society. The word Peter used for servant in our text is a special word. It referred to the professional class of slaves. These were the educated slaves who functioned as teachers, doctors, accountants and administrators for their owners. You can imagine the tension. You are a highly intelligent man or woman. You are a teacher or doctor but you are not getting paid well because you are a slave for your boss. You might even be smarter than your boss. Your boss could be a mean, irritable and irresponsible man who is hurting you but there is little you can do about it. This is the environment Peter addressed. Many of us can relate to this. We know what it is like to work for a boss that is unreasonable. We know what it is like to be intelligent but need to submit to the foolish or cruel whims of a boss. As Christians, how do we handle this?

The Bible is clear. We respect and submit to our bosses’ authority and leadership, no matter what his character. He may be a good and gentle boss. That makes it easy. If he is a difficult boss, we respect his leadership and submit to it anyway. Peter said employees respect and submit to their boss even if he is unjust. The word unjust literally means crooked. Even if your boss is a cheat and is dishonest, you work hard for him anyway.

Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. Colossians 3:22 (ESV)

As Christians, we submit to the leadership of our bosses in everything, even if they are crooked. We work hard, even when the boss isn’t looking, because we know God sees everything.

The example that came to mind was Joseph and Potiphar in the book of Genesis. The Bible doesn’t tell us about Potiphar’s character but I suspect it wasn’t the best. If your wife is trying to sleep with your employees, and you tolerate it, it probably means Potiphar’s character wasn’t much better. How did
Joseph work for what could have been a crooked boss? He was faithful, honest and hard working.

**Do I have to keep working for a crooked boss?**

In the ancient world, if you were a slave or a servant, you didn’t have the opportunity to escape a crooked boss. If you saved money, you could buy your freedom. Sometimes slaves could gain their freedom. Until then, they were stuck.

Were you a bondservant when called? Do not be concerned about it. *(But if you can gain your freedom, avail yourself of the opportunity.)* 1 Corinthians 7:21 (ESV)

As Americans, we are not slaves to our bosses. We can resign and escape a crooked boss. That is a benefit we have they didn’t have in the ancient world. If you have the opportunity to leave a crooked boss, take advantage of it. In the meantime, work hard as a model employee.

Peter then talked about suffering, suffering under the hands of an unjust boss. We are going to talk about suffering in general. Peter taught us that sometimes we suffer because we bring it on ourselves. Sometimes we suffer and we don’t deserve it.

**Sometimes I suffer because I bring it on myself.**

Peter came right out and reminded us that sometimes we suffer because we deserve to suffer.

*For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure?* 1 Peter 2:20 (ESV)

Sometimes slaves were beaten because they deserved it. They were lazy or rebellious. Sometimes we face a hard times in life because we deserve it. We are passed over for a promotion because we are messing around on the Internet instead of doing our jobs. We need to own up to things that are our fault.

**I bring suffering on myself when I reap what I sow.**

Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, *for whatever one sows, that will he also reap.* Galatians 6:7 (ESV)

The classic example of suffering I bring on myself is the speeding ticket. Who do we blame? The cop. We blame the circumstances. We claim the cop framed us. We claim we were late for church so we had to speed. It wasn’t our fault we were driving too fast. The truth is it is completely our fault for driving 20 mph over the speed limit. Don’t blame shift. A speeding ticket is just reaping what we were sowing.

Sometimes we wonder why we have no friends. Why are some people popular while I feel like a loner? Usually loneliness is something we bring on ourselves through the simple process of sowing and reaping. If we have a bad attitude when we are around others, if we are cantankerous, if we are always
self-interested instead of caring about others... guess what happens? Nobody wants to be our friend. If we are interested in people, if you are excited to see them, if you care about listening to them, if you give them hugs, what happens? Like a magnet people are drawn to us. It is simple process of sowing and reaping. If you are a great friend, everybody will want to be your friend.

Sometimes people tell me they struggle with their weight and there is nothing they can do about it. Sometimes there are genetic or physical problems. What cracks me up is many people complain about their weight while they are holding a McDonald’s bag with two Big Macs and a super-size fries in the bag. There is something you can do about it. Have you heard about vegetables? Sometimes poor health is nothing more than reaping what we are sowing when it comes to our diets.

When we bring suffering on ourselves through the process of sowing and reaping, what we need to do is repent and turn to Jesus. Just like we repent of our sin, we repent of the poor choices and turn to Jesus where we cling to his grace and ask for his strength to help us change.

**I bring suffering on myself when God justly punishes sin.**

The Bible talks about times when God brings suffering into lives because we deserve it. They are similar but different in their purpose.

God punishes sin. Sometimes God has enough when it comes to sin so he decides to punish it. Examples include Noah and the flood when God said every inclination of a person’s heart before the flood was evil so God punished sin by hitting the reset switch on the world with a cosmic flood. Another example is Sodom and Gomorrah where the cities were filled with homosexual men who were interested in gang raping men who passed through town. God said, “Enough is enough.” He rained fire and sulfur from heaven like a cosmic flamethrower and destroyed the towns. God doesn’t always punish sin by completely destroying people. Sometimes he punishes sin by letting people suffer the consequences of their sin.

In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error. Romans 1:27 (NIV)

There is built-in punishment that goes with that sin. God says there is punishment built into the sin of homosexuality. When you sin, you will suffer.

Some of you are wondering if God will punish you because of your sin. If you know Jesus the clear answer is “No!” Jesus has already taken all the punishment for our sin. There is no justice necessary for our sin. Jesus paid for all of it. **BUT** that doesn’t mean God won’t bring suffering into our lives when we sin.
I bring suffering on myself when, like a good father, God needs to break my love of sin.

God disciplines his children. This is very important. God occasionally brings correction on his children out of love to steer them away from sin.

For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives. Hebrews 12:6 (ESV)

For those who don't know Jesus, God brings just punishment for sin in this world, and ultimately in eternity, as a just response for sin. For those of us who are Christians, Jesus already paid for our sin. God may choose to bring suffering into our lives to correct us so we turn away from sin, just as a good father lovingly spanks his child because he wants his sons or daughters to turn away from things that will destroy them.

Imagine a child who has a fascination with a pot on the stove. He insists on reaching for the handle and pulling on it. As a loving parent, you will correct your child. A loving parent will do whatever is necessary to break his or her child of his will to protect him from the scalding hot water in the pot. In the same way, God may bring suffering in our lives when we give ourselves to sin, not to punish us, but as a loving father to correct us so sin doesn't destroy us. God’s correction is for our good.

Sometimes I suffer and I didn’t bring it on myself.

For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. 1 Peter 2:19–20 (ESV)

The real problem is what should I do when I don’t deserve to suffer but I find myself suffering at work or at home? How should I respond to undeserved suffering? Peter gave us great insight.

Enduring unjust suffering is a gracious thing in the eyes of God.

That doesn’t sound helpful. For me, it sounded confusing until I researched it. The word gracious can also be translated beneficial or favorable. When we face undeserved suffering, and we endure it, God takes note of our suffering. He counts it to our benefit, to our favor. God knows when we face undeserved suffering. He is watching how we respond. God will reward us for enduring it in a way that honors Christ.

Where did Peter get this idea from? It comes right from Jesus in Luke 6. Jesus used the same Greek word in Luke 6 as Peter did in this passage, except in Luke 6 it is translated as the word benefit. They are tied together.

If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same… But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great.
and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. Luke 6:32–35 (ESV)

When we face undeserved suffering at work and in our home, don’t take it upon yourself to right the wrong. Don’t cop a bad attitude. Don’t snipe the boss. Endure! Love the boss even if he acts like an enemy. Do good for the boss, even if he doesn’t deserve it. Keep a great attitude. Keep working hard for your boss. Remember that God is watching. He is noting how we respond to undeserved suffering and counting it to our benefit. He will reward us for it, possibly in this life, and if not in this life, then for sure in the next.

This means if we are at work and the boss doesn’t treat us right, don’t try to get even. I don’t take the boss to court to get my rights. God is watching.

This means when the boss messes up our vacation by asking us to stay late or work over the holidays, we don’t cop a bad attitude. We don’t whine. We work hard. We endure and trust the unfair situation into God’s hands, knowing God will pay us back in eternity for how we endure unjust suffering now. We will be rewarded in heaven.

This means if we are a salaried employees instead of hourly and our boss makes us work excessive hours because he knows he doesn’t need to pay us more to get the job done, we endure it. We smile about it. We still speak well of our boss. We work hard and know God is watching. He will ultimately repay us.

This means when we are not getting paid what we are worth, we work like we are getting paid what we are worth because God is watching.

Outside of the work environment, this means that over the holidays when our spouses or family members yell at us or treat us in a way we don’t deserve, we don’t get up on our high horse and think we deserve better. You gently and patiently continue to love and serve others even when they act like an enemy. We know God is watching. He will repay us for facing unjust suffering with a loving kind attitude that honors him.

This means when the coach doesn’t pick us for the starting lineup of the basketball team, even if we feel we deserve the position, we don’t cop an attitude. We work hard remembering that God is watching.

Face undeserved suffering like Jesus, knowing we will be rewarded for patiently enduring.

Continuing to do good, to speak no evil of people and to work hard for a corrupt boss, while we face unjust suffering, is such a radical concept that Peter knew we needed an example of what this looks like. The example he gave us is Jesus.

When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. 1 Peter 2:23 (ESV)
When we read this, we need to remember Jesus’ crucifixion. Crucifixion was the most horrendous way to die. Josephus called it “the most wretched of deaths.” Cicero said, “A decent Roman citizen shouldn’t even speak of the cross because it is too barbarous for civilized men.” Crucifixion was invented by the Persians but it was perfected by the Romans at the time of Christ to be the most horrendous death conceivable by man. A Roman citizen was never allowed to be crucified no matter what their crime. The Romans eventually outlawed it as a form of death for anyone. The Romans even invented a new word to describe the level of agony that could only be experienced on the cross. This word came over to English to describe the most horrible levels of pain experienced only on the cross, *excrūsis* pain. In English we call it excruciating pain. When crucified, some people only lasted a few hours. Some dangled between life and death for up to nine days. While hanging on the cross, the worst of society were encouraged to gather to mock the dying men or women, spit on them and throw rocks on the defenseless. Beneath the cross developed a pile of coagulated blood, sweat and excrement as the fluids essential for life slowly drained to the ground. Animals gathered to tear the warm flesh off those still alive. Birds perched on the body to eat the dying flesh. It was a barbaric form of death that defies the modern imagination.

In agony, those who were crucified would yell, cuss and try and retaliate in any way they could. Yet Jesus was different. Even though his crucifixion was the ultimate example of undeserved suffering, Isaiah told us Jesus was different as he face his undeserved suffering. He didn’t promise revenge upon his tormentors. He entrusted himself into his father’s hands and endured his unjust suffering.

> *He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.* Isaiah 53:7 (ESV)

Jesus suffered in silence.

Jesus was a stud. He was approximately 33 years of age. He was in the prime of his life. He was in great physical condition. He was a construction worker, so he was buff. He was also in good cardiovascular shape. He walked everywhere. When beaten and crucified, his body didn’t easily die. His body had the strength to endure the exquisite amounts of pain.

Isaiah told us he was beaten to the point people didn’t just struggle to recognize his identity but they struggled to recognize him as human. Luke told us they blindfolded him and beat his face. No doubt his eyes were swollen shut, his nose was bleeding and blood ran from his mouth. While I don’t know exactly how it happened, I picture the soldiers placing a bag over his head, beating his face to a pulp. When they took off the bag, he was unrecognizable.

In all of this undeserved suffering, he didn’t try to retaliate. He didn’t insist on his rights. He didn’t try to get even. He entrusted himself to his heavenly
father, knowing that God the Father sees everything and would reward him for enduring unjust suffering in a way that glorified him.

After being blindfolded and beaten, his clothes were removed and his hands were fastened to a post. Using a cat-o-nine-tales, which is a whip with multiple strands, they whipped across his exposed back, butt and legs. The whip had multiple strands. Some had large metal balls to bruise and tenderize the flesh. Some strands had large metal hooks which would sink into the flesh and be used to tear strips of flesh off his back, butt and legs.

All this and he was silent in the face of this unjust suffering. No retaliation. No swearing. No cussing. He simply entrusted himself to his heavenly father knowing that God the Father was watching and God the Son was earning his favor by the way he endured.

This boggles my mind. I know what comes out of my mouth when I hit my thumb with a hammer when pounding a nail. It would be even worse if somebody else hit my thumb with a hammer when pounding a nail. Think of what Jesus went through, and he never sinned. He never promised revenge or retaliated with his words or attitude but entrusted himself to his heavenly father; it is amazing.

When they hung Jesus on the cross, in the moment when he would normally be self-absorbed in agony, what was he doing? He was caring for his mother, entrusting her to the care of the apostle John. He was caring for the thief on the cross next to him and promising him Paradise that very day. He even said, “Father, forgive them because they do not know what they are doing.”

As he hung on the cross the unbroken communion between the father and the son was, for the first time, temporarily broken. In that moment, God the Father poured out on his own son all of his wrath for all of the sin that we deserve. In that moment Jesus has the ultimate experience of undeserved suffering that makes all the physical agony like nothing in comparison. In the middle of that agony, Jesus didn’t cuss. He didn’t promise to get even with you or me as he suffered for our sin. He did nothing negative. He endured it and kept on enduring it until he finally said his dying words, “It is finished.”

Through Christ’s undeserved suffering, undeserving sinners like you and me were brought back into a relationship with God. It was Christ’s undeserved suffering that God the Father used to bring us back into a relationship with himself. When we face undeserved suffering, God the Father can use it as part of bringing other people into a relationship with God when we suffer well like Jesus.

Was God the Father watching God the Son suffer? Did God the Father reward Jesus for how he suffered? Yes!

And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of
Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Philippians 2:8–11 (ESV)

Theologians call this the super-exaltation. God the Father somehow highly exalted God the Son after his crucifixion and resurrection to a place of prominence and authority that he didn’t hold before the cross. God the Father rewarded God the Son.

I am called to a life of undeserved suffering where I handle it like Jesus.

For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. 1 Peter 2:21 (ESV)

We are called to a life filled with unjust suffering. Don’t be surprised when we face it. Prepare our minds for it. When we face undeserved suffering we are to respond to it not by griping, whining, complaining, taking people to court, or trying to get even. We are called to face it like Jesus. We entrust ourselves to our heavenly father and continue to do good to those around us. That is the example Jesus left us to follow.

The word example literally means a pattern to follow. It is the words used to describe how a child learns his or her alphabet by tracing the letters of the teacher on a page. Jesus is our teacher. When it comes to facing unjust suffering, we are to strive to have our life trace the pattern set by his. Endure undeserved suffering while trusting God to be the just judge and continuing to do spiritual and practical good to those around us.

This is not a popular message. Most teachers tell us Jesus came so we can avoid suffering. That is not the message of the Bible. If we are going to be like Christ, we will face undeserved suffering. We are to try to handle it like him. We don’t try and get revenge. We do good to our enemies. We look out for our bosses’ best interests, even if they are crooked. We entrust ourselves to our heavenly father, knowing he will reward us.

We all talk about wanting to be more like Jesus. My friends, the only way to be more like Jesus is to experience undeserved suffering like Jesus and to respond like he did.

Will you stand as I close in prayer?
Life Group Work Sheet
1 Peter 2:18-25

November 16, 2014

Getting to Know Each
1. Have you ever served on a jury? If so, describe the trial and what it was like to be an administer of justice. Do you feel like justice was served in your particular trial?
2. Today we will discuss God’s justice. Think about some of the other attributes of God—His power, presence, knowledge, sovereignty, holiness, truthfulness, and righteousness. How does knowing God is all these things help you trust that He is also just?

Read Colossians 3:22-25
1. How was slavery different in the New Testament era than what we think of as slavery today? How is it similar?
2. As Christians, who are we to ultimately work for in all that we do? Why do you think we so easily lose sight of this?
3. How would you contrast “external service” and work that is done with “sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord”?
4. How might focusing on working for the Lord help us endure unjust treatment from our coworkers, bosses, or clients?
5. What promise does God make to us regarding the injustice in the world in verse 25? How might remembering this help you work “heartily, as for the Lord”?

Read 1 Peter 2:18-25
1. How was Jesus able to face injustice without retaliating? How was He able to face suffering with confidence (v. 23)?
2. On Sunday we learned that “the good news of 1 Peter 2 is that God’s justice has already been satisfied in Jesus.” How might knowing this change your perspective on the difficulties you are currently facing? How might this truth help prepare you for future suffering?
Application Questions

1. What step might I take this week to begin approaching my work with a Christ-centered perspective?

2. What are some practical ways I might deepen my trust in God’s perfect justice? How might my group help me “entrust myself to Him who judges justly” (1 Peter 2:23)?

3. What could I do to remember what Christ accomplished on my behalf on the cross? How might doing so help me face injustice with confidence?
1 Peter 3:1-6 — Ancient Beauty For The Modern Woman

November 23, 2014

Good morning CrossWinds. One of life’s problems is the check out line in the grocery store. While we are waiting in line to pay our bills, we are subjected to the covers of women’s magazines. The women on the cover is usually flawless. They are provocatively dressed and Photoshopped to the point of perfection. Men of decent character try to look away. Many women look on the covers with envy. The single woman looks at the cover model and says, “If I looked like her, I would be married.” The married woman looks on the cover model and says, “If I looked like her, my marriage would be exciting.”

Ladies, this is a great morning for you. We are studying ancient beauty secrets from the Bible. We will learn how a wife can be more attractive to her husband than those cover models, no matter what her age. This will be a great study.

If you are new, my name is Kurt. I am one of the pastors at CrossWinds. On both our Spirit Lake and Spencer campuses we are studying our way through the book of 1 Peter. This morning, we are in 1 Peter 3:1-6. These six verses talk about women, beauty and marriage. 1 Peter 3:7 talks to men, about masculinity and marriage. Normally we would cover verse 7 next week. We are going to make an exception. Next week we start a five-week advent series from the book of Luke. We won’t get back to 1 Peter to talk to the men until January. Guys, I don’t want you to feel left out this morning. This message is geared to wives. Just remember. Verse 7 is coming.

Let’s take a moment to read the passage.

Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, when they see your respectful and pure conduct. Do not let your adorning be external — the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear — but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God’s sight is very precious. For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their own husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. And you are her children, if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening. 1 Peter 3:1–6 (ESV)

This passage gives us three ancient beauty secrets for the modern Christian woman. Ladies, I guarantee you that applying these beauty secrets will make you irresistibly attractive to your husband, but most importantly, incredibly beautiful to God. When we are done we will see an example of these beauty secrets.
secrets in action through the life of Sarah in the Old Testament. At the end of our study I will bring up Cindy, my wife, for a little Q&A about this text and the beauty secrets it reveals.

1. A wife that submits and supports her husband is beautiful.

Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, when they see your respectful and pure conduct. 1 Peter 3:1–2 (ESV)

In this section of 1 Peter, Peter talked about honoring Christ by honoring those in authority over us. This theme of Christians honoring those in authority began in 1 Peter 2 where we learned that Christians are to obey and honor their government officials, even if we don’t agree with them, even if they are corrupt. This means the civil unrest in Ferguson, Miss., where police officer Darren Wilson shot and killed Michael Brown is something Christians should be very cautious about joining. Christians should not be throwing rocks at police. Christians should not smash the windows of local businesses. Christians should not be involved in that kind of social unrest. If the police officer is in the wrong and shot Brown unprovoked, there are God-honoring channels to address grievances. Christians honor Christ by submitting to authority, even unjust authority.

Last week we looked at employer and employee relationships. Christian employees submit to and serve their bosses, even if their bosses are unfair and cruel. Christian employees serve their unjust bosses like they are serving Jesus, giving their absolute best at all times. Can you look for another job if you feel your job is unfair? Of course! While working for your employer, Christians respect their bosses and work hard for their bosses. When they work this way they attract others to Jesus through their lives.

This morning we move from government-citizen submission, and boss-employee submission to wife-husband submission in marriage. How should a wife respond to her husband’s leadership in their marriage? This is a crucial question because it is a matter of honoring Christ and God drawing others to himself through the life of a wife as others see how a wife honors and submits to her husband.

Right off the bat in this verse we see there is order in marriage. A wife is to be subject to or submit to the authority of her husband in their marriage. Most women hear these words and are repulsed. They sound out of touch with modern society. They appear to say a wife is inferior to her husband. Is this true? Is a wife a second-class citizen?

When Peter talks about a wife’s submissiveness to her husband’s leadership, he is not saying a wife is inferior, that she has less value or personhood. He is simply saying that a marriage relationship is not a 50/50 proposition. A husband and wife must function in different roles in the marriage. It is the same way between God the Father and God the Son. In the Bible God the Father and God the Son are both called God. They are equal in identity.
God the Son voluntarily submitted his will to the leadership of God the Father. The Bible tells us that God the Father planned creation but it was God the Son that carried it out. God the Father planned redemption, but it was God the Son who submitted himself to his father’s will and carried it out. Marriage functions in a similar way.

But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God. 1 Corinthians 11:3 (ESV)

There is God-given order in the Godhead and a God-given order in marriage that a husband and wife cannot ignore if they want their marriage to work.

Where did the idea of a wife’s submission to the leadership of her husband originate?

Some people believe a wife’s submission to the leadership of her husband was a product of the fall. It came from sin and Christ came to take that away. They quote Galatians 3:28.

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. Galatians 3:28 (ESV)

The problem with this logic is that it is simply isn’t true. A wife’s submission to a husband’s leadership in marriage was established in Genesis 2 before sin entered the world.

Then the Lord God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.” Genesis 2:18 (ESV)

A wife’s rebellion against her husband’s leadership in marriage came about as a product of the fall.

To the woman he said, “I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.” Genesis 3:16 (ESV)

The Hebrew literally says, “your desire shall be for your husband’s position.” A consequence of sin is that a wife does not want to submit to her husband or be a helper for her husband. She wants to boss him around and tell him what to do. Sin gives her the desire to usurp her husband’s position of leadership in their marriage.

Wives must understand that submission to their husband’s leadership was not a man’s idea. It is also not a husband’s responsibility to enforce it. There is no command in the Bible telling husband’s to make their wives submit. This command comes straight from God. It is part of the creation order. Wives are answerable to God for a lack of submission to their husband’s leadership and a lack of willingness to function as his helpmate. Ladies, don’t get mad at me. I didn’t write the mail. I am only reading it.

Notice that a wife is not to submit to the leadership of all men but only to the leadership of her husband. Women should not seek leadership in their lives
from men other than their husbands, no matter how worthy of respect and honor those men may be.

**How do you answer someone who claims Galatians 3:28 takes away marital roles?**

The answer is pretty simple. In Galatians 3:28 Paul told the Galatians that while there may be different groups of people on Earth, Jews and Gentiles, slaves and free, men and women, when it comes to knowing God there is no privileged status. Everyone is on equal footing. It is only through a personal relationship with Jesus. Christ doesn’t abolish the role relationships between people. He abolishes the barriers between us meeting directly with God.

**How is a wife’s submission to her husband misunderstood?**

**A husband’s leadership is superior to Christ’s.** If your husband wants you to get drunk, to lie, to hang with him at a party that breaks your Christian witness, to lie on the taxes or to speed to work, you don’t submit to that leadership. Wives are loyal to Christ over their husbands. Submission does not mean a wife submits to her husband if he tells her to sin.

**A submissive wife can’t think for herself.** A mindless blonde is not the poster child for the submissive wife. On the contrary, a good wife should be creatively and thoughtfully influencing her husband toward Jesus, not mindlessly following him. Submission does not mean a wife can’t think for herself.

**A submissive wife should be weak or passive.** Proverbs 31 describes a woman who is submissive to her husband’s leadership. She is extremely intelligent and has great leadership abilities. She works with her hands (gardening, cooking, making clothing). She buys land (a real estate agent). She dresses herself with strength (goes to the gym and works out). She gives to the poor (makes meals for those in need and gives to those in need.) She makes and sells clothing (has a side business.) She makes a great bedroom for her marriage (a creative lover.) Submission does not mean a wife is lacking intelligence or leadership.

**What should a wife’s submission look like?**

**A wife uses her gifts and strength for her husband’s benefit.** God gives a wife unique gifts, ideas, talents, and insights that her husband needs. A husband is created needing the gifts of his wife. A wife is to give of her skills for her husband’s benefit. In my marriage, this is very apparent when it comes to clothing. I have no sense of fashion. Sunday morning my wife approves my clothes before I go out the door. I desperately need her sense of fashion. You learned this summer that she is a much better cook than I am. Leave it to me and my children would be malnourished. Thankfully Cindy uses her cooking and color matching skills for my benefit.

A wife is not to strive to have a separate life, pursue a separate career and fashion a separate identity from her husband. Submission means she submits her will to the success of their life together. This doesn’t mean a wife can’t have
a job. It means her job doesn’t come before submitting to her husband’s leadership. Her job does not come before her role as her husband’s helpmate.

Practically this means a wife prays for her husband every day. She encourages her husband throughout the week and when he comes home. A wife is committed to using her gifts for her husband’s benefit, not just her own benefit.

**A wife will bend her will to her husband’s if they can’t agree.** There will be times when a husband and wife can’t agree. A wife needs to decide ahead of time that when those conflicts happen she will defer to her husband’s will. She will also decide ahead of time to not continually pester him or dig at him once she submits to him. Ideally the number of times this happens should be very small because a husband’s greatest desire is to sacrifice himself for his wife.

When Cindy and I were engaged, we needed parts for my car. She wanted to buy them at an auto part store where she used to work because she could purchase them for cost. It was the same store where her old boyfriend worked. I was in school. I asked her to not buy the car part from that store even if she was given a huge discount. We disagreed. She was for saving the little money we had. I was for protecting the future of our relationship. I wanted her to avoid all contact with her old flame. I know what men are like. I am one of them. I don’t trust them.

Cindy and I were locked in a disagreement. To decide where to buy car parts, we went to the Bible. In the end she submitted to my desires and bought the parts at another store without the discount.

**What if my husband doesn’t deserve my submission?**

This is a great question. Does a husband need to earn the right for his wife to submit? Can a husband lose the right to have his wife submit? What if he is lazy, inconsiderate, watches ESPN all day, is financially irresponsible and doesn’t discipline the children? Does a Christian wife still need to respect and submit to that kind of a husband?

I want you to notice Peter didn’t give any exception clauses for a wife submitting to her husband. Peter didn’t give exception clauses because a wife’s submission to her husband is not a right a husband earns from her, it is a role a wife must play in marriage because it is given her from God. In the same way headship in marriage is not something earned or lost by a husband. A husband’s headship and a wife’s submission in their marriage are God-given roles that continue to exist even when your spouse does a really bad job of following his or her role.

Why must a wife continue submitting and supporting her husband even if he is a mess?

**A wife’s submission is a place of power, not weakness.**

Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, when they see your respectful and pure conduct. 1 Peter 3:1–2 (ESV)
The roles a husband and wife play in marriage are God-created roles that a husband and wife are created to function within. Just as a husband and wife’s biologies are created to complement one another and bring great joy to one another, husband and wife roles are created by God to complement one another and bring great joy to one another. When a husband is a good leader and a wife is a good helpmate they will experience great joy. Just as a husband and wife are created by God to complement one another physically, a husband and wife’s roles are created by God to complement one another relationally.

When a wife chooses to submit to her husband and become his helpmate, she steps into a space in his life that God created him needing her to fill.

Wives, a husband is built by God to find your submission to his leadership and help in his life extremely attractive.

Wives, you have the power to change your husband’s life by playing your God-given role. When he sees your respectful and pure conduct, he will be changed. If he isn’t a Christian, it will be hard for him not to become one. A husband finds a wife that delights in supporting his leadership and helping him as incredibly attractive.

The word “see” in this verse is a special Greek word. It means to be captivated by what you see. Wives, when you focus on submitting to your husband, following your husband, being his best friend and his best helper, the Bible says he will be captivated by what he sees. He will have a hard time taking his eyes off you.

Let’s see what this looks like.

Preach wordless sermons. Many wives try to change their husbands by nagging and pestering. This does not work. To a husband, nagging sounds like the teacher from the Peanuts. Submitting to him, delighting in helping him and being his best friend, that will make him listen. He will be captivated by you. Submission is a position of power, not weakness.

Keep your conduct respectful. What does it mean to be respectful? It means to honor or speak well of someone. It is the same word used to describe the way we are to treat God’s name in Psalm 19:9. We don’t use God’s name as a swear word because it dishonors God by dishonoring his name. In the same way, a wife is to never shame to her husband in public or in their home.

Keep your conduct pure. Pure means blameless or modest. This means you watch your relationships with other people, especially other men. You do not let them get close to your heart. If you sense someone of the opposite sex growing close to your heart, you cut them out of your life. Your heart is reserved for your husband. You watch what you read, what you look at on the Internet and how you spend the family money. A husband is attracted to a wife he can trust because she is pure in her devotion to him.

Submission is not a position of weakness, it is a position of power because a husband is created by God to find glory and joy in a submissive, helping wife.
Just as a husband and wife are biologically designed to complement one another, their roles are created by God to bring complement one another.

2. A woman that cares for her spirit, not just her body, is beautiful.

Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear—but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God’s sight is very precious. 1 Peter 3:3–4 (ESV)

This verse is often misunderstood. It says, “don’t let your adorning be external.” Throughout history women have taken this verse and run with it. They tell their husbands God doesn’t care what they look like. There is no need for a hairbrush or a curling iron. There is no need for a bath or a razor. All God cares about is the heart. There is nothing wrong with having more body hair than a wookie. No-shave November isn’t just for men anymore. What do you think? Is this what Peter was saying?

Is it wrong for a woman to tend to her physical beauty?

If you look at the Greek text, it literally reads, “don’t braid your hair, don’t put on gold jewelry and don’t wear clothes.” If Peter was saying a woman should never braid her hair, that would mean a woman also shouldn’t wear clothes. Something tells me he wanted Christian women wearing clothes, especially in public.

Peter was talking about a matter of emphasis. Women can spend an exorbitant amount of time and money on how they look. The word adorning is the Greek word cosmos from which we get our word cosmetics. Peter said, don’t go off the deep end with cosmetics, the fancy clothing, expensive jewelry and fancy hairstyles.

When we study ancient Roman culture we discover many of the ancient women spent a great deal of time and money on clothing, jewelry and fancy hair. Let me show some of their hairstyles. Remember this was all before the electric curling iron. Women curled their hair by heating rocks in a campfire. These hairstyles took hours. These women were willing to pray the price because they wanted to be pretty. They wanted to be noticed.

Is it wrong for a woman to wear makeup and to have decent clothes? Absolutely not. In our study of the Song of Solomon we learned one of a wife’s responsibilities is to take care of herself so she can be the best she can be as a gift to her husband. A husband’s responsibility is to take care of himself so he can be the best he can be as a gift to his wife.

If it is OK for a Christian woman to wear makeup? I have a simple answer. If the barn needs painting, paint it. How much makeup should a Christian woman wear? The simple answer is that if a barn needs two coats of paint, that is what
you give it. Peter told Christian women that external beauty is not wrong but it is not their great emphasis.

Stoics and other schools of philosophy in the ancient world were pointing out that many ancient women were beautiful but if you talked to them in person they were self-centered, irritable and hard to live with.

Peter picked up on this discrepancy between inner and outer beauty that characterized many women in the ancient world and he said Christian women are in a great position to remedy this problem. While exterior beauty is not wrong, exterior beauty was never to be a Christian woman’s primary emphasis. Her emphasis was to be on the inner beauty of her heart.

**What does inner beauty look like?**

**A gentle spirit.** The word gentle means *mild*. It means *calm*. It means somebody that is easy to talk to. You aren’t afraid they will blow up around you when you say the wrong thing. They don’t raise their voice. They don’t yell and are not given to fits of rage. A gentle spirit is the kind of spirit the Holy Spirit is cultivating in Christian women.

**A quiet spirit.** Quiet means tranquil or peaceful. It is like going to the lake in the morning with just the beauty of the sunrise and the call of the birds in the trees. This is the temperament the Holy Spirit is working to produce in godly women. Any man finds that kind of temperament extremely attractive.

**Outer beauty fades with time. Inner beauty gets better over time.**

As Cindy and I get closer to 50, we have become acutely aware of the effects of gravity. Everything in our body is moving closer to the ground. While outer beauty fades, inner beauty improves with time. A husband should find himself more attracted to his wife over time as as he has an increased attraction to her godly character.

**Inner beauty is precious in God’s sight.**

While women are very concerned with outer beauty because they want to be noticed, God notices a woman with inner beauty. God favors a woman of character. Ladies, who would you rather take notice of you? All the men at the mall because you are wearing a mini-skirt or God and your husband because they see the beauty of your heart? Next week we will begin looking at the birth of Jesus. Why do you think God chose Mary? Was it because of her outer beauty or inner beauty that only God could see? God notices a woman's inner beauty.

**Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.** Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her works praise her in the gates. Proverbs 31:30–31 (ESV)

**3. A woman filled with trust in God instead of fear is beautiful.**

For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their own husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord.
And you are her children, if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening. 1 Peter 3:5–6 (ESV)

Women are prone to fear. Where will the money come from? How will things work out? I am concerned my kids won’t make it in school. What if I don’t get dinner done on time? I am afraid my sister won’t like the way I cook the turkey at Thanksgiving. I wonder how many women have trouble sleeping at night because their minds are preoccupied with something that worries them? A wife consumed by worry destroys her beauty. How is a women to get around this? Turn it over to God.

…casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. 1 Peter 5:7 (ESV)

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:6–7 (NIV84)

A Christian woman has the Holy Spirit to bring her comfort. She knows that if God loves her enough to send his own son to die for her, she can trust God with her life. It may be a bumpy life, but God is good. When a wife is filled with worry and anxiety, she doesn’t have to bear it alone. She rises early and gives it to God in prayer. He gives her the peace that passes all understanding so he guards her heart and mind in Christ Jesus. She prays with her husband and asks him to pray for her. God gives them peace together.

But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Matthew 6:30 (ESV)

A husband finds a wife that trusts in God for the future rather than fearing the future extremely beautiful.

Q&A with Cindy

1. What has 20 years of marriage taught you about the power of submission?
2. How important is a kind and gentle spirit for beauty?
3. Do you struggle with worry? How do you get through those times?

Conclusion

When we began, we talked about all those beautiful women on the covers of magazines at the grocery checkout. The truth is they may be beautiful on the outside, but I suspect they are no different from women in the ancient world on the inside. They are probably women with an attractive appearance but an unattractive spirit.

As Christian wives, no matter what your age, God desires for you to be more attractive to your husband than any woman on a glossy magazine cover. Only a Christian woman understands she was created to submit to and help her husband, and when she does that her husband finds her irresistibly attractive.
Only a Christian wife understands that being her husband’s helpmate is not assuming a position of weakness but of power and strength.

Only Christian women have the ability to cultivate inner beauty by the Holy Spirit fashioning them into a gentle and peaceful person. Only Christian women have the Holy Spirit transforming their inner nature to be more like Christ. A husband finds a gentle and peaceful wife extremely attractive.

Only Christian women have the ability to not internalize fear and stay awake all night because of it. Only Christian wives can cast all their anxieties on Jesus and rest assured God will take care of them.
Life Group Work Sheet
1 Peter 3:1-6
November 23, 2014

Getting to Know Each Other

1. What do you think are the most significant differences between men and women?

2. Why do you think God created us with prescribed roles in marriages? How are those roles similar? How are they different?

3. Are there any marriages you look up to or admire? What is it about those marriages that makes them admirable?

Read Ephesians 5:21-24

4. How would you define submission? Why does the word tend to stir up controversy?

5. Submission is the divine calling of a wife to surrender her rights and will to Christ, which enables her to place herself willingly under her husband’s leadership. Based on this definition, what are some checkpoints that help wives know if they are being obedient to this calling?

6. The Bible’s teaching on submission in the context of marriage can easily be taken out of context and abused. Now that we have discussed what submission is, share some examples of what submission isn’t.

7. How does the church submit to Christ? Wives, how might this help you submit to your husbands?

8. Kurt said, “a wife’s submission is a position of power, not weakness.” What did he mean by that? How might God use the submissive heart of a godly wife for His kingdom purposes?

Read 1 Peter 3:1-6

9. Why did Peter encourage women to adorn themselves with “a gentle and quiet spirit” rather than gold jewelry? What does this have to do with submission?

10. Briefly discuss the illustration of Sarah’s submission to Abraham (vv. 3-6). What example did Sarah set?

Application Questions
11. How is Jesus’ work on the cross an example of submission for us? What can we learn from His example?

12. How does a relationship centered on sacrificial love and submission reflect the gospel? How can you and your spouse keep these ideas as a common part of your marriage?

13. What is one step you could take this week to strengthen your marriage? How might we as a group encourage each other to honor Christ in our marriages?
January 4, 2015

Good morning CrossWinds. Welcome to 2015. With the new year we are returning to our series in the book of 1 Peter. When we left off our study, we finished 1 Peter 3:1-6. It was Peter’s words to women on marriage. We called the message, “Ancient Beauty For The Modern Women.” We saw how a wife makes herself extremely attractive to her husband when she assumes her God-given role of his helpmate. Ladies, if you missed that message, I encourage you to check it out online at www.CrossWinds.tv. When we studied 1 Peter 3:1-6, which was addressed solely to women, I promised the men that we wouldn’t ignore them. As soon as we returned to 1 Peter in January, we would study men and marriage. In 1 Peter 3:7 that is what we will do.

Men, before we jump into our study I want you to listen closely. As I speak, you will have a myriad of distractions. You will think of a text message you need to send, a Facebook post you need to make, a tweet you need to read or you will daydream about a football game you can’t wait to see. Make a decision now, before the message begins, that you will not allow yourself to be distracted. Ignoring what we are about to talk about will lead to marital disaster. Applying what we will talk about will lead to marital success. It is your life and your wife. Make a decision to stay focused and learn.

We have a lot to say this morning but it comes out of only one verse: 1 Peter 3:7. Let’s read it together.

Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered. 1 Peter 3:7 (ESV)

In this simple verse we find four clear instructions to husbands on how they should live with their wife for marital success. Let’s jump in.

A husband must learn his wife.

Likewise husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way….

How is a husband to live with his wife? In an understanding way. The word for understanding is an interesting Greek word. It could also be translated as knowledge. It means that as a husband lives with his wife he is to grow in his understanding of his wife and change himself to accommodate her.

Men, when you get married you quickly realize that living with a wife is very different than living with other guys in a college dorm room. In college, you let out a loud bodily noise and you heard cheering from the other guys down the hall. Your wife doesn’t do that. In college, you dried your laundry by stuffing a corner of your wet clothes under the edges of the ceiling tiles in your room. You try that with your wife at home and she is not impressed.
The longer a man lives with his wife and the longer he studies her the more he realizes she is very different. A wife is not just different in her plumbing. She is very different psychologically, emotionally and in every way. She is a very different creature.

Men, when you get married, you must study your wife, learn what she is different and accommodate yourself accordingly. Don’t tell her she must change and become like one of the guys, you accommodate to her. There are two way you study her.

**Learn how your wife is different because she is a woman.**

One of the first things a newly married husband learns is his wife is much more emotional than he is. Guys are usually more even tempered while a woman can go up and down like a yo-yo. Guys, you will learn there are certain times of the month your wife needs some space. You learn to accommodate her. She is different than you because she is a woman. Don’t expect her to be a man. There are certain times it is not good to bring up tough topics. You accommodate to her.

You will also learn that your wife needs time. She just wants to sit with you and be together. She needs attention. Emotionally, men are like microwaves while women are like a CrockPot. Guys are busy all day at work. They come home late at night and can’t wait to be with their wives. They don’t understand why their wives are colder than an icicle toward them. That is because a wife is made emotionally different than a man. A husband needs to start loving over over the breakfast dishes. You need to text her throughout the day. You need to let her know you are thinking of her. That may not be needed for you as a guy but your wife is a woman and she is wired differently. Learn that and accommodate her.

You will also learn that your wife, because she is a woman, most likely has more insecurities about herself. She feels insecure about her looks. Guys need 16 seconds in front of a mirror while a wife can take 20 minutes and still be stressing over a hair that is out of place. That is just a woman for you. She also needs constant words of affirmation from her husband over her looks. She needs to hear, “Honey, you look great.” “Honey, that dress looks good on you.” “Honey, you are beautiful.” She needs to hear continual words of affirmation, whereas a guy typically thinks, “I told you I loved you at the altar. If anything changes I will let you know.” Women are not wired that way. Godly husbands accommodate themselves to the way God made their wives and love them accordingly.

**Learn how she is different than you because she is your particular woman.**

While it is true that women are different from men and a husband is called to accommodate himself to his wife, every woman is different from every other woman. A husband is called to study his particular wife and live with her accordingly.
Some women are night owls. The later it gets, the more energy they have. When Cindy and I were first married, that was her. She used to work the night shift so after midnight the turbo kicked in. Other women are fading by 10 p.m. After 10: at night is not the time to get the credit card bill out and try to itemize the charges because your particular wife may be emotionally shot after 10 p.m.. Husbands, learn your particular wife and act accordingly.

Some women have a great desire for a clean house while other women can tolerate a degree of mess. Find out what your wife is like and act accordingly. If it stresses her out when you leave your socks and dirty underwear at the foot of the bed, don’t do it. If it stresses her out when you leave your shoes in a disorganized heap by the door, organize your shoes.

In college, one of the highlights of the weekend for guys is eating super nachos on the couch while watching a football game. Where do college guys wipe their fingers? You guessed it, on the couch. You get married and your wife will not appreciate you using the couch as a napkin. Your particular wife might stress out when you try to eat anything in the living room. Don’t stress out over this. Just accommodate yourself to your wife and keep the food in the kitchen. That is the husband who lives with his wife in an understanding way. He has studied her and learned how best to live with her and love her.

Now it is time for a test to see if you understand this point. The classic debate of every married couple is the toilet paper roll. Does it roll from the top or from the bottom? Almost every married couple has a different opinion. Today we will solve that age old debate. Men, what is the proper way for the paper to come off the roll? The answer is whatever way your wife wants. That is the proper way. You accommodate.

Learn her love language.

A few years ago we studied the book of the Song of Solomon. In that study we learned about love languages. Every man and woman expresses and receive love in different ways. A husband that wants to live with his wife in an understanding way will learn his wife’s love language and love her accordingly. Guys, what you do when you get home is you take these notes, put them in from of your wife and ask her to circle her love language. If she has more than one, tell her to order them so you know what makes her feel most loved. Learn the way she needs to be loved and act accordingly. Here are the different love languages.

1. **Words Of Affirmation** — Some wives don’t feel loved unless they hear words of affirmation and love from their husbands. They need to hear, “I love you. You are the best wife. You are beautiful. You make me so happy.” If words of affirmation are your wife’s love language, act accordingly.

2. **Gifts** — Some wives need gifts. When you go on a trip, she is looking forward to the surprise you bring home, like a T-shirt from a souvenir shop. Every time she opens her clothes drawer and sees that T-shirt she is reminded of your love for her. Women who have a love language of gifts are
energized when you bring them flowers. She will put them in a vase and every time she sees them throughout the day she is reminded of your love. If that is the way your wife feels loved, act accordingly.

3. **Service** — This means help. Many mothers of young children find service has become their love language. Serving a wife is washing the laundry so she doesn’t have to. It is taking care of the dishes after a meal so she can rest. It is reading the kids a bedtime story. It is watching the kids so she can go to the food store alone. If your wife is at a particularly busy time in your marriage, serving her many needs makes her feel loved. If that is your wife, love her accordingly.

4. **Time** — This is one of the hardest love languages for a man to speak. If you are a busy man, your wife may have this love language. She just wants your time. She just wants you to herself. She just wants you to sit with her on the couch with her and just talk. She wants you to take her to dinner and stare into her eyes not your smartphone. This is the love language of many women. Husbands, this is very hard for us to speak because we always feel we need to be doing something. How do you speak it? To make sure you have time with your wife, schedule time with your wife on your calendar. If you don’t schedule it, somebody else will take it. You set aside time with her first. If she is No. 1, schedule time with her first in your calendar. Husbands, if this is your wife act accordingly.

5. **Touch** — Some wives need to be touched to feel loved. She just wants you to hold her hand when you are driving in the car or walking in public. When you are in church she wants you to put her arm over her shoulder so she can snuggle in close. If that is your wife’s love language, make sure you are speaking it.

    This afternoon, the wise husband will sit down with his wife, give her this sheet and ask her to circle her love languages. If she has more than one, ask her to rank them. The wise husband will learn his particular wife and act accordingly.

**A husband must honor his wife.**

Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman…

The little underlined phrase in your notes hides some interesting language in the Greek. It says husbands show honor to the woman but the word *woman* is literally “the feminine one”. The idea is that a husband should honor his wife because she is feminine. The very femininity of a wife should cause a masculine husband to show honor to her. When a man doesn’t honor his wife, what is implied is he has a lack of masculinity. He is a boy in a man’s body. Real men honor a wife because she is feminine, she is a woman. How does a masculine husband honor the femininity of his wife?
Honor your wife in your speech.

Masculine men always speak well of their wives. He speaks well of her to their friends, at work and under his breath. He doesn’t call her the old lady, the nag, the witch, or the whine. Masculine men don’t just speak well of their wives when they speak to others about her, they always honor their wives in their speech to her. Masculine men never cuss at their wives. They never swear at their wives. Boys yell and scream at people. Masculine men don’t yell and scream at their wives. They don’t text their wives nasty messages. That is boyishness, not manliness. A masculine man always honors his wife in his speech because she is a woman and deserves to be honored and protected.

Honor your wife with your time.

Masculine men don’t become so involved in their work that they have nothing but leftovers to give their wife week after week. Truly masculine men are willing to cancel hunting trips if they haven’t spent any time with their wives in a month. A masculine man make sure she knows she comes first in his time. Masculine men give their wives their full attention when they talk. Masculine men leave work at work because they honor their wives by giving them exclusive time.

Honor your wife financially.

Some men are perpetual low achievers. That is not because they have to be but it is because they don’t like the hard work and stress that comes with a higher paying job. If they went back to school they wouldn’t be able to play video games at night. If they had a more demanding job they wouldn’t have as much free time to hang out with the guys.

That is not honoring a wife. A masculine man works hard and improves himself financially so his wife doesn’t always have the burden of needing to work so the basic necessities of life are met. Your wife is feminine. If her dreams are to be a full-time wife and mother that gives herself to love, nurturing and caring for your children, husbands you need to honor your wife by doing everything you can to make that possible. You are a blessed man if your wife wants to stay home and give her entire life to caring for your children. Honor her financially by doing your best to enable her to do that.

Honor your wife parentally.

Some men think their only responsibility with children is to make them, not to care for them. They refuse to change diapers. They watch the news instead of reading bedtime stories. They think it is the wife’s responsibility to help the kids with their school work while they go play racquetball with the guys at the gym. Newsflash! Parenting is not a wife’s responsibility. The educational and spiritual life of the children in the home is a husband’s responsibility before God. His wife only helps him accomplish it. The husband who steps away from parental responsibilitiesdishonors his wife and is disobeying his calling from God to ensure the spiritual and intellectual growth of his children. Husbands, it is your responsibility to have your children in church. It is your responsibility to have
your kids here on Wednesday night for AWANA and youth groups. It is your responsibility to make sure there is Bible reading and prayer in the home. All your wife should do is help you accomplish the plan. Husbands, get involved in your kids’ lives. Honor your wife parentally.

**Honor your wife emotionally.**

A wife needs intimacy. She craves full transparency with her husband. She needs to know he is not an onion with layers upon layers she needs to constantly peel back to get to what he is really like on the inside. Husbands, while you crave physical intimacy, she craves emotional intimacy. If you are hiding things from her, if you are hiding your struggles or your fears from her you are sowing seeds of disaster for your marriage. You honor your wife by trusting her with the real you. It is only when she knows the real you and she forgives you and loves the real you that you will experience the kind of love that God has designed marriage to offer. There is incredible satisfaction when you wife knows you as you truly are and forgives you and loves you just the same.

Your wife also needs to know that when she shares herself as she really is and if she is upset and emotional you will still listen to her, love her, and be faithful to her. She needs to know she can share how she really feels and you will still honor her emotionally. Honor your wife by meeting her emotional needs.

**A husband must protect his wife.**

…showing honor to the woman, as the weaker vessel…

This little phrase can get some women upset. They think the Bible is telling women they are inferior to men. What does the Bible mean when it says a woman is a weaker vessel? It certainly doesn’t mean a woman is weaker intellectually. Many women are just as intelligent as men. Some wives are much more intelligent than their husbands. It certainly doesn't mean a wife is inferior when it comes to organization or leadership.

What does it mean to be a weaker vessel? This generic description is talking about any way that a woman is not on par with her husband. I thought of three ways where a wife is a weaker vessel than her husband. His greatness in these areas should be used to protect her weakness because she is vulnerable around him.

**Protect your wife physically.**

While a wife typically lives longer than a husband, she is not as strong as a husband. When a husband and wife fight and things begin to get physical, a wife has a reason to fear. A husband can be like a bully picking on someone who is much weaker. A husband should never threaten his wife physically. A husband should never hit his wife. He should never throw her on the couch. When he is angry, he should never tower over her with his stature, raise his voice or raise his hand as if to strike her. He shouldn’t throw things around the house. He shouldn’t grab her chin and press his face into hers to threaten her. A husband is to be his wife’s protector and provider, not her bully. If that is you, you
need to repent of your sin before God right now. You need to get on your knees before Jesus and get on your knees before your wife and ask for forgiveness from God and from her. You need to repent. Call your bullying what it is. Sin.

When a husband and wife get in an argument, the husband does not raise his voice. He does not threaten and yell and cuss. You know what a masculine man does when his wife is angry and yelling at him? He takes it. He refuses to respond to her anger in the same way. He absorbs her anger like a sponge. He continues to love and treat his wife with kindness. Only a fool is drawn into a spitting contest. The model for true masculinity in the face of conflict is Jesus. Men, Jesus is your hero. He is a truly masculine man. He has the ultimate strength. He created the entire universe by himself. He will one day defeat Satan and all his armies by only a single word, yet look at how he took abuse as he was led to the cross to die for us out of love.

He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. Isaiah 53:7 (ESV)

True masculinity is strength under control. When there is a fight in the house, a masculine husband follows the path of Jesus and protects his wife from any abuse that would come from his mouth or his muscles. He has greater strength but it is strength under control.

**Protect your wife emotionally.**

We learned this earlier is the message. A wife is more emotionally delicate than a husband. Guys are better at venting, getting it over with and moving on. You vent on your wife and use hurtful words, you call her names and say vicious things about her, while there may be no visible marks on her body, you have bloodied her spirit. Your wife is emotionally delicate.

In more than 20 years of ministry I have seen this many times. A husband and wife come in for marital counseling and the husband was consistently mean and vicious with his words toward her. He thinks they have a few things to work through. They have verbal fights but he can get over them. It doesn’t work that way for his wife. She holds those hurts on the inside. On the outside she looks great but she is hemorrhaging in her soul. She is hurt. She just can’t let the words go. In the counseling the wife just says, “I’m done. I have no feelings for him. I don’t want to work on it any more. It is over with.” The guy has no idea what happened. What happened is he beat her to a pulp in her emotional world and she is destroyed. The average guy could take it but the average woman can’t. This is why husbands must protect their wives emotionally.

Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them. Colossians 3:19 (ESV)

As a husband you protect your wife’s emotional world from abuse that comes from your mouth. She is more emotionally delicate than you are. You are her protector.
Protect your wife from misuse of your authority.

In marriage, the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church. That is right out of Ephesians 5. A wife is to submit to the leadership of her husband. Sometimes a husband may ask his wife to do things that are not wrong but they are hard. An example of that comes from our family. As many of you know, my mother recently died of cancer. When she was diagnosed, our family drove to be with my parents for a few weeks. Even as we left it was apparent that both mom and dad were not well. Only days after we returned one of us needed to fly back to Pennsylvania to help them. I asked Cindy because of her caregiving skills and because I needed to work at church if she would be the caretaker of my mom and dad. She spent the entire summer apart from her children. There was a lot of tears. She missed them terribly but she did it because I asked her. She wanted to be my helpmate and care for my parents in ways I couldn’t. A husband has the authority to ask his wife those type of requests. Some husbands take that authority and abuse it.

They use it to serve themselves rather than to serve the family and others. Abuse of that authority is realizing you don’t have enough money in your budget for a new motorcycle or fishing boat so you ask your wife to go to work so her income can cover the payments of your new fishing boat. That is misuse of your authority. Maybe your wife wants to be a stay-at-home mother and she wants to bless you with many children but instead you tell her she needs to work so you can live a a higher level of affluence while you deny her desire to bless you by bearing and caring for your children. That is abuse of your authority.

A husband must follow Christ with his wife.

…since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.

Most men look at following Christ as a woman’s job. The typical U.S. congregation is 61 percent female and only 39 percent male. On an average Sunday, there are 13 million more women in church than men. On an average Sunday, 25 percent of married women attend church without their husbands. This is where guys get it all wrong. Following Jesus is not a womanly thing. It is also not an individual thing. It is a couple thing. A husband and wife are to follow Christ together. The health of our relationship with God is so closely connected to the health of our relationship with one another. Husbands, if you let your marriage go sour or you treat your wife, that is one of God’s chosen daughters,

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10 This statistic comes from Barna’s figures on male/female worship attendance, overlaid upon the Census 2000 numbers for adult men and women in the U.S. population.

11 I came up with this figure by taking the U.S. Census 2000 numbers for total married adults and overlaying Barna Research’s year 2000 percentages of male vs. female attendance at weekly worship services. The figures suggest at least 24.5 million married women attend church on a given weekend, but only 19 million married men attend. That’s 5.5 million more women, or 22.5%. The actual number may be even higher, because married people attend church in much greater numbers than singles.
with dishonor or disrespect, God promises he will not answer your prayers. It just won’t work. Your marital life and your prayer life are connected at the hip.

On the flip side, when you have a great marriage that is transparent, genuine and loving, you can expect God to answer your prayers. The health of your relationship with God and the health of your marriage is connected.

As I thought about this, I remembered Genesis 2:18.

Then the Lord God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.” Genesis 2:18 (ESV)

The idea is that a man needs a helper and God created the first wife to be Adam’s helpmate. We often think about this in purely pragmatic terms. A wife is great at making dinner, cleaning the house, and being a best friend.

As I thought about this, I began to wonder if there is more to this than meets the eye. Since a husband and wife are so connected to God and to one another, maybe a wife is given to her husband not just to be his practical helpmate but to be his spiritual helpmate as well. A husband and wife are to follow Christ together.

How do you know if you are following Christ with your wife? Husbands, when was the last time you prayed with her? When was the last time you read the Bible with her? If you can’t remember, you are following Christ alone.

I know when I am struggling, I am blessed to be able to text my wife and ask for prayer. When we do our family Bible study, I am always amazed by the insight Cindy brings to our family time in the Bible together. It is things I would never think about. I guess that shouldn’t surprise me. God made her different than a man. He made her to help me in ways I can’t help myself.

Today is the first day of a new year. Husbands, make 2015 different. Repent of following Christ by yourself and follow Christ together with your wife. Before you drift off to sleep at night, reach over and grab your wife’s hand and pray for her, pray for your children, pray for your church and pray for needs of those around you. Let her pray for you and whatever else God brings to her mind. In the morning, before you leave for work give her a big hug and hold her tight. Before you let her go, pray for her. Thank God for her and pray for her day. Turn off the television and read a chapter of the Bible together. Grow in Christ with your wife.

Husbands, learn your wife, honor your wife, protect your wife and follow God with your wife, so that nothing may hinder your prayers.
Getting to Know Each Other

1. Why is learning to love his wife always one of the best decisions a husband can make? (see Ephesians 5:28)

Read 1 Peter 3:7

1. What does it mean to learn your wife? What are a few somewhat comical ways that your wife is different from you that you didn’t know until marriage?

2. Why is it important for a good husband to work with his wife’s preferences and personality rather than grade against them? How do those differ from those of other women?

3. Share two or three ways mentioned in the sermon that a husband is to honor or praise his wife.

4. Why is it important for the husband to follow Christ with his wife? In what ways can a husband and wife help one another to follow Christ?

5. What happens to our relationship with God when we fail to follow his clearly revealed will to love and respect our wives?

Read Ephesians 5:25-33

1. What one word describes the way a husband loves his wife? Husbands, what is one tangible way that you will sacrifice for your wife this week to make her feel loved?

2. What results will flow from a family where the husband loves and respects his wife?

Read 1 Corinthians 7:1-5

1. How does sex and intimacy relate to loving your wife? How does this honor God?

Next Steps

1. Why are these passages important to not only those who are married but also to those who are single?
2. What one specific step can you take this week to show your love to your spouse in a way that you haven't in the past?

3. What one specific step can you take to grow in Christ with your spouse this week?
Good morning! My name is Kurt. I am one of the pastors. This morning we continue our series in the book of 1 Peter. We pick up at 1 Peter 3:8. I ask you to turn there in your Bible. If you need a pew Bible, 1 Peter 3:8 is found on page 1,015.

In this section of the book, Peter taught about the way our relationships with Christ changes our relationships with other people. He showed how our relationships with other people should make Christ attractive. Peter talked about how Jesus changes the way we relate to the government. Christians are model citizens. He talked about the way Jesus changes the way we work as employees for our employers. Even if our bosses are crooks, Christians are to be the best employees. He looked at the way Jesus changes marriage. We learned how Jesus teaches a wife to honor her husband and support his leadership in their home. Last week, we learned how Jesus changes how husbands love their wives. Instead of dominating a wife, a Christian husband accommodates her, honors her and protects her. A husband and wife follow Christ together. The best husbands and wives are Christians because Jesus changes the way they relate to other people.

This morning, Peter finishes up his teaching on how Jesus changes the way we relate to others. This final section is teaching for all of us.

Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing. For “Whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit; let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.” 1 Peter 3:8–12 (ESV)

This is the big picture. If you can get this, everything else in the message will fall into place. As a Christian I live my life to bless others. Blessing is a church word. Don’t let its “churchier” roots throw you off. It simply means to do spiritual and practical good for others. As a Christian, my life is not about me living for myself. The way I live the Christian life to make Christ attractive is I bless others. I do spiritual and practical good for people around me. As we work through these verses, we will develop our thoughts under three headings.

1. I bless others in the church by living in community rather than isolation.
2. I bless my enemies by doing them good and refusing to take revenge.
3. God promises to bless me when I bless others.
I bless others in the church by living in community rather than isolation.

Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. 1 Peter 3:8 (ESV)

Modern society is about the individualism. We have personal computers, personal phones (the iPhone is my phone), personal cars and personal e-mails. Everything is geared for the individual. This teaches us to think about life from a narcissistic angle. All I care about is what affects me. You see this in church.

Many Christians only want to attend church as spectators. They treat church like they are attending a movie at the theater. They come for the show and not to connect with other people. They want to listen to the sermon, sing in worship and go to lunch. See you next week. The reason we do this is because the individualism and isolation of our culture teaches us to come to church but not connect with one another at church.

The church is to be a different place. The people of the church are to be radically different people. We aren’t to think of church like attending a movie. In church, I am there to connect with other people and serve them because it is about community. Peter detailed out what this life of community in the church looks like.

**Unity of mind**

This is unity of mind, not uniformity of mind. It does not mean that everyone is a clone. It means that in church we have the same aim of serving God and loving one another but God made us different. Some of us are home schoolers. Some of us are public schoolers. Some of us are blue collar, others are white collar but there is to be a unity among us in our attitude and approach to life. We put honoring God and other people first.

How do we keep this unity of mind and stay focused on the big picture? This is where the Holy Spirit comes in.

...eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Ephesians 4:3 (ESV)

As we walk with Christ, the Holy Spirit supernaturally works inside of us to produce unity between us, not uniformity among us. The church is to be like an orchestra. In an orchestra there are different instruments playing different parts. If everybody plays his or her own thing, it is a mess. When everybody plays his or her part and follows the conductor, they make beautiful music. The conductor in the church is Jesus. When we follow him he takes our differences and makes something beautiful. Live in community, not isolation. Life is not about me, it is about blessing others.

**Sympathy**

Sympathy means in the church we should be concerned about others, not just ourselves. If we are just concerned about ourselves and what affects our family, that is selfishness. In our hyperconnected society it is easy to stay
emotionally disconnected because we see so much pain on the news and in the movies. It is not God’s plan that in the church we say emotionally disconnected from others’ pain. One of the ways we bless others in the church is we have sympathy for them when they go through times of pain. The word sympathy literally means “to suffer with” someone. It means to enter into the experiences of others either by multiplying their joy or dividing their sorrow.

Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Romans 12:15 (ESV)

This means when something really great happens in someone’s life in the church family, we are genuinely happy for them. We don’t ignore them. We celebrate with them. If someone is struggling, we try to call them or message them on Facebook to pray for them and tell them we care.

When my kids were little, our family attended wrestling tournaments on the weekends. In a wrestling tournament, if you place in the top three, they give you a little gold, silver or bronze medal. On Sundays, my kids loved wearing their little medals to church. Some people just ignored them but there were a handful of people in the church that saw them wearing their little medals, they stopped and congratulated the boys. They celebrated with them. That meant the world to my boys. They loved church, because while they didn’t have grandparents that lived near us, they had grandparents in the church who celebrated their victories with them. That is the picture of the church. We love in community, not isolation. We use our lives to bless others.

Brotherly love

We are to develop a type of love for one another that’s not just surface love but family love. We are to treat each other like they are part of our family. They are our brothers and sisters. The church is to be a family and to love one another like family. If you don’t have family, the church is to be the place where you find family love and people who care. We don’t live in isolation but in community.

Unfortunately, in the modern church, it is harder to feel like family. It is easy to come to church early and leave early. It is easy to treat church like a movie theater. Church is to be like a family reunion. A family spends time together and enjoys being together.

At CrossWinds, there are ways we try to get around this. This is why we serve coffee and cookies. When family members pay a visit, you put on the coffee and get out the snacks. We take it to an extra level. We make really strong coffee. We drug you with caffeine to force you to talk to other members of your family. In the same way, once a month we have lunches after service; they are family meals. When family gets together they always eat together so the family can connect. When big families get together they break into smaller groups for more intimate conversation. In the same way, we have Life Groups that allow you to connect with family members on a deeper basis. Look what the Bible says about the importance of the church living together in community like a family rather than isolation.
Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart… 1 Peter 1:22 (ESV)

Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. Romans 12:10 (ESV)

**Tender hearts**

What is a tender heart? It means feelings of concern for others that express themselves in action. We see so much violence on television and in the movies that we are desensitized to pain. We can become hard-hearted toward others and their pain instead of tenderhearted. Most of us don’t think we are hard-hearted. How do we know if we have become tenderhearted? Here is a test. When you see someone in the body going through pain do you feel a deep enough response that you actually do something about it? Do you give them a call? Do you bring them a meal? Do you visit them in the hospital? If you never respond to the pain of others in the church, chances are you are hard-hearted. That may be tough to say but if the shoe fits, wear it.

How can we be more tenderhearted? Here are some suggestions. When someone is going through a hard time, take a moment to text them or message them on The CITY to let them know that you prayed for them and you care. Another way to be tenderhearted toward others in pain is to bring a meal. Many of you ladies are great at this. People know you care when you give them a meal. If you are like me and you can’t cook, just give someone a gift card.

When we get the prayer list off The CITY, do you actually pray about the needs of others in the church or do you just delete it? If you delete it, you may be hard-hearted instead of taking the 60 seconds to read the prayer requests and pray for the needs of your church family.

Here is a recommendation. Don’t just pray for people on the prayer list but get on The CITY, type in their names in the upper right hand corner and they will come up. Send them a two sentence message letting them know you prayed for them and that you care. If you have been here for a while and you have not signed up for The CITY, please sign up. The reason for The CITY is to help us live in community and care for one another. Don’t choose to live in isolation from your church family. I ask you to get on The CITY, create your profile, put up a photo, and put up information about yourself. How do you sign up for an account on The CITY? Simply go to www.crosswinds.tv and follow the instructions. The reason for The CITY is so we can live in better community not just isolation.

**Humble minds**

This means not thinking we are better than others in the church. It means not self-promoting. When I was studying, the example that came to mind was Mike Singletary.

Do any of you remember him? He was a famous football player for the Chicago Bears. At the time he played for the Chicago Bears, I lived in Chicago. I had a chance to attend his church. When he retired they interviewed him and I
learned something about him I didn’t know. Mike volunteered on Sunday nights to clean up the sanctuary. His job was running the vacuum between the seats in the auditorium and getting down on his knees to pick up discarded bulletins. Sunday afternoon he was the MVP on NBC and late Sunday night he was vacuuming the church serving as a janitor. That is the way the church works. We are to be humble-minded people. We don’t think of ourselves as above others, we do whatever it takes to bless and serve others.

While living to bless others in the church sounds radical, Peter’s next words are even more unsettling.

**I bless my enemies by doing them good and refusing to take revenge.**

Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless for to this you were called… 1 Peter 3:9 (ESV)

When I was growing up, one of my favorite movies was “Rambo.” Who has has seen the movie? One of the famous lines from the end of the movie after Rambo had single-handedly destroyed a town and the corrupt police force behind it came when Rambo’s former commanding officer, Colonel Trautman, asked him why he did this? Do any of you remember his words? “They drew first blood.” In other words, they hurt me first so I have a right to get revenge. I have a right to get even. They drew first blood means they started it but I am going to finish it.

The problem is that many Christians think more like Rambo than Jesus. We think that if someone hurts us, we have a right to get even. The people of Jesus do not seek revenge. **We do not repay evil for evil.**

We repay every evil done to us with a blessing. Look at what the Bible says.

**But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you...**

Matthew 5:44 (ESV)

It doesn’t say blow your enemies up with a grenade, shoot them or cuss at them. It says go out of your way to love them, help them and pray for them.

That means we don’t raise our voices. It means we don’t call people four-letter words. It means we don’t threaten them. It means we don’t take them to court. We do them good. We speak kindly to them.

I know what you are thinking. You are trying to find a way to squirm out of this and find a loophole. Don’t go there. Just obey the Bible. Don’t repay evil with evil. Love our enemies and pray for them. Bless them. Period! That is the way Christians live.

Another important word here is the word revile. It means using insulting or hurtful talk. It means when people swear at us or say insulting things about us, we don’t swear back. We don’t raise our voices. We don’t gossip about them to others. We bless them.
As Christians, when our spouses yell at us, we do not take it up a notch higher and yell at them. Remember that our entire lives are to be about blessing others, even our enemies. Our entire lives are to represent Christ by blessing others, by doing spiritual and practical good even for our enemies. When others do evil toward us, they cuss at us, they hurt us, they talk bad about us, they drag us into court. We go out of our ways to bless them and do them good. The Bible says this repeatedly.

But I say to you who hear, 
Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. 
To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from one who takes away your cloak do not withhold your tunic either. Luke 6:27–29 (ESV)

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Romans 12:14 (ESV)

Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” To the contrary, “if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.” Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. Romans 12:17–21 (ESV)

See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone. 1 Thessalonians 5:15 (ESV)

Look at how Jesus handled evils and injustices that were done to him.

When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. 1 Peter 2:23 (ESV)

This is revolutionary. Can you imagine what it would be like if every Christian was known for blessing those who hurt them? Can you imagine what it would be like if we were known for loving our enemies instead of acting like Rambo and getting even with them? Can you imagine what is would be like if we gave special focus to doing practical good to those who say nasty things against us? This would produce a completely different society. The entire world would know Christians were different in absolutely no time at all when we live more like Jesus than Rambo.

Incidentally, this doesn’t mean that our enemies will instantly become nice people and their hurt-filled words or evil actions will magically evaporate. Sometimes things will get worse. Some people are evil enough that by showing them kindness it actually annoys them.

Is there ever a place for Christians to fight against evil? Yes.
God ordained the government to punish those who are evil.

The government has a job to punish those who do evil. While we are not justified in seeking personal revenge, the job of the government is to punish evildoers.

…or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. 1 Peter 2:14 (ESV)

Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God’s servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God’s wrath on the wrongdoer. Romans 13:2–4 (ESV)

While a Christian doesn’t have a personal right to take revenge on those who do evil toward them, that very same Christian, if he or she is a police officer and acting as a representative of the government, does have a right to stop evil and use deadly force if necessary.

Why does God want us to bless our enemies? It is essential to following Christ that we pray for those who do evil toward us and verbally insult us. This is a non-negotiable part of the Christian faith. Showing undeserved grace and kindness toward those who do evil and speak against us is the very same thing God did for us through Jesus. We were his enemies. He blessed us and showed us undeserved grace and kindness. He did us spiritual and practical good when we didn’t deserve it. Just as God blessed his enemies we are to live the gospel so others can see it by blessing our enemies.

But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful. Luke 6:35–36 (ESV)

Every Christian must live this way. This is an essential part of the Christian life. Our enemies will never understand the gospel message if we don’t show it through our lives to them.

God promises to bless me when I bless others.

…for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing. For “Whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit; let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.” 1 Peter 3:9–12 (ESV)

This is an amazing promise. God promises to bless us, when we are blessing others, especially when we are blessing our enemies. We think the world moves along with simple cause and effect; God is not involved. Nothing
could be further from the truth. God is involved in our everyday lives. When we use our lives to bless others in the church, when we use our lives to bless our enemies who do evil against us, rest assured that God will look out for us and bless us.

We think that if we don’t look out for ourselves, nobody else will look out for us. That isn’t true. God promises to look out for us and care for us. That is the Christian life. We don’t live protecting ourselves but we live blessing others, even our enemies, and trusting God to bless us and take care of us in return.

This sounds insane so Peter bolstered his point. He gives us an example in the Old Testament of what looks like the foolish blessing of an enemy. It comes from Psalm 34. Psalm 34 was written by King David when he was in a low point in his life. He was anointed king by Samuel but old king Saul was still on the throne. King Saul made it his life mission to destroy David. David, the anointed king, found himself running for his life from Saul, the wicked king. That was a messed up situation. David had done nothing but good to Saul but Saul was an enemy who tried to take David’s life.

If you look at the heading of this Psalm in your Old Testament, you will see this Psalm was written when David was forced to hide from Saul in Philistine territory. The Philistines were Israel’s enemies. To survive in enemy territory, David needed to pretend to be insane. His enemies didn’t kill him because they thought he was a lunatic.

It was during this time when the Holy Spirit inspired David to write that God will look out for those who are righteous but his hand will be against those who do evil. David wasn’t to focus on getting even with Saul. He was just to focus on blessing his enemies and let God take care of where the chips fell. How did it end up?

David eventually escaped the Philistines and two times after this David had the chance to act like Rambo, take revenge and kill Saul, but he refused.

In 1 Samuel 24, Saul went into a cave to relieve himself. He didn’t realize David and his men were hiding in the same cave. Saul was literally caught with his pants down. Even though his troops begged David to make use of the opportunity to kill Saul and get his revenge, David refused to kill him or do evil against him. David cut off the corner of Saul’s robe to prove he was there but he let Saul go. Look at what Saul said to David afterward when he realized David could have taken his life but didn’t.

“Is this your voice, my Son David?... You are more righteous than I, for you have repaid me good, whereas I have repaid you evil.... So may the Lord reward you with good for what you have done to me this day.” (1 Samuel 24:16, 17, 19)

In 1 Samuel 26 David had another chance to take Saul’s life when David snuck up next to him while he slept in his own camp. David’s military officers once again urged David to take Saul’s life and get his revenge, but once again David refused to do evil against him. Instead he took Saul’s canteen and slipped
away under cover of darkness only later revealing to Saul, from a safe distance, that he had his canteen and was right next to him the night before didn’t take his life. What did Saul say about this?

“The Lord rewards every man for his righteousness and his faithfulness…. Blessed be you, my son David.” (1 Samuel 26:23, 25)

Did God reward David? Did God take care of blessing David? Yes! Saul eventually took his own life and God brought David to the throne of Israel. David didn’t need to do evil to his enemies. All he needed to do was bless them and trust the results into God’s hands.

Peter’s point is that God still promises to bless us when we are blessing others, especially our enemies. We don’t need to look out for ourselves. We just need to bless others and let God take care of us.

**Conclusion**

What does this look like in real life? On October 2, 2006, Charles Roberts, a milk truck driver who delivered to Amish farms, entered a one-room Amish schoolhouse with a 9mm handgun. The teacher at the school escaped to a nearby farm but Roberts was prepared for a long standoff. He ordered the boys in the school to help him bring from his truck a shotgun, stun gun, wires, chains, lumber and nails. He eventually let the boys go after he forced them to help him barricade himself in the school with 10 of the girls before the police and state troopers surrounding the building.

If you remember the news, you know he shot the girls before taking his own life. Five of the 10 girls died. What happened next left everyone in shock. On the day of the shooting, a grandfather of one of the murdered Amish girls was heard warning his relatives not to hate Roberts. Only hours after the massacre an Amish neighbor went to Roberts’ wife, three children and parents to offer forgiveness. The Amish community visited and comforted Roberts’ widow and three children. One Amish man held Roberts’ sobbing father in his arms as he wept for an hour over what his son had done. The Amish set up a charitable fund to help Robert’s family and they contributed to it. Thirty Amish attended Robert’s funeral. That more than doubled the size of his funeral because nobody else from the public gave him the honor of attending. Let me show you what Marie, Charles Roberts' widow, said about the way the Amish lived their faith as they forgave and blessed her family. ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ERTjBWxzzEY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ERTjBWxzzEY))

Charles Roberts’ widow, Marie, also wrote an open letter to the Amish community.

Your love for our family has helped to provide the healing we so desperately need. Gifts you’ve given have touched our hearts in a way no words can

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describe. Your compassion has reached beyond our family, beyond our
community, and is changing our world, and for this we sincerely thank you.

Some commentators who wrote about this were critical of the Amish for
forgiving and blessing so freely. They said offering forgiveness was inappropriate
when their was no repentance or remorse. The Amish responded by saying their
willingness to not seek revenge but to offer forgiveness and to go out of their way
to bless the wife and family he left behind was because they wanted to follow the
words of Jesus.

My friends, we are called to use our lives to bless others. We are to bless
others in the church by not living in isolation but in community. We are to bless
even our enemies. The world will see understand the gospel when we offer
forgiveness and blessings to others just like God has offered forgiveness and
blessing to us. As we do, the name of Jesus is made famous and people are
drawn to Christ.

Let's pray.
Life Group Work Sheet
1 Peter 3:8-12

January 11, 2015

Getting to Know Each Other

1. Peter called us to live in community. What in our culture pulls us away from close relationships and makes community difficult?

Read 1 Peter 3:8-12

1. In 2:18—25 Peter spoke to servants and told them how to relate to their masters. In 3:1—6 he spoke to Christian wives and showed them how to honor their husbands. In 3:7 he spoke to husbands about living wisely and considerately with their wives. In 1 Peter 3:8, who is Peter teaching them how to relate to? Does this have any significance in your small group relationships?

2. In 1 Peter 3:8, Peter lists five traits of living in biblical community rather than isolation. Have each member of the group choose a trait and explain what it looks like in practical life.

3. In 1 Peter 3:9, Peter talks of not repaying evil for evil. In the past, what evil was done or spoken against you that you struggle to forgive? At work? In your family? On social media?

4. How should Peter’s words in 1 Peter 3:9 which are a paraphrase of Jesus’ words in Luke 6:27-28, change the way we handle our anger and desire for revenge?

5. How was the truth of 1 Peter 3:9 lived out in Stephen’s life (Acts 7:54-60)? Who did Stephen learn this from (Luke 23:34)?

6. Stephen blessed his enemies in an extreme situation. How does the example of Stephen and Jesus help us find strength to bless our enemies in the more mundane oppositions we face?

7. Our ability to bless others that hurt us comes from knowing that our life is in God’s hands. God promises to fight against those who do evil and to answer the prayers of those who do right. How does confidence in God’s sovereignty over life give us the strength to respond with a blessing in the face of evil?
8. Is it possible to bless those who do evil against us from our own strength? What role does dependence upon the Holy Spirit, Bible reading and prayer play in living this kind of life?

Read Romans 13:1-4 & 1 Peter 2:14

1. What is the difference between personal revenge and the God ordained role of a nation’s police and military punishing those who do evil and protecting the innocent?

Next Steps

1. This week, what is one way I can living in community, rather than isolation, and do good for someone in my church family?

2. This week, what is one way I can bless someone that has spoken or acted in an evil way toward me?
January 18, 2015

Good morning! I want to send a special greeting to those who are watching live on the Internet. It is good to have you. This morning we continue our study in the book of 1 Peter called *Hope In Hard Times*. Today we come to a turning point in the book.

Let me show you what I mean. The book of 1 Peter divides itself into three large pieces. You may want to physically put your finger in the book of 1 Peter so you can see this.

1 Peter 1:1-2:10 — What is our new identity in Jesus?

From 1 Peter 1:1 until approximately 1 Peter 2:10 is about our new identities in Jesus. In Peter’s summary of this section he said we are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a people for God’s own possession set apart to proclaim God’s excellencies on this earth. We are to live holy lives in an unholy world to reach our society with the saving news of Jesus. The first section of the book is about who we are in Jesus and that we should live a holy life in an unholy world to reach people for Jesus.

1 Peter 2:11-3:18 — What does it look like to live a holy life in an everyday world?

From 1 Peter 2:11 to 1 Peter 3:18 is the second part of the book. In this section, Peter described what it looks like to live a holy life in our everyday relationships. If you skim this section you can see he talked about the way Christians live in different spheres of influence. He talked about Christians obeying their governments. He talked about Christians honoring Christ as an employee with a corrupt employer to introduce an employer to Jesus by our good and honest work. He talked about Christian wives living for Jesus and making Jesus appealing to their non-Christian husbands by their transformed characters. We saw how Christian husbands treat their wives differently than other men treat their wives. Last week Peter wrapped this section up by summarizing the way Christians live their lives. We live our lives blessing one another and others around us. We even bless our enemies. We do everyone we can spiritual and practical good. This brings us to the third section of the book that we begin today.

1 Peter 3:19-4:19 — What does it look like to live a holy life when facing hard times?

How do we use hostile people and undeserved suffering to make the name of Jesus famous? How can we introduce people to Jesus through the way we endure suffering? This is an important topic.
Last week we learned Christians are to bless their enemies. We are to say good things to those who insult us, spread rumors about us and lie about us. We aren’t to be known for taking our adversaries to court. We aren’t to be known for swearing at people when they hurt us. Islam takes revenge for supposedly disrespecting Mohammed. We are the exact opposite. We are not a people of revenge. Rambo is not our hero. Jesus is our hero. We extend blessing and forgiveness to others even when they don’t deserve it, just like God extends blessing and forgiveness to us through Jesus because we don’t deserve it.

This week we look at a subtopic of that. Sometimes our enemies agitate us only once or twice, other times they sink their teeth into our flesh and hang on like a pitbull. We work with our enemies every day. We go to school with our enemies. We live next to our enemies so we can’t get away. The question is how do we endure unjust suffering over the long haul?

Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness’ sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God’s will, than for doing evil. 1 Peter 3:13–17 (ESV)

Try to stop undeserved suffering by doing what is good.

Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? 1 Peter 3:13 (ESV)

Peter asked a rhetorical question. Who is going to harm you for doing what is good? Usually people who do practical good for others are not in conflict with other people. When an enemy is your neighbor and you shovel his driveway in the winter, it is hard for him to stay mad. When you work with your enemy and his car breaks down so you offer to drive him to work, it is hard for him to stay mad at you. When you go to school with your enemy, and your enemy is struggling in math so you offer to tutor him, it is hard for him to stay mad. It is usually the folks that are hurting others, cheating others or swearing at others that it is easy to fight with. People who have fits of rage or outbursts of anger that are the ones getting in trouble. It is hard to be angry at somebody when they are good, kind, decent people that go out of their ways to help you. It is that simple.

Peter said that when you have people that pose themselves as our enemies and say evil things about us or go out of their ways to hurt us, what you do is you go out of your way to do them practical good. It will be hard for them to stay angry when we take the initiative to be good and kind to them.

When someone hurts us, this is hard. When someone hurts us, we like to build walls. We set up our own little fortresses of self-pity and pride and gossip to all our friends about how right we are and how wrong they are. We spend all our
energy telling our friends the evil our enemy do so we can make ourselves feel better. It is a subtle way of trying to get revenge. Don't go there. Instead of building walls to protect ourselves from our enemies, build a bridge to reach your enemy. Spend your energy doing them good.

I love the way Peter described this. He said we are to be zealous for what is good. Zealous is a descriptor of a Jewish political group that started in the days of the Maccabees and existed in the days of Jesus called the zealots. They were the crazy religious fanatics. They lived in the desert. They engaged in terrorist warfare against Rome. They knifed Romans in the crowd. They were a terrorist group that was willing to die for the cause if necessary. The zealots were the absolute nut-cases for the cause.

Peter said we are to be like the zealots. We are to be nut-cases doing lots of practical good for people around us, especially our enemies. If you have someone who talks smack about you on social media, go out of your way to befriend them and do them practical good. The Bible says this again and again. But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you...

Luke 6:27 (ESV)

So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith. Galatians 6:10 (ESV)

See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone. 1 Thessalonians 5:15 (ESV)

For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. 1 Peter 2:15 (ESV)

Interestingly, the Greek verb in this verse is in the optative tense. That is a rare tense. It means a situation is possible but it is unlikely. In other words, if you are zealous for doing what is good, it is unlikely your enemies will continue to harm you. Being a zealot for goodness typically defuses our enemies.

A few years ago, before I moved to Spirit Lake, I had a man in my life who decided to become my adversary. He attended the church I pastored. He began talking evil about me in public and in private. He gathered a group in the church and just said nasty and untrue things about me. This was a very trying time in my life and the life of my family as we saw a split emerge in the church with my outspoken adversary leading the opposite group.

Why was he against me? It was years later I learned he had me confused with someone else who was a child molester. No, I was never a child molester, but at the time, his confusion cost me dearly.

As I was praying about this, I remember reading some of the verses we just read. This man was building a new house on a lake and I knew what I needed to do. I took my day off and volunteered my time to help him build his house. I wanted to do anything I could to diffuse the situation. It was awkward. It was weird.
I am not here to tell you that he magically became my friend. He didn’t. I left the church to prevent a split because he continued to undermine me. I knew I had done what God wanted me to do. He knew, and others knew, I had nothing against him. I just wanted to bless him.

When we have an enemy that persists, we persist in doing them good in hopes of defusing the situation. It is not guaranteed this will work but it is likely it will work.

What are we to do when our enemies refuse to turn away? What are we to do when we need to batten down the hatches and endure our enemies? That is the question the next verse’s answer.

How do I endure unjust suffering?

But even if you should suffer for righteousness’ sake… 1 Peter 3:14 (ESV)

1. Know I am blessed.

But even if you should suffer for righteousness’ sake, you will be blessed… 1 Peter 3:14 (ESV)

Whenever Christians are enduring undeserved suffering, especially for following Jesus, they must remember that enduring unjust suffering means they are blessed by God, not cursed by God. What does that blessing look like? Last week we learned two ways God blesses us in unjust suffering. God watches over those who suffer for righteousness and he answers their prayers.

For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil. 1 Peter 3:12 (ESV)

God also promises to give special ear to their prayers and watch over their life.

The Bible also tells us that this blessing from God is not just in this life but God will reward us in the next life for our unjust suffering in this one.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. “Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” Matthew 5:10–12 (ESV)

I like the way the Greek says this. It says, “Are you suffering for doing what is right?” Then it just says one word, “Blessed!” Whenever we suffer for doing what is right, and we don’t deserve it, remember that God promises to bless us as we endure it. We are not cursed by God, we are blessed. When it is hard to endure unjust suffering be confident that God will bless you because of it in this life and the next.

2. Don’t be afraid.

…have no fear of them, nor be troubled… 1 Peter 3:14 (ESV)
Whenever we face suffering and people are saying evil about us, we tend to get pretty uptight about it. We get fixated on fearing the person who is committing the evil against us. I don’t know what happens to you but my heart starts pounding, my armpits start sweating profusely, my voice locks up and I can hardly talk. Peter said that if you are suffering and don’t deserve it, don’t be afraid of the person who is after you. You have nothing to fear.

That doesn’t mean the evil done to us isn’t a big deal. It doesn’t mean the evil words spoken against us won’t hurt. It doesn’t mean someone won’t hurt us physically. It doesn’t mean we won’t lose a ton of money if they steal from us. It simply means the person who is doing evil toward us and hurting us is not the one we ultimately need to worry about.

The Greek wording of this verse is almost an identical quote from the Greek Old Testament words of Isaiah 8:12-13. In Isaiah, the Assyrians were threatening to attack Judah when Ahaz was king. The kings of the northern kingdom of Israel and the kingdom of Syria wanted Ahaz to join them in a three-nation alliance to defend themselves against the ruthless Assyrians that were threatening to attack. King Ahaz didn’t want to join the alliance. When he refused, Israel and Syria decided to attack him. Out of fear, Ahaz approached the invading Assyrians and entered into an alliance with the enemy. Ahaz, out of fear, was driven to conspire with the enemy. In the book of Isaiah, God had a talk with Ahaz. “Ahaz, you have it all wrong. You are afraid of the wrong things, external circumstances. All you have to worry about is that you are in a right relationship with God. Don’t find your confidence in alliances. The only thing you have to worry about is that you are in a right relationship with God. Make sure you stay in a right relationship with him and he will take care of you. Stop worrying about the other armies and nations.”

Do not call conspiracy all that this people calls conspiracy, and do not fear what they fear, nor be in dread. But the LORD of hosts, him you shall honor as holy. Let him be your fear, and let him be your dread. Isaiah 8:12–13 (ESV)

Peter took the wording of this verse and brought it straight to his readers and ultimately to us. Don’t worry about those who have set themselves up as your enemies and want to make you quake in fear. Don’t worry about that guy who has it out for you at work. Don’t worry about the bully at school who picks on you. Don’t worry about getting in trouble for reading your Bible on your lunch break. Ultimately everyone will stand before God. If you are in a right relationship with God through Jesus, you have nothing to worry about. Your enemy, that probably doesn’t know Jesus, will face an eternity in hell with just retribution from God for making you suffer. That is the one to fear.

Jesus put it this way.

And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Matthew 10:28 (ESV)
3. In my heart honor Christ as Lord.

...but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy ... 1 Peter 3:15 (ESV)

This is a quote from Isaiah 8:13. Isaiah 8:13 tells us to honor the Lord as holy in our hearts and let him be the one we fear. This is the same wording as Isaiah 8:13, with one change. The Lord of hosts is called Christ the Lord. Peter said the same God that Isaiah told Ahaz to fear in the Old Testament is actually Jesus in the New Testament.

When you are suffering for doing what is right, focus on honoring Christ in your heart. If we can't create a right relationship with our enemies, we can certainly make sure we are in a right relationship with God. Persecution and trials and opposition gets us on our knees in a hurry. It causes us to search our hearts, confess our sins, fast, pray and then seek God really hard. To that end, trials are good. They cause us to check our relationships with God through Jesus. They cause us to honor Christ in our hearts. For that, we can be grateful. We may not deserve it when people hurt us and say evil things about us, but God uses it for our good as we go through large steps of spiritual growth in these rough times.

So we can confidently say, “The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?” Hebrews 13:6 (ESV)

Later in the book of Isaiah, in Isaiah 37, the Assyrians came back to attack Judah. This time Hezekiah was king instead of Ahaz. He didn't go to other countries for treaties and security. He went to God. He literally got on his face in the temple calling out for God to save the nation from the Assyrian attack. What happened? Isaiah 37:36 says the angel of the Lord went out during the night and killed 185,000 members of the Assyrian army. The Jews got up to look around, and they were not surrounded by an Assyrian army but they were all dead. Who should we fear? The army coming against us or the God who can wipe 185,000 out in a single night in their sleep and justly send them to hell for eternity when he does it? Who should we fear, someone who can kill our bodies or someone who can condemn our souls to hell forever? When enduring unjust suffering, set your heart to honoring Christ as holy in your life. Your relationship with God is the only thing you have to worry about.

4. Use the opportunity to witness.

...always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you... 1 Peter 3:15 (ESV)

This is one of the famous verses everybody quotes to make sure we can explain the truth of the our faith to anyone who asks. There is nothing wrong with that. It is good. In context, that is not what the verse means. In context, it means we need to be able to explain to people why we are blessing our enemies. We need to be able to explain to people why we are do good to our enemies. It is not because we are wimps. It is not because we are vegan herbal
tea drinkers. It is not because we are pacifists. It is because we are Christians. We bless our enemies just as God blessed us when we were his enemies.

We are just giving to others what we are getting from God in hopes of them coming to Jesus.

This means when Christians are enduring undeserved suffering we don’t miss the opportunity to bless our enemies because we know God will use these times of conflict to bring many people to him. It is just like a fight in middle school at the bike racks. Do you remember when all the kids in the school came out to see the fight at the bike racks? That is what people do when they see we are oppressed by our enemies. When they see we respond by blessing them instead of fighting them, everybody will be listening to what we say about Jesus.

5. Keep a good conscience. Speak of my enemies with gentleness and respect.

…yet do this with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. 1 Peter 3:16 (ESV)

Peter said, when you are talking about your enemies make sure you talk about them with gentleness and respect. Don’t call them jerks. Don’t call them idiots. Don’t rip into them. Don’t go there. Resist the temptation to raise your voice, insult your enemy or hurt his or her in any way. As you stand before God, strive to keep your conscience clear so you have nothing to be ashamed of before God.

This is really hard. It is easy to let nasty comments slip by the lips. It is easy to say hurtful things, snide remarks and unhelpful words. It is natural to point out others wrongs and our rights.

What happens is when our enemy continues to say rotten things about us and instead of fighting back we bless them, over time it becomes clear that our enemy has the problem, not us. Jesus is made famous through the way we handle conflict.

Remember that enduring suffering for what is right is very different than enduring suffering for what is wrong.

For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God’s will, than for doing evil. 1 Peter 3:17 (ESV)

Not all suffering is the same. Suffering for doing what is wrong is very different than suffering because you did what was right. Suffering is never fun. Nobody looks forward to it. But if two men go to jail, one accused of being a Christian while the other was accused of murder, even though they suffer the same way, the eternal outcome of their lives will be radically different.

While all suffering is hard, not all suffering is the same. What does this look like in real life?
Conclusion

What does this look like in real life? Jacob DeShazer was born November 15, 1912, in West Stayton, Oregon. He graduated from high school in 1931 and enlisted in the Army Air Corps in 1940. In 1941, when he heard the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor he promised to “make the Japs pay.”

Soon he had a chance to fulfill his wish. The United States developed a plan to get the first bombs on Japan called the Doolittle raid. The plan involved flying modified B-25 Mitchell bombers off the aircraft carrier USS Hornet. After bombing fuel storage facilities in Japan, the planes were on their way to China. Unfortunately the planes flew into a strong headwind and were forced to leave the aircraft carrier 200 miles before their planned departure.

After bombing Nagoya, Japan, Jake and the rest of his crew were forced to parachute into enemy territory because their plane ran out of fuel. He was captured and sent to Tokyo where he was held in a series of P.O.W. camps for 40 months. He was brutally tortured to the point of losing consciousness, sometimes on a daily basis. He was kept in solitary confinement for 34 months, nearly froze to death and nearly starved to death when fed only a few pieces of stale bread and weak tea at each meal. For months, he was forced to sit on a stool and stare at the back wall of his cell for 16 hours a day and not move. As a result, he almost died. Three of his crew members were executed. One died of starvation.

At one point in his captivity, Jacob’s guards allowed him to read a Bible. Although he only had the Bible for three weeks, when he read it, he gave his life to Christ and memorized large portions of it before it was taken away. One of the parts God really pressed on his heart were the passages about loving your enemies and doing them good. God changed the hatred and fear in his heart toward his guards into a sense of pity because they didn’t know the forgiveness of Jesus. He decided to follow the Bibles’s words about loving his enemies. Even though he was consistently tortured by his captors he began speaking kindly to them and greeted them in Japanese by saying, “Good morning.” Like we saw in our first point, that kindness made a change in the way he was treated by the Japanese secret police. They eventually gave him more food which helped him survive. After the war God gave Jake a desire to keep loving the Japanese enemies that tortured him mercilessly for almost four years. He returned as a missionary to Japan where he served 30 years.

Japan’s culture is a culture of katakiuchi, which means revenge. When the Japanese heard that the man they tortured mercilessly for four years was returning to Japan to bless his enemies, they were fascinated. They had to hear why he did this. Jake found himself speaking to crowds of 8,000 to 10,000


14 http://melbarger.com/deshazers_remarkable_forgiveness.html
Japanese a week to tell them about Jesus. He preached 40 sermons a month and was giving away 6,000 Gospel of John tracts a month.

While in Japan, Jacob wrote a tract titled, “I was a prisoner in Japan.” One of the people who read that tract was Mitsuo Fuchida. He was a Japanese pilot that led the attack on Pearl Harbor. Fuchida was a Buddhist. He couldn’t understand how someone could love his enemies. He couldn’t deny it was true because Jacob was living and helping the very people who tortured him. Fuchida decided to buy a Bible and read it for himself. After reading it, Fuchida renounced his Buddhism and became a Christian.

Ultimately Fuchida met with Jake to thank him for forgiving his enemies. He thanked him for the way he lived his life introducing him helping introduce him to Jesus. Fuchida, one of the men who dropped the first bombs on America, and Jake, one of the men who dropped the first bombs on Japan, eventually joined forces traveling Asia together telling the world about how Jesus changes your life and enables you to forgive your enemies.

My friends, enduring undeserved suffering for what is good is very different from enduring suffering for what is wrong. Love your enemies. God will use it to help people understand the gospel when they see it lived in your life. You may be surprised. God may use your undeserved suffering in a way you never expected. That is what happened to Jake DeShazar. It may happen to you.

15 http://archive.statesmanjournal.com/assets/pdf/J0103377317.PDF
16 http://www.biblebelievers.com/fuchida1.html
Getting to Know Each Other

1. Have you ever experienced suffering for righteousness' sake? What does unjust suffering look like in our region?

Read 1 Peter 3:13-14

1. What purpose did God create us for? Is God's calling for us to do good works conditional? Is suffering while doing good the exception or the rule?

2. Share a personal story of a good deed that was directed toward you in your life and how that event affected you.

3. Read 1 Peter 3:9. How should we treat those who do evil to us or cause us suffering?

4. Read Matthew 5:10-12; 1 Peter 3:12; 4:14. What are ways that God blesses us in the midst of unjust suffering?

Read 1 Peter 3:14-15

1. As a disciple of Jesus, Peter was intimately acquainted with fear. Give some examples of this in his life. (cf. Jn 18:15-18, 25-27; 21:15-19)

2. How do we overcome our fear of others when faced with it? How does our culture deal with fear? Is it helpful or biblical to follow popular coping techniques? What does the Bible say about how to overcome fear?

3. What does it mean to "honor Christ as holy" in your hearts? How can you do that in your life? What does this say about what you value most in life?

Read 1 Peter 3:15-17

1. How does blessing those who cause you to suffer provide a chance to share the gospel? Can you think of an example from your life or the life of someone you know?

2. Why is it important to keep clear conscience before God and to treat your enemies with gentleness and respect?
Next Steps

1. What are some groups in our own culture that are hostile to Christianity (i.e., LGBTQ, "Freedom From Religion" group)? How can we proactively engage and bless them, trusting that God will reward those acts of kindness?
January 25, 2015

Welcome to CrossWinds. It is great to worship together. If you are connecting from the Internet, thanks for joining us. If you are new, I want to welcome you. My name is Kurt. As a church we are studying through the book of 1 Peter. This is a great book and as we get to the end we are studying some challenging, but richly rewarding, sections of the book. Peter taught us how to handle the trials we face in life. No trial grabs our attention more than someone setting themselves up as our enemy to do us evil. People that set themselves up as our enemies. When people lie about us and speak evil about us, it cuts our hearts. Two weeks ago Peter taught us how we treat those enemies.

Rather than returning evil for evil or insult for insult, we bless our enemies. We go out of our ways to do them spiritual and practical good. We are to love our enemies. That sounds totally contrary to everything in our human nature but that is the way Christians must treat our enemies. The reason this is important is because it is the heart of the gospel message.

We were enemies of God. We had done evil to God, yet God blessed us. He sent his own son to die for us and save us from our sin when we didn’t deserve any of it. We are to act the same way to our enemies. We are to go out of our ways to bless them, even when they don’t deserve it because that is the gospel message. When our enemies ask why we love them and bless them, we use that opportunity to tell them that we bless them as God blessed us. I want to treat you the same way and do good to you when you are my enemy so you understand the way God loves us.

Sometimes the reason God allows there to be enemies in our lives who do evil against us is because he is giving us a platform to tell them the good news of Jesus, not just with words but with our actions. This week we will see how God can bring about good out of undeserved suffering.

Last week we moved from how to respond when evil and unkindness to how to endure our enemies. Today we look at what possible good can come from unjust suffering?

For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, because they formerly did not obey, when God’s patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the
right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him. 1 Peter 3:18–22 (ESV)

This is a very interesting passage. It is considered to be one of the hardest passages in the Bible to understand. If you read the scholars, there are 180 different interpretations in 2,000 years of church history. While there are different interpretations, I believe we can discard many of them to get to its meaning. While some parts of this passage are obscure, the big message is abundantly clear. Everything in this text is about answering the question, “What possible good can come out of undeserved suffering?”

Peter answered it by saying, “Let me give you an example. Let’s look at all the good God did through the undeserved suffering of Jesus.” His argument is that if God had a good purpose for allowing unjust suffering in Jesus’ life, you can rest assured that he also has a good purpose for allowing undeserved suffering in your life.

Let’s look at all the good God did with the unjust suffering of Jesus. God used Christ’s undeserved suffering to pay for our sins and bring us to God.

For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God… 1 Peter 3:18 (ESV)

Christ understands unjust suffering.

When we experience unjust suffering, the first thing we feel is that nobody understands. That isn’t true. Jesus understands undeserved suffering. Jesus experienced the ultimate in undeserved suffering. He was beaten and whipped to the point he wasn’t even recognizable as a human being before he was crucified. He deserved none of it. There was not a single evil word he had spoken. There was not a single evil action he had done. All Jesus had done was bless people, teach people, heal thousands and feed thousands. All Jesus did was good, yet he was whipped and crucified for it. The first thing we need to know when facing undeserved suffering is that Jesus understands what it feels like.

Christ’s suffering was purposeful.

Jesus suffered as the righteous for the unrighteous. Jesus suffered in our places for our sin to bring us to God. Jesus’ unjust suffering had a good purpose. From a strictly time-bound human point of view, Christ’s suffering looked purposeless. As Jesus’ followers watched him die they couldn’t imagine any good was around the corner. From God’s perspective, we can now see Jesus’ suffering was purposeful. It wasn’t trite suffering. It was suffering to pay for our sin and bring us to God. In the same way, as adopted children of God, we can rest assured that when we face unjust suffering, it may feel purposeless, but from God’s perspective, we can say with confidence that God has a good purpose for it. We may not see what God is doing with our suffering in the heat of the moment, but from the vantage point of eternity it will make sense.
Christ’s suffering was powerful.

Christ suffered once for sins to bring us to God. Peter showed us the power of Christ’s sufferings. Jesus died once for all sin. He paid for sin in full. That means the sins of Christians in the 1600s, the sins of Christians in 2014 and the sins of Christians in 2025. He paid for all of sin by enduring one great act of undeserved suffering.

Peter’s point is that what God will do in our lives through our unjust suffering is powerful. We may not understand what God is up to until eternity, but rest assured that no wound we experience is wasted. There are powerful redemptive purposes behind our suffering. God’s plan may be that others will in heaven because of how we handle unjust suffering. Rest assured, God has a powerful purpose behind what you are going through.

**God used Christ's undeserved suffering to conquer the fallen spiritual world.**

…being put to death in the flesh but made alive in (by) the spirit (Spirit), in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah… 1 Peter 3:18–20 (ESV)

For most of us, the train just jumped the tracks. What is happening? Who are the spirits in prison? Why did Peter start talking about Noah? What is happening? At this point the Bible scholars go nuts. This is the section of the passage that has 180 different views in church history. While it is hard to know exactly what it is happening, that doesn’t mean I don’t have an opinion.

What do you do when you have a tough text like this? The first thing to remember is that context is king. Context determines meaning. We need to remember what Peter was talking about and make sure we understand this as part of the flow of his argument. Roman Catholics find purgatory in here. Peter was not talking about purgatory. Some Christians in church history see a second chance at salvation. Peter was not talking about a second chance at salvation. The majority of the 180 different views of this text are completely foreign to Peter’s flow of thought and for that reason I think it is safe to discard them. The first thing we saw about Christ’s undeserved suffering is that it took care of our entire sin problem and brought us to God. These verses, which are the next section of that argument must have something to do with the good that was accomplished by Christ's undeserved suffering.

Our text says Jesus was put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit. This is one of the trickiest parts to translate in the Greek. Some people believe that when Christ died he was made alive in the spiritual world and he spiritually preached to spirits in prison. I don't think that is the best translation or the best explanation. If it simply means Jesus was alive spiritually after his death, that is no big deal. The Bible says everybody is alive spiritually after their death. There is no good news.
The Greek doesn’t have capitalization for proper nouns. I think the spirit talked about here is the Holy Spirit and it could be translated with a capital “S.” This means Christ was resurrected by the power of the Holy Spirit. This a completely viable translation. The good news of Jesus is not just that he died on the cross for our sins but that he rose from the dead. Those are usually the two pieces we find together in the Bible. This is telling us some of the good that happened when Christ rose from the dead.

After Jesus rose from the dead, he went and preached to the spirits in prison. Who were these spirits and where was this prison? The very terminology feels foreign to the Bible. It cannot be spirits that are in hell because the Bible tells us nobody is in hell until the final judgment. What is this referring to?

Apparently there are spirits, fallen angels, or demons that are kept in some type of prison right now. They are not roaming the Earth. God in his grace bound them to hold back their wicked influence upon the Earth. Interestingly, this is what we find in other passages of Scripture.

And the angels who did not stay within their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains under gloomy darkness until the judgment of the great day. Jude 6 (ESV)

Jude described some kind of angelic rebellion where fallen angels left their proper place, apparently they came to Earth to try to destroy the people on it. God stopped them by binding them in chains to be kept for the final day of judgment.

For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell (Tartus) and committed them to chains (pits) of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment; 2 Peter 2:4 (ESV)

One very important thing we need to notice is the word for hell in this verse. I told you earlier that nobody is in hell until final judgment. It appears these demons are in hell right now. I want you to look at the footnote on this word. The word for hell in this verse is not the word hell. It is actually the Greek word Tartus. For many years Tartus was translated as hell but it is actually a different place. Tartus comes from Greek and Roman mythology and is mentioned in Jewish apocalyptic literature. It is a place where the Greeks and Romans believed enemies of God are kept bound. They believed the location of Tartus was in the heart of the Earth. The Greeks and Romans believed it was a holding cell for what we would call demons. What we see in these three verses attest to a place where particularly evil demons are kept bound so they no longer roam the Earth. They are held there by God until final judgment.

The next question is, “When did they roam the earth?” According to what we read in 1 Peter 3, they roamed the Earth in the days of Noah. When we turn to the book of Genesis to read about Noah, look what we find just before the flood.
When man began to multiply on the face of the land and daughters were born to them, the sons of God saw that the daughters of man were attractive. And they took as their wives any they chose. Then the Lord said, “My Spirit shall not abide in man forever, for he is flesh: his days shall be 120 years.” The Nephilim were on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of man and they bore children to them. These were the mighty men who were of old, the men of renown. The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the Lord regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. So the Lord said, “I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens, for I am sorry that I have made them.” But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord. Genesis 6:1–8 (ESV)

We have undefined spiritual beings that are not human roaming the earth. They were called “the sons of God” and they were doing things they shouldn’t. They were taking human wives and having children with them. The Bible doesn’t give us all the details of what was happening. Some scholars think these powerful evil beings had physical male bodies and they were taking human women to conceive children so they could create a hybrid demonic human race that would be unredeemable. Some think they were demons that so strongly possessed human men that they literally controlled them and their children would be like little demons. We don’t know the details on this. We can only speculate of the fine details.

We do know their influence on the earth was so bad that the thought of every man’s heart was now evil all the time. The entire human race was now so evil that God decided to bring the flood and wipe out the entire earth, except for Noah and his family. In the flood these evil demons were apparently bound by God and put in this holding place called either the prison, the pit or Tartus. Thankfully they are no longer roaming the earth to be such an evil influence on humanity, but they are in God’s prison awaiting their final judgment. If that wasn’t so, the earth would be just as wicked as before the flood with their influence around.

Just so you know, God’s decision to flood the earth and destroy everything wasn’t a rash decision. The Bible tells us that for years God had Noah begging people to repent of their sin.

…if he did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven others, when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly; 2 Peter 2:5 (ESV)

As Noah built the ark, people mocked him for building a boat where there was no water. Noah kept warning people about the flood and pleading with them to repent but after 120 years of boat building nobody listened. Finally God said, “Enough is enough. The ark is done. Noah, get inside with the animals. I will shut the door and my judgment will fall.”
In the same way Peter was encouraging these Christians who were suffering unjustly in an unholy world to be like Noah. Keep telling people to repent. Keep living a righteous life even though other people are persecuting you for it. Some who are persecuting you may even be demonically inspired to persecute you, just like Noah experienced in his day. Just remember, God’s judgment will come.

There is another layer to this story. One of the things I love to do is research the history and culture of the ancient world to better understand what the Bible meant to the ancient people who read it. The historical background of this section is particularly interesting.

Apparently Noah was a popular guy in Asia Minor. In that part of the world four slightly different versions of the flood story circulated in pagan culture. There was even a town in the area that had the Greek word for ark as part of its name. It was believed the ark of Noah came to rest on one of the nearby mountains. The Roman emperor even minted an entire series of coins with a drawing of Noah and his wife on one side and the Roman emperor’s face on the other. Noah was well known in their culture, like Christopher Columbus is known in our culture. Peter talked about Noah and God’s judgment for sin because everybody understood that, even if you weren’t familiar with the Bible.

A second interesting piece of cultural background comes from studying the books people read is this part of the world. There was a book in the ancient world that was not part of the Bible, but it was popular reading. It is called the book of 1 Enoch. It is like an ancient version of a Dan Brown novel. 1 Enoch has some biblical facts mixed with a bunch of fiction. Guess what part of the Bible 1 Enoch pulls its information from? Genesis 6. 1 Enoch is a fictional story about the mysterious “sons of God” beings talked about in Genesis 6 and how they interacted with Noah. In 1 Enoch they are called “the watchers”. They follow the biblical story line of being powerful fallen angels that are extremely evil. They come to earth to sleep with human women and produce children who are extremely evil giants.

Incidentally, if you saw the Russell Crow movie Noah you need to know the movie uses the book of 1 Enoch as part of the Noah story. In the movie, the watchers are powerful spiritual beings that are heroes who help Noah. In 1 Enoch, the watchers are the villains that should be destroyed. In the book of 1 Enoch the watchers are infesting the earth and trying to destroy the human race and they are bound for all eternity in prison awaiting final judgment by God. That is the same terminology used in 1 Peter 3.

This is interesting stuff. Peter used the terminology of 1 Enoch and the spiritual prison to describe the Biblical truth of the binding of powerful fallen demons.
You may wonder how this applies to us and fits into Peter’s argument. Peter brought up something everybody in his audience understood, Noah and the binding of powerful demonic in a prison, to make a point. Jesus’ unjust suffering didn’t just conquer sin but it conquered the entire unseen spiritual world that is in rebellion against God. Every fallen spiritual being, even the super powerful ones that ruined humanity before the flood, were conquered by Jesus’ undeserved suffering. When he rose from the grave he went to their prison and proclaimed ultimate victory for a portion of the human race to the very demons who tried to destroy the human race.

This is why Peter closed by saying:

…who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him. 1 Peter 3:22 (ESV)

We understand the identity of angels. Who are the authorities and powers? In Jewish rabbinic literature, the terms authorities and powers are the titles of powerful high-ranking angels. Jesus’ undeserved suffering didn’t just pay for the sin that separated us from God but it beat every single spiritual being that seeks to separate us from God, even the super powerful ones that roamed the earth before the flood.

This truth is not unique to Peter. Paul said the same thing and made the same argument.

And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities (demonic rulers and authorities) and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him. Colossians 2:13–15 (ESV)

This is the same thing Peter said. There is immense good that God did through the unjust suffering of Jesus.

One of the questions that comes to mind is how can we participate in Christ’s incredible victory from his undeserved suffering? Peter, being a good pastor, gave us the answer.

An appeal to God for a good conscience through Christ, which is seen in baptism, is the ark that carries me through God’s final judgment.

Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ... 1 Peter 3:21 (ESV)

In the ancient world, when people believed, they were baptized. They didn’t have altar calls. If you repented of your sin and trusted in God to save you from your sin, you were baptized. That was your public proclamation of trusting in Christ. That is the way it should be today. It is not baptism that saves you. It is the appeal to God for a good conscience through Jesus that saves us from our sin. That appeal to God through Jesus is the ark that carries us through God’s
final judgment. Peter saw a parallel between the ark carrying God’s people through the first judgment and trust in Christ, which is pictured through baptism, carrying God’s people through God’s final judgment.

This morning, if you haven’t trusted in Jesus to save you from God’s final judgment, today is the day. Now is the time. If you haven’t had a chance to be baptized and go public with your trust in Jesus to carry you through the final judgment, talk to me after the service.

Since Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking about suffering in the flesh.

Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking… 1 Peter 4:1 (ESV)

When we face undeserved suffering, especially because we are following Jesus, don’t lose hope. Be confident that God has a good purpose behind the unjust suffering. It is not purposeless suffering; just like Jesus, it is purposeful suffering. It is not useless suffering but it is powerful suffering. We may not understand why God is allowing us to suffer unjustly until eternity but when we get there we will understand. We will admit that God is good and that he blessed our lives.

Even though we may be oppressed by evil forces that are behind the unjust suffering we experience, rest assured that every demon was conquered by Jesus. Jesus proclaimed his victory over them when he rose from the grave and right now he is sitting in triumph over all of them at the right hand of the father.

My friends, as a child of God, you can be confident God will do good through the unjust suffering in your life, just like he did through the unjust suffering in Jesus’ life.

Let’s pray.
Life Group Work Sheet  
1 Peter 3:18-22  
January 25, 2015

**Getting to Know Each Other**

1. Share a time when you experienced unjust suffering. Are there good ways and bad ways to handle suffering? How did you do? Did you learn anything from it?

**Read 1 Peter 3:18**

1. Why is it significant that Jesus only suffered once for sins? What is the result of Jesus’s unjust suffering?

2. Why is it important that Christ suffered for our sins? What does this suffering teach us about God and how he relates to our personal suffering?

3. Read Isaiah 53:10. Isaiah tells us that it was the will of God for Jesus to suffer. Why is it good news that it was God’s will for Jesus to suffer? What does that tell us about our own suffering?

**Read 1 Peter 3:19-20**

1. How do these verses encourage us to persevere in proclaiming repentance during unjust suffering?

2. Read 2 Peter 3:9. What does the story of Noah teach us about God’s patience with humanity? How is God’s patience seen today?

3. Read Genesis 6:5-8. Peter uses the life of Noah to encourage his readers to endure suffering. Can you think of any parallels between Noah’s context and yours? How can Noah’s life be an encouragement to you just as it was to Peter’s audience?

**Read 1 Peter 3:21-22**

1. What is the significance of baptism in the life of a believer? Are we saved through baptism?

2. What is the basis for having a good conscience? How is this different than the world’s understanding of a good conscience?

**Next Steps**
1. When we are being oppressed by evil forces in this life, why is it important to know that Jesus sits at the right hand of the Father in victory? How does this help us to remain faithful in our everyday lives?
1 Peter 4:1-6 — Choose Suffering Over Sin

February 1, 2015

Welcome to CrossWinds. It is great to have you. I want to say a special, “Hello” to those of you connecting via the Internet. This morning we continue our study in the book of 1 Peter called “Hope In Hard Times”. The latter part of the book is teaching us how to live a holy life when going through trials. Peter had a special focus on how to honor God when the suffering we face is undeserved.

This morning he continues on the theme of suffering. In the verses we are about to study, Peter’s goal was that we would be willing to suffer for holy living rather than collapse when faced with the pressures of living in a sinful society. Peter’s objective was that we would develop the necessary courage to live a holy life in an unholy world, even if it costs our lives. Let’s read the text before we study it.

Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God. For the time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry. With respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you; but they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. For this is why the gospel was preached even to those who are dead, that though judged in the flesh the way people are, they might live in the spirit the way God does. 1 Peter 4:1–6 (ESV)

Peter gave us six truths to remember when we are tempted to follow the sinful ways of society. Remembering these truths protect us from folding under pressure. Let’s jump in and look at the six truths we need to remember.

1. Remember that suffering for righteousness is to be expected.

Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking… 1 Peter 4:1 (ESV)

Peter’s point was simple. Suffering for righteous living is normal. Don’t be shocked. Many times the wicked get away with murder and the righteous suffer when they don’t deserve it.

We tell our children that honest living and right choices always pay off. That is not always true. Many times the wicked prosper and those who honor God suffer. The Psalmist wrestled with this.

For I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For they have no pangs until death; their bodies are fat and sleek. They are not in trouble as others are; they are not stricken like the rest of mankind. Psalm 73:3–5 (ESV)
In the news we hear about people who are caught doing insider trading on Wall Street. We read about people like Bernie Madoff who steal millions of dollars. What is amazing is not the number of people who are caught cheating. What is amazing is the number of people who aren’t caught but they are doing the same things and getting away with it. They don’t suffer for sin.

Many of us experience work politics. People are fired or denied a promotion simply on account of a boss’ personal agenda. It isn’t fair but people get away with it all the time. Those who are honest and don’t play into corruption but live a holy life often find themselves in trouble because they didn’t follow the sinful ways of the world around them. This is exactly what Jesus experienced.

But the word that is written in their Law must be fulfilled: ‘They hated me without a cause.’ John 15:25 (ESV)

Jesus did absolutely nothing wrong; he lived a holy life. That is why he was hated. When we choose right living that honors God, we should expect to be hated by society, just like Jesus.

Remember the word that I said to you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. John 15:20 (ESV)

The more we become like Christ, the more we can expect to be treated like Christ. Expect to suffer for right living, just like Jesus.

If you are a young adult and choose to honor God relationally and abstain from premarital sex, expect lots of pressure for intimacy before the wedding night from your friends. Many of them will be shocked and think you are weird because you are not involved premaritally. Probably the most powerful pressure will come from the media where every television program seems to have couples in bed. Most movies have a sex scene. Soon we feel that “everybody is doing it.” Maybe I should be doing it. Maybe we shouldn’t be doing everything sexually before marriage but we should probably be doing something sexually before marriage. The Bible’s standard for premarital intimacy is absolute purity. Young men are to treat young women as sisters with absolute purity before the wedding night. (See 1 Timothy 5:2) When you act out the Bible’s standard for sexual purity, don’t expect people to accept you.

This means when you are at a friend’s house and he or she decides to watch an “R” rated movie with sex and gore, you have to make a choice. You could decide to go home or you could leave the living room and park yourself in front of the chips and dip in the kitchen for the next 2 hours during the movie. Either way, when you make a choice for a holy life, your friends will mock you. They may even leave you. We will suffer for righteousness.

Peter said we need to be prepared for this kind of suffering. Don’t let it shock you. The more choices we make for holiness where we imitate Christ, the more we will be treated like Christ and hated without reason. Expect to suffer for right living. It is normal.
2. Remember that it is always better to choose suffering over sin.

Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking… 1 Peter 4:1 (ESV)

While Jesus knew that a righteous living would ultimately lead to his rejection, suffering and death, he prepared himself to keep choosing suffering for holiness over sin by fixing his thoughts on this truth. It doesn’t matter how tempting the sin. It doesn’t matter how high the price for holiness. It is always better to choose the pain of suffering over the pleasures of sin.

In the short-term, right living is usually costly, but over the long-haul into eternity it always pays off when we stand before God.

Jesus had to arm his mind with this truth, just like we need to arm our minds with this truth or we will repeatedly give in to sinful pressures.

For example, at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, God the Father led him into the wilderness for a 40-day fast without food. At the end of 40 days Jesus was weak. He was hungry. He was vulnerable. That is when Satan tempted him. In Luke 4 we see Satan tempting Jesus to turn stones into bread to satisfy his legitimate physical needs in a way that was outside of his father’s will for a time of fasting in his life. Satan tempted him by telling him he deserved food. It seemed reasonable to have food after 40 days. It would have been so tempting to follow Satan’s reasonable suggestion in those moments when Jesus’ life was in the balance from starvation. Jesus strengthened his mind against that temptation with this thought. “It is always better to choose righteous living, even if it involves suffering, than to give in to the pleasures of sin, even if they seem reasonable and expedient.”

It is the same way at the end of Jesus’ ministry. Before he went to the cross, when Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane, he desperately wanted to avoid the cross. At that crossroads he said, “God, not my will be done but your will be done.” He said, “I am willing to choose suffering, if that is your will for my life, rather than avoid suffering for being in your will, because that would be sin.”

Just like Jesus, at our weakest moments, we will also find ourselves tempted by Satan to give into sinful pleasures that may seem quite reasonable. Arm yourself with this truth. It is always better to suffer for right living and for being in the center of God’s will for your life than it is to sin — no matter how tempting the sin or how reasonable the sinful choice may seem.

If we don’t remember to think about temptation like Jesus, we will give in to those reasonable temptations every time rather than look to God for forgiveness.

3. Remember that a willingness to suffer for righteousness shows I made a break with sin.

…for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God. 1 Peter 4:1–2 (ESV)
This is a challenging verse. I don’t think it means that everyone who suffers in the flesh ceases to sin. If that was true, there would be very little sin in our lives. It is true that God frequently uses suffering to turn the hearts of his children to repentance and away from sin, but when faced with suffering, that isn’t always what happens. Sometimes, instead of ceasing to sin when faced with suffering, people grow bitter toward God. What does this verse mean?

I think it means that when we are willing to choose suffering for righteous living instead of choosing sinful living because of the pressure around us, that is evidence to ourselves and to others that we made a clean break with sin in our lives. Talk is cheap. We can say Jesus is our savior. We can say he is No. 1 in our lives. We never know that is true until we have to suffer for it.

In Iraq, a Christian that chooses right living and acknowledging Christ publicly may be separated from his or her family. Christians may be impoverished or killed. It is only when we see Christians that are willing to suffer to make a break from the sinful living of their pasts that we know they are living for Christ in the present.

We don’t live in Iraq. The price for following Christ and living a holy life isn’t a life or death situation. How many of us are willing to pay a price? What friends have you left behind because you made a clean break with sinful living and now you can’t be around them anymore because those friends constantly led you toward sin?

What movies have you turned off after you watched the first 10 minutes because you made a clean break with the sin of your past and you are willing to lose the $5 rental charge? Have you every walked out of a movie theatre because you have made a clean break with sin and refuse to be entertained by something that glorifies sin and death?

If you are a single man or woman, are you willing to pay the price of loneliness because you refuse to date non-Christians? It is only when you are willing to suffer with loneliness on the weekend because you are committed to only dating someone who loves Jesus that you know you made a clean break with sin in your life.

4. Remember that the sin of my past is always more than enough.

For the time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry.
1 Peter 4:3 (ESV)

Peter wanted us to understand that whatever amount of sin we have in our pasts, it is more than sufficient. It is more than enough. Some people come to Christ from a colorful past. They want nothing to do with the sinful lifestyles they left behind. Other people come to Jesus from relatively tame pre-Christian lives. When society pressures them to go along with unholy living, they reason that it wouldn’t be that bad to sin a little. For instance, when your friends are texting or messaging they use three letter swear words like OMG or 4Q or MOFO and you
don’t want to be left out so you start using those acronyms that most parents don’t understand.

Peter put his foot down and said whatever amount of sin we have in our past, it is already more than enough. Do not compromise. Live a holy life even if it hurts. It is always better to choose suffering for holiness than to choose sin. That was the way Jesus looked at life; it is the way we need to look at life.

Peter then gave us few example of the sinful societal pressures Christians are to put out of their lives.

**Sensuality** — *Sensuality is living for what feels good at the moment.* The word sensuality is typically used to describe sexual sin because our sex drive pushes us to do what feels good in the moment. It is premarital sex, because it feels good in the moment. It is an affair at work, because it feels good in the moment. It is looking at someone of the opposite sex lustfully, because it feels good at the moment. It is pornography, because it feels good at the moment. Sensuality also includes outbursts of anger when you tear somebody up because they made you angry. Yelling at them made you feel good in the moment. Peter said that is not the Christian life. We don’t just follow our feelings. We restrain our feelings and seek to honor God. We make a clean break from a life that is determined by what is sinful but feels good at the moment.

**Passions** — *Passion is living to satisfy your physical and emotional appetites.* That appetite could be food. Christians don’t live to just satisfy their food appetite. It could be sexual. Some girls live to satisfy their sexual appetites. They need to have a boy. Some guys live to satisfy their sexual appetites. They need to have a girl. That is the kind of life we are to make a clean break with. Some people live to satisfy their appetites for success and significance. They live for their appetites of popularity and power. We don’t live that way. We live to honor God, not just satisfy our cravings.

**Drunkenness** — *Drunkenness is drinking too much alcohol.* It is drinking to the point of losing control. It is not God’s will that a Christian gets drunk. That is the old lifestyle. We make a clean break from that kind of living. All of this should be put behind us.

**Orgies** — *Orgies are wild parties.* Christians are not party animals. We avoid those kinds of parties. That was the old lifestyle, not a life of holiness. Orgies may or may not involve sexuality. The Greek word means going to a party where you drink, get drunk and do stupid things with other people. It means getting drunk and waking up realizing you are in bed with someone you don’t know. It is getting drunk and realizing you took hard drugs, which is something you would never do if you weren’t drinking with other people at a wild party. It means drinking with other people and doing something foolish like getting behind the wheel of a car and trying to give them a ride home. This could be a big party like Mardi Gras or a small party at your friend’s house. It could be going to the bar. It is going to a party, getting drunk and doing stupid things with other people.
Christians separate themselves from this kind of living. There is already more than enough sin in our pasts. We don’t need to add to it.

**Drinking parties** — *Drinking parties are literally drinking contests.* It is you and a friend seeing who can drink the most shots of tequila. Let’s see who passes out first. Nothing is new under the sun. This is the kind of thing we avoid as Christians. There is already enough sin in our pasts. We don’t add to it.

**Lawless idolatry** — *Lawless idolatry is disgusting pagan worship.* This sounds weird. It sounds like Peter was talking about illegal idol worship. If this kind of idol worship was illegal for pagans, why would Peter need to tell Christians to avoid it? In the Greek the word *lawless* can also be translated as *vile* or *disgusting.* I think that is closer to what Peter meant in this context. Peter said stop participating in the disgusting practices of the pagan religions around you. You are Christians. Make a clean break with the disgusting idol worship of your past. Stop it.

Then Peter told us what we should expect if we make a clean a total break from sinful living.

*With respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you…* 1 Peter 4:4 (ESV)

When we make a clean break from sinful living, our friends, family and coworkers will be shocked. They will not be able to understand why we don’t join them in the river of sin in which they swim. People will give you a hard time when you decide that the sin of your past is more than enough and you make a clean and total break from sinful living in your life.

This recently happened to us. David, my oldest son, has a Net-flix account. He let us use it on my phone. We were recommended to watch a television series featured on Netflix. We started watching the program. I have to tell you that it is suspenseful. It had us on the edge of our seat.

The more episodes I watched, the uneasier I became. The graphic killing scenes, the severed head that showed up in a box, the graphic stranglings scenes plus using a knife to cut off a hand kept sticking in my mind. As I was praying about this, I realized I was letting myself be pressed into an unholy lifestyle of sinful entertainment. Sex and murder was my entertainment. I was letting myself, and my family, compromise with fallen values of society and not make a clean break with sinful living.

There really wasn’t much discussion about it at home. I got up one morning and told Cindy I didn’t want our family watching the show because the sex and violence were graphic and I didn’t want us and our children having those images planted in our minds. We needed to make a complete and total break from the sin in our society. She agreed.

If I tell guys at the gym that our family is no longer watching this popular program because we are committed to righteous living, I know they will think I am...
weird. I am sure they won't invite me over their house for a party after that. Some people may intentionally avoid me because they think I am a total prude.

The truth is that many Christians will also think I fell off the deep end. If I told you the name of the program I suspect a number of you watch it every weekend.

I want to remind you what Peter taught us.

1. It is always better to choose righteous living than enjoy the brief pleasures of sin.

2. I want to remind you that it is only when we are willing to suffer for right living that we know we have made a clean break with sinful living.

3. I want to remind you that the sin of our pasts is more than sufficient. Never rationalize yourself into thinking just a little sin is no big deal, so we can compromise with the sinful pressures of society.

This is what the Bible says about our entertainment.

Philippians 4:8 (ESV)

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

Print that verse out on an piece of paper and tape it below your television. Make sure it is printed big enough so you can read it from your couch. Read that while you are watching TV and see if you don’t change the channel or shut off the television. I know some of you think I am off the deep end. Let me tell you about Christians in the first century and how they separated themselves from their society.

The Christians in the first century were considered by many in the ancient world to be the kill joys who lived boring lives. Why did they have this reputation? Christians in the first century made a clean break with most forms of entertainment in Roman culture. Christians stopped attending the theatres because the performances involved sex and nudity. I know we would also not attend a theatre that showed live sex and nudity. The problem is that the modern theater has moved from public forums to the privacy of our own homes. What is different between being entertained by sex and nudity on a television in our home theater instead of sex and nudity in a public theatre?

Christians also stopped attending the gladiatorial games because they thought watching blood, gore and death was a sinful form of entertainment and not part of a holy life. Today we don’t watch death live, we watch death on our television screens in a cinematic recreation that is more vivid than if it were live in a public arena. It seems to me that we should separate ourselves from those types of entertainment. The early Christians did.

When Christians in the ancient world separated themselves from those popular forms of entertainment they were known as haters of humanity and
society. They weren't haters of humanity. They were just people who understood that the sin of their pasts was more than enough. They want to make a clean break with sinful living.

5. Remember that everyone will give an account to God.

…but they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. 1 Peter 4:5 (ESV)

One of the great temptations that comes along with suffering for a holy life is deep-seated anger toward the person that hurts us. We want to call them to account. In some situations it is appropriate to correct people. For example: Parents have a responsibility to point out the sin of their disobedient children (Proverbs 13:24). Policemen have a right to stop the sins of law-breaking citizens (Romans 14:4). Employers have a right to point out the performance of slack employees (2 Thessalonians 3:10). Elders have a right to point out the sin in members of the congregation (Hebrews 13:17).

Most of the time, when we suffer for righteousness, it is not God’s will that we call other people to account. Instead we hand it over to God who promises to judge justly.

The general belief system in the ancient world was that everyone should get as much fun out of life as they could because once we die, we die. Not many religions taught accountability for life after death.

The Bible tells us everyone is accountable for their actions in eternity. Everyone, including Christians, will be judged by God based on how they lived. Hell is just eternal punishment. That means the greater the sins of someone apart from Christ amasses, the more heinous the punishment of their eternity. For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality. Colossians 3:25 (ESV)

As Christians, our sins are forgiven by Jesus. He took the punishment we deserved. While our sin is paid for, we still are judged in eternity. Christians are rewarded in eternity for how we live on Earth. Those who choose to suffer for righteousness rather than go along with the pressures of a sinful society will be richly rewarded for their suffering. The reward for choosing to suffer instead of choosing to sin will always far outweigh any of the pleasures earthly sin could offer or any of the painful suffering for righteousness that is endured. If the reward in eternity didn’t outweigh the suffering, then it wouldn’t be called a reward. Remember what Peter said to Christians:

And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one’s deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile. 1 Peter 1:17 (ESV)

As Christians, we need to think carefully about how we live. God promises to judge and reward us. When we choose to suffer for righteous living rather than sin, we will be rewarded for it.
6. Remember that right living for Christ is never a losing proposition, even in the face of death.

For this is why the gospel was preached even to those who are dead, that though judged in the flesh the way people are, they might live in the spirit the way God does. 1 Peter 4:6 (ESV)

This is a difficult text. I think it is referring to those who heard the gospel then died. I do not think it is referring to those who heard the gospel after they died. That wouldn’t make sense because the Bible tells us there is no second chance to hear the good news of Jesus and respond to it after death.

And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment… Hebrews 9:27 (ESV)

The point of this verse in 1 Peter is to encourage us. All dead Christians are alive in their spirit and are in God’s presence until Christ returns. Dwelling with God until Christ returns is a pretty good proposition. Look what it is like in God’s presence.

…in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore. Psalm 16:11 (ESV)

It is possible that some of the Christians Peter wrote to in this letter had friends that lost their lives for righteous living rather than going along with the sinful ways of society.

Peter encouraged them by reminding them the gospel was not preached to their dead friends in vain. They trusted in Jesus. They chose holy lives. They didn’t go along with the sinful ways of the society. They skipped out on the drinking parties and sexual sins. They avoided what people thought was great earthly fun and replaced it with holiness. Some of them were so rejected by society they suffered to the point of losing their lives.

I am sure many people said, “What a waste.” These Christians had absolutely no earthly fun. What a waste of a life. They died just like the rest of us. How did holy living pay off?

Peter said that because of their trust in Jesus they are now in God’s presence where there is fullness of joy. While their dead bodies may look like everyone else’s, their eternities do not look like everyone else’s. They are alive in their spirits in the very presence of God. Any earthly suffering they endured is nothing compared to the glory that was revealed to them.

…and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him. Romans 8:17 (ESV)

Peter assured us that even believers who paid the ultimate price for righteous living did not find that to be a losing proposition. Today they are enjoying the blessing of the very presence of God.
Conclusion

We don't know what brought Perpetua to faith in Christ or how long she was a Christian. Thanks to her diary and the diary of another prisoner, we know about her final days. Perpetua was a wealthy noblewoman who lived with her husband and infant son in the city of Carthage located in North Africa during the third century.

At that time, North Africa was the center of a vibrant Christian community. It comes as no surprise that when the Roman Emperor Severus decided to cripple Christianity, he focused his attention on this region of the world. Among the first to be arrested were five Christians taking a Bible class in preparation for their baptism. Perpetua was one of them.

After her arrest, her father immediately came to visit her in prison. He wasn’t a Christian, and in his concern for her, he saw an easy way for her to save herself — simply deny her faith in Christ and burn incense in worship to the emperor.

Perpetua took a vase and held it up to her father. “What is it?” she asked. “A vase,” he replied. She told him, “Just as a vase can be known by any other name I cannot be known by any other name than Christ’s. I am a Christian.”

Perpetua was a nursing mother, so she was soon moved to a better part of the prison to allow her to provide better care for her infant son. With the day of her trial approaching her father visited her repeatedly pleading with her to worship the emperor and spare him, her husband and her family the grief of watching her die.

The day of Perpetua’s trial arrived. She was one of five Christians brought before the governor. The first four claimed to be Christians and refused to worship the emperor. Then it came Perpetua’s turn.

Just as she was about to speak, her father burst into the room with her crying child in his arm. He begged her to simply worship the emperor so she could nurse her child. Perpetua stood fast. She refused to bend.

The emperor finally had enough. He commanded the guards to beat her father into silence, then he condemned Perpetua and her friends to die in the arena.

A short time later they were forced into the arena where wild beasts and gladiators roamed the floor. In the stands, the crowds roared with excitement to see the gore. They didn’t have to wait long. Almost immediately a wild cow charged the group, gored Perpetua with his horns and tossed her high in the air. Afterward, a leopard attacked Perpetua, mauling her and her friends. In only minutes their clothing was covered in blood from their gaping wounds.

The crowd was not willing to wait for their final moments. They began chanting for the deaths of the Christians. Perpetua and her friends were lined up and one by one a sword was thrust through their bodies.

What the crowds didn’t understand is that it is always better to choose to suffer for righteousness than to sin, no matter how high the price, even if it is death. Remembering that is always better to suffer for righteousness than to sin was the mindset of Jesus. It was the mindset of Perpetua. I pray it becomes the mindset of each one of us.

Let’s pray…
Getting to Know Each Other

1. How are Christians seduced into conforming to the unholiness of modern culture?

2. Share a time when you paid a price for honoring Jesus?

Read 1 Peter 4:1-2

1. How does Christ's suffering encourage me when I face suffering?

2. How was Christ's suffering like our suffering? How was his suffering different?

3. Why is suffering for a Christ-honoring lifestyle an essential experience in the Christian life?

Read 1 Peter 4:3

1. What is wrong both biblically and practically when we think a little sin is no big deal?

2. Read Philippians 4:8. What is the standard I should use when evaluating music, movies, television, the Internet and other forms of entertainment?

3. Should a Christian watch “R” rated movies?

4. In what areas of entertainment is the Holy Spirit calling me to repent?

5. After reading the above quote, how does the way I live in my community compare to the way early Christians lived in their community?
Read 1 Peter 4:5; Colossians 3:25; 1 Peter 1:17

1. How does the reality both Christian and non-Christian having judgement by God change the way I handle my anger? My time? My money? My relationships with the opposite sex? My thought life?

Read 1 Peter 4:6; Psalm 16:11

1. Why would death be better than sin?

Next Steps

1. What is one area of life, where I am conforming to sinful patterns of the world, that I want my Life Group to hold me accountable for a change?
February 8, 2015

Does anyone remember what was supposed to happen May 21, 2011?

Maybe this billboard, that was on the road between Arnolds Park and Milford, will jog your memory. May 21, 2011 was the day Harold Camping predicted as the return of Christ and the end of the world as we know it. This was one of Camping’s numerous failed predictions for the date of Christ’s return. The Bible has two words for these kinds of people. The are called false prophets.

As a result of Camping’s predictions he temporarily gained a global following and millions of dollars in donations. People committed themselves, and their money, to bold acts of evangelism as they tried to live for the end of the world.¹⁸

While Camping was dead wrong when it came to predicting the date of Christ’s return, the reality of Christ’s return and the end of the world as we know it was not wrong. The Bible is abundantly clear. Christ will return. He will judge the earth and draw history, as we know it, to a close. Camping’s problem was not the fact of Christ’s return. The problem was trying to predict the date of Christ’s return. Matthew 24:36 tells us no one knows the date of Christ’s return except for God himself. If God is not sharing that date with the angels in heaven, he certainly is not sharing the date with Harold.

While we don’t know the date of Christ’s return, since Christ is returning, how should we live until he returns? Should we donate millions to post billboards around the country? Should we get on the radio and proclaim a turn-or-burn message? How should we live to get ready for Christ’s return? That is the question we will answer this morning.

If you are new my name is Kurt. As a church we are studying the book of 1 Peter. This morning we are in 1 Peter 4:7-11. I ask that you take your Bibles and turn to that passage.

Let’s read the text.

The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s

varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. 1 Peter 4:7–11 (ESV)

What did Peter mean when he said “The end of all things is at hand?”

What did Peter mean when he said, “The end of all things is at hand”? Did Peter expect Jesus to return a few months or years after he penned this letter? Was Peter loosely predicting a date for the end of the world, like Harold Camping? If Peter was predicting a date for the end of the world, he was wrong, or at least off by 2,000 years, which seems like a significant error.

Unlike Harold Camping, Peter was not predicting a date for the end of the world. When Peter said, “the end of all things is at hand” Peter was not speaking chronologically. He was speaking theologically. In the grand story of God’s redemptive work, the next big event on the redemptive timeline after Christ’s return to heaven is Christ’s return from heaven. The Bible describes all the days after the ascension of Christ as the last days.

While Peter was not giving us a date for Christ's return, he told us we need to be confident of Christ’s return. Don’t be fooled into thinking it won’t happen. In 2 Peter, Peter told us it will seem like we are waiting a long time for Christ to return.

They will say, “Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation.” For they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God, and that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly. 2 Peter 3:4–7 (ESV)

Just as the world had a beginning, it will have an ending. Just as the world was once destroyed by the flood with water, it will be finally destroyed by fire. It is not a matter of if it will happen, it is only a matter of when it will happen.

In 2 Peter we also learn we are waiting a long time for Christ to return. It is not because God forgot to send him back but it is because of God’s patience. The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. 2 Peter 3:9 (ESV)

The reason Christ hasn’t returned is because God is patient and is providing more opportunity for people to repent. Rest assured, Christ will return. Everyone will be judged by Jesus. It doesn’t matter what we think about ourselves. It doesn’t matter what others think about us. All that matters is what Jesus thinks about us. Everyone’s life will be evaluated by Jesus.
If you are not a Christian, I plead with you to take this seriously. The only thing that matters in this life is what God thinks about you. Christ will either return or you will die. Either way, you meet Jesus. The only way to be accepted by God and to have your sins forgiven is to trust in Jesus Christ's death for your sins. His death in our places for our sins is the only way to be cleansed. Call out to Jesus, asking for his mercy today.

For those of us who are Christians, the return of Christ and the time we stand before him to be judged is a time to be rewarded for how we lived. Since Christians will be judged and rewarded, we should think carefully about how we live. We should live wisely. Peter said this very thing in 2 Peter.

Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness... 2 Peter 3:11 (ESV)

Christians need to live wisely now to prepare for the time we are judged and rewarded by Christ. In the passage we are studying in 1 Peter, Peter told us how Christians should live to prepare for Christ's return.

We discover Peter didn’t propose we act like lunatics plastering the sides of the highway with billboards proclaiming the end of the world. Instead we should commit ourselves to three simple things — praying, loving and serving. If we are praying, loving and serving, we will be prepared for the end of the world when we stand before Jesus.

Pray

…therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. 1 Peter 4:7 (ESV)

People who know the end of all things is near are concerned with keeping a clear line of communication with God. As we look at this verse, I have three observations about the kind of prayer we should have in our lives as we prepare for the end of the world.

Pray Consistently

The general sense of Peter’s words are that prayer is not something reserved for Sunday. It is not something reserved for times of desperation. Peter pictured prayer as something Christians do throughout the day. I want you to notice that prayers is plural. The idea is we are praying consistently throughout the day.

Since Christian prayer is heart-felt and self-controlled it also pictures our mind engaged in conversation with God. This rules out those repetitious prayers like saying 50 “Hail Marys.” It moves prayer beyond simple repetitious meal-time prayers and bedtime prayers. It puts conversational prayer time in our drive to work, in our coffee break at the office and even during the day when we take a break and go for a walk. We prepare for the return of Christ by having a consistent prayer life where our minds are engaged in conversation with God consistently throughout the day.
If you find yourself infrequent in prayer or praying only on a surface level with mindless prayers or you find yourself only praying on Sundays or times of desperation, this is an opportunity to change. Prepare for the end of the world by having regular conversations with God.

**Pray Seriously**

In addition to consistent prayer, we prepare for the return of Christ by thinking about prayer soberly. This means taking prayer seriously. One of our great temptations is to think of prayer as a nice gesture toward people in need. We don’t expect anything to happen in response to our prayers. As a result, we don’t take prayer seriously. We figure that after we have tried everything and failed, then we pray. Peter told us to take prayer seriously. God does respond to prayer by either changing us or changing our circumstances.

Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. James 5:16 (ESV)

We live a life that is prepared for the end of the world by taking prayer seriously, knowing it is powerful and does make a difference.

Peter used this same phrase *sober-minded* later in his letter when he talked about how we are to think about the devil.

Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. 1 Peter 5:8 (ESV)

We are not just floating through life. We are in a spiritual battle. Satan and his demonic forces are committed to our destruction. Satan will do whatever he can to render our lives ineffective. He will try to tempt us away from our spouse. He will try to get us too busy to pray. He will try to mold us to follow the pressures of the world. We take Satan seriously. This is why we don’t attend seances. This is why we don’t play with Ouija Boards.

Peter told us that we need to take the power of prayer as seriously as we take the power of Satan. If you take Satan seriously, take prayer seriously. It makes a difference.

**Exercise self-control or you won’t have time for prayer.**

If we are to take prayer seriously, we need to find time to pray consistently. In our busy world, it is easy to be drawn away from prayer. Peter told us that unless we learn to exercise self-control, we will never find time for prayer. Unless we learn to say, “No” to good things, and control our own desires, prayer will always be pushed out of our lives. Peter was not telling us that all we should do is pray. He was telling us that unless we learn to exercise self-control, we will never pray. Think about this. Which one would you like to do right now? Eat ice cream or pray? If given the option, would you rather watch a movie or pray? Would you rather flip through Facebook or pray? If we don’t exercise self-control we will pick ice cream, a movie or Facebook every time.
We need to exercise self-control and say, “I need prayer more than I need ice cream. I will have ice cream later but only after I pray because I know I need God more than I need ice cream.” Only God is the one who can heal my marriage, not prayer. Only God is the one who will break me free from sin, not Facebook. Only God is the one who can change my heart, not watching movies.”

Peter said that because the end is near, we want to be people of impact that honor Christ with our lives, so we take prayer seriously. We exercise self-control to discipline ourselves to pray consistently. How do we do this?

How do we find time for prayer in our busy schedules? Here is a suggestion. Charles Spurgeon, a pastor who lived in the 1800s, was like many of us today. He was completely ADD. He had a hard time maintaining focus in prayer. He decided to only pray for 10 minutes at a time, or he would lose focus. He prayed for multiple 10 minute slots throughout the day but he learned that was the only way for him to pray. My challenge to us as a congregation is to find at least one 10-minute slot every day and give our focused attention to prayer in that time. Pray for your spouse, your children, your church family, the mission of the church as we try to reach our region, repent of sin, ask God help you make right choices for your future. Take this time of prayer as seriously as you take the existence of Satan. After that, have ice cream, scan Facebook or watch a movie.

If you can't find 10 minutes a day for concentrated prayer, you have a serious problem with self-control.

Prayer is one of the most important things we can do to prepare for the end of the world.

Love

Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. 1 Peter 4:8–9 (ESV)

Some of you are tempted to think that the best Christian life is one of solitude for prayer. Thankfully that is not the picture Peter gave. The Christian life is a life lived in community and in relationships with other Christians. God wants us to give ourselves in love to one another as we live together in the local church.

My love should be genuine.

...keep loving one another earnestly...

In the church, we don't just attend a service, we are to love each other earnestly. Earnestly means we are sincere about our love. That means we actually love people. We don't just fake it. In the church, people genuinely care. The love we have for one another is not to be that surface kind of love where you never open yourself up to others. It is to be real.

I am not asking you if you feel genuinely loved by other people in the church. When we stand before Christ at his return, Jesus will not ask us if we felt
genuinely loved by others in the church; what will be evaluated is if we genuinely loved others in the church. Don’t blame shift this. Ask yourself, “Do I genuinely love my brothers and sisters in the church?” I will give an answer to Jesus for how I love others in this body.

**Be hard to offend.**

When we open ourselves up to one another, it doesn’t take long for people to learn we are pretty messed up. When we get close to people in the church they will hurt you. People in the church will disappoint you. The people who have caused the deepest wounds in my life are all church people. I also have a long list of people I have hurt inadvertently or sinned against, and they are church people. The only way to avoid this is to either keep all your church relationships on a plastic surface level or you have to be a person that is hard to offend.

...love covers a multitude of sins...

In the world, when people hurt us, we write them off. We avoid them. In the church we love others by being hard to offend. We have love for people that is strong enough to keep forgiving people. We are willing to cover over many sins.

Aren’t those the kind of people you love to be around? I have a gift. It is called, “Foot-In-Mouth Disease.” I can say the dumbest things. I feel terrible about it. When I go to people and ask their forgiveness for something dumb I said, I love it when they look at me and say, “No worries.” They don’t hold it over my head. I love those kind of people. You love those kind of people. God calls us to be those kind of people. Peter was just quoting a verse from Proverbs.

Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all offenses. Proverbs 10:12 (ESV)

As Christians be hard to offend. Treat people the same way Jesus treats you. Forgive them and refuse to shut them out of your life. When we fail Jesus again and again, he doesn’t write us off. He refuses to let our sin stand in the way of the relationship he wants with us. In the same way, when people fail us at church, and they will, love them like Jesus and be really hard to offend.

Just a word of advice. If you are a person who has a list of people you have written off because they failed you, part of the reason you have a list is because they failed you. The other reason you have a list is probably because you are unloving and unforgiving. You are too easily offended. You won’t forgive. If you find yourself bitter toward people the problem might be in your own heart. Be hard to offend and quick to forgive. Just like Jesus forgives you.

**Love others with my home.**

It is tempting to think this earnest heart-felt love is to stay in the church. It sounds like we are to save it for Sundays at the coffee bar. That isn’t the way Peter pictured it. This genuine love for our church family goes home with us. Genuine love is seen through hospitality. Christians are to have members of their church family over their homes. We are to literally have church members
over to our homes for meals. That is one of the ways we show others in the body
genuine love. When we eat together, we bond together.

Let’s be candid about this. Hospitality can be a real inconvenience. It
costs extra money for food. You have to clean the house. By the way, I have
learned nobody really cleans the house. All you do is take the piles out of the
living room and hide them in the bedroom. When your company leaves, you take
them out of the bedroom and put them back in the living room. True cleaning
never happens. You have to make time in your schedule. If you have people
stay at your house overnight you have sheets and laundry to clean. The kids
need to give up their beds and use sleeping bags to stay on the floor.

Ladies, it is tempting to grumble over hospitality and to avoid it. Peter
said, “Don’t grumble. Genuine love is practicing hospitality.” If you don’t have
anyone from the church over to your home, the question can be asked, “Is your
love for your brothers and sisters in Christ genuine?”

Most of us do not realize the power of our homes to disciple other
believers and encourage them. All Christians are to be engaged in the building
up of the body of Christ. An extremely powerful way we do this is simply opening
up our homes and inviting people from church over for a meal. It is telling stories
together and laughing together. It is talking about your faith in Christ together. It
is watching a football game together. It is playing monopoly together. Your home
is a powerful discipleship tool. Eating together in your home with people from the
church builds relationships. When people start to genuinely know you, they start
to genuinely listen to what you have to say about Jesus.

Let me be very straight on this. There are a lot of people in this church
that need friends. There are single mothers. There are widows. There are
divorcees. There are unwed young adults. There are lots of people that are
desperate for somebody to care about them. Many of us leave on Sunday and
go home to eat luscious meals with our biological families while numerous
singles in our church family go home to eat a peanut butter and jelly sandwich at
the kitchen table by themselves. I want this to change, beginning today. I want
us to begin the practice that after church we intentionally meet new people and
invite them either out for a meal or over to our homes for a meal. Open up your
home and your life.

I am keeping the bar low. I would love to see more than this. If you are
part of the CrossWinds family, as your pastor I am asking you to have one new
family or individual over a month. If you can do this more than once a month,
great! Go home and put at least one open dinner date a month on your calendar.
Meet people that are new to you and start inviting them over to your home.
Enjoy yourself and love people.

Building relationships is one of the best things we can do to open the door
for the gospel. Your home is a powerful discipleship tool. Use it wisely.
Serve
As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies… 1 Peter 4:10–11 (ESV)

Just as we are to take prayer seriously and loving people seriously to prepare for the return of Christ, we are to be serious about serving others in the church. Peter started out by saying, “as each has received a gift”.

Everyone is gifted by God to serve others in the church.

Peter implied that everyone received a spiritual gift from God when he or she became a Christian. The Bible tells us all Christians have at least one gift. Paul taught this explicitly in 1 Corinthians 12:7-11. Some Christians have more than one gift. Christians are given different strengths of their gifts. When Christians use their gifts they develop and get stronger.

I am gifted by God to serve others, not myself.

A spiritual gift is a way the Holy Spirit empowers us to serve others in the church and to build up the church. This is important. Spiritual gifts are never given to us to serve ourselves. Spiritual gifts are given to us to serve others. God wants everyone in the church not just attending church but serving others in the body. If you are part of CrossWinds, you are gifted by God and people in the church need you using your gift.

I am accountable for how I use my gift.

Since every one of us is gifted by God to serve others, we are to be a good steward of those gifts. We are accountable to God for how we use the gifts he entrusted into our lives.

Remember that our gifts are not ours. They are given to us by God. We are only a steward of God’s gifts. We will answer to God for how we used our gifts.

The gift lists in the Bible are representative, not exhaustive.

It says we are to be good stewards of God’s varied grace. There are various gift lists in the Bible. Some of the gifts mentioned in those lists include teaching, administration, mercy and many others. Some of you are wondering if you need a special gift test to figure out your gift. Some of you are not sure if your gift is one of those mentioned in the Bible. The gift lists in the New Testament are representative, not exhaustive. While God still gifts people with the spiritual gifts described in the New Testament, that doesn’t mean God never gifts people in new and creative ways not directly mentioned in the New Testament. I know of people who are great web designers for church. You don’t find the gift of web design in the Bible but God is gifting them in that area.
I discover my gifts by sensing needs and feeling joy.

How do we discover my spiritual gifts and learn the way wants me to fit into the church body? It is not through an extensive test. It is simple. Just look at the church and find a place you sense a need and a place you feel joy.

1. **Look for a place I sense need, then get involved.** What in the church do you think could be done better? Where in the church do you think you can help? If you sense a need, that probably means you are gifted in that area. If you think greeters should be friendlier, become a greeter and be friendlier. If you wish there was better outreach, get involved in outreach. Do you think you could improve the computer and tech? Jump in because we need your help. One time a lady told me she didn’t like the store-bought cookies at the coffee bar. Since it is church, she thought the cookies should all be home-baked. Do you know what I told her? Start baking cookies! Apparently you are gifted in that area. You see a need, now meet the need. That is your gift. Do you like kids? Maybe God gifted you to help with CrossWinds Academy on Sunday morning or AWANA on Wednesday evening.

2. **Look for a place where you find joy.** Get involved meeting various needs in the church and discover what places you find the most joy. Some people love to cook. I don’t like cooking. I like eating. I get no joy when it comes to making a meal. Cindy, my wife, loves to make meals for people in need. She gets real joy from dropping off a meal to encourage people. That is her gift. I know that because she gets joy from it.

**Don’t just attend church, serve others in church.**

Let me share one of my concerns for CrossWinds. As we get larger it gets easier for us to be a church of people who attend rather than people who serve others. If you are just attending and have not found a way to serve, I want you to change. It is unhealthy for you spiritually to just attend. You will stifle your spiritual growth if you just attend. If you don’t get involved serving others, you will deny yourself joy. There is great joy that comes when we serve others with our gifts and we know the church is built up and people are embracing Christ because God used us in a small way. Don’t be satisfied with just attendance. Keep pursuing finding a place to serve by sensing needs and finding joy.

Now Peter lumps the different spiritual gifts into two classes, speaking gifts and serving gifts. He told us how we are to use them.

**If you have a speaking gift, take preparation seriously.**

Whoever speaks is to speak as if they are speaking the very oracles of God. That means if God has you gifted in preaching or teaching, either adults or children, do a good job. Take it seriously. Don’t do Saturday night specials when it comes to preparation. A Saturday night special is waiting until Saturday night to try and figure out what to say on Sunday morning. If you teach a class, work at the class throughout the week. Write out what you need to say. Pray over it. Saturday night should be a time to refresh your memory not to begin forming
your thoughts. Remember we are giving God’s Word to God’s people. Take it seriously. How we used our teaching gift will be judged and rewarded by God when we stand before him.

If you have a serving gift, look for the strength God promises to supply.

Those with serving gifts will occasionally find themselves tapped out. Perhaps it is Sunday morning and your job is to run the sound board. Instead of running the sound board, you want to sleep. How do you handle this? Talk to God in prayer and ask him to supply the strength you need.

Experience has taught me that when you press into fatigue and ask the Holy Spirit to supply the strength you need to use God’s gift to serve God’s people, he always comes through. At the end of the day God supplies the strength and joy we need to make it through.

When it comes to using your gifts to serve in the church, consciously ask Jesus to give you the energy and to empower you to serve others. That may be asking Jesus to give you the energy needed to make a meal you want to deliver to someone in the church in need. It may be asking God to give you the energy you need to put a smile on your face as you greet others at the door because you are tired. Lean on the Holy Spirit. He will get you through in a way you won’t expect.

Conclusion

This morning, we started with an audacious question. How should we live to prepare for the end of the world? The Bible doesn’t tell us to give away all our money for billboard advertisements about judgment. We don’t join a commune or become long-haired hippies. We prepare for the end of the world by following a basic list — pray, love and serve.

Pray throughout the day. Take prayer seriously, remembering that it makes a difference. Exercise self-control by actually planning times of prayer in our lives. If we don’t have that self-control, we will do everything else besides pray. We are going to apply that by everyone making at least 10 minutes in our daily schedules for concentrated prayer. We need prayer more than ice cream or Facebook.

Love others in the church. Don’t be satisfied to just know people on a surface level that only involves shaking hands. Open our lives up to others. When they hurt us, which they will, be quick to forgive and hard to offend. Love in the church doesn’t stay in the church. We are to be people known for our hospitality. We should be inviting people into our homes. Our home is a power tool for discipling others in the church. My challenge was meet new people in the foyer and invite one new family a month over to your home for dinner.

Serve others in the church. Every one of us is gifted to serve others in this body. The only question is, “Are we using our gifts?” When we use our gifts to bless others, God blesses us. If you have a teaching gift, take it seriously.
You are handling the very words of God. If you have a serving gift, don’t try to rely on your own strength. Ask the Holy Spirit for the energy you need to use God’s gift to serve God’s people with God’s strength. God promises he will carry you though.

Let’s pray.
Life Group Work Sheet
1 Peter 4:7-11
February 8, 2015

Getting to Know Each Other

1. Think back to Y2K. Do you have any stories of people’s commitment to surviving “the end of the world”? What do these stories (and our society’s fascination with the apocalypse) tell us about our culture?

Read 1 Peter 4:7

1. Peter refers to “the end of all things” being at hand. Did Peter think the world was going to end in the first century? What does he mean by this statement?

2. How does living in light of the end give us an eternal perspective? How does this eternal perspective help us grow spiritually?

3. What happens in a Christian’s life when they are not self-controlled and sober-minded? Have you missed out on opportunities to serve God in the past because you weren’t self-controlled or sober-minded?

4. Why is prayer important? Do you have an intentional time reserved for prayer each day? What is one way that you can practice self-control in order to pray this coming week?

Read 1 Peter 4:8-9

1. Read Matt. 18:23-35. Peter tells us that love “covers a multitude of sins”. What does this mean? How does the love of Christ for us help us to love others (cf. 1 John 4:19)? What specific actions can we take to live out 1 Peter 4:8?

2. Peter teaches us to love others by opening up our homes. What are some ways that we can show hospitality? Why is it important to have others in your home?

3. How is hospitality demonstrated? Share some different ways. Do you have to have the gift of hospitality to open up your home?

4. Read Phil. 2:3-5. How do Paul’s words here help us to show hospitality without grumbling?

Read 1 Peter 4:10-11
1. Read Eph. 4:7-14. Do you know your spiritual gifts? How do you discover your spiritual gifts? Why is it important that everyone use their spiritual gifts for others? Is any one spiritual gift more important than another?

2. What keeps us from using our spiritual gifts for the church? What would happen if no one used their spiritual gifts?

Next Steps

1. What would CrossWinds look like if everyone prayed habitually, loved sacrificially, and served consistently? What would our communities look like?
February 15, 2015

It was July 19, 64 A.D., when the first spark that began the great fire of Ancient Rome was lit. This fire became one of the most famous in history. Rome was a city of narrow streets and close wooden apartments stacked one on top of the other. Since everything was close, the fire spread fast. It burned for six days and nights. When it was done only four of Rome’s 14 districts escaped damage.\(^\text{19}\) Two-thirds of the city was destroyed.\(^\text{20}\)

In addition to the terrible fire, there were accounts that Nero, the ruler of Rome, simply watched the city burn. Some accounts claim he wouldn’t issue orders to extinguish the flames to his soldiers. Other accounts claim that when people attempted to extinguish the flames, his soldiers stopped them. Other accounts tell of his soldiers setting additional fires in different parts of the city to frustrate those attempting to contain the blaze. No one knows for sure who started the fire but many historians believe Nero was behind the disaster.

Many of the people in the city lost everything. Some stood in front of the flames allowing the fire to consume them. They had already lost their possessions and their families so they despaired of life itself. Citizens of the city were angry. Someone needed to pay for this terrible disaster. Nero needed a scapegoat. Christians were the answer.

At the time, Christianity was spreading fast. It was a new and often misunderstood faith. Word on the street claimed Christians were cannibals. When they gathered they ate the flesh and drank the blood of a man named Jesus. Christians spoke of a final day of fiery judgment. For Nero, that was convenient. He claimed the Christians tried to bring about God’s fiery judgment upon Rome by burning down the city.

Nero and the Romans had a place to vent their anger. Violent persecution broke out against the church as Nero used Christians as his scapegoat. Over time, Nero’s practice of persecuting was codified into official Roman policy by Domitian, Trajan and other Roman emperors. The next 200 years were a period of horrible persecution against the church. Many times the justification for torture or death was nothing more than speaking the name of Christ and your own in the same sentence.

Tacitus, the Roman historian, gave us detailed reports of Nero’s wrath. Nero rolled Christians in pitch, strapped them to poles and lit them on fire while still alive. They served as torches lighting his parties by night. He wrapped


Christians in bloody animals skins and let his hunting dogs tear them to shreds. The historical list of atrocities against Christians that began with Nero and continued for the next 200 years boggles the mind and unsettles the stomach.

Why do we begin with these gruesome historical details? The book of 1 Peter was written as these 200 years of persecution began. It was a book that became a favorite for early Christians as they looked to it for hope in hard times.

The passage we are about to look at this morning was one of these early Christians’ favorites. As we come to the end of this book, Peter talked about suffering one last time, except this time he focuses in on a particular type of suffering. Suffering for being a Christian.

Follow along in your copy of God’s Word as we read our passage.

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name. For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And “If the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?” Therefore let those who suffer according to God’s will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good. 1 Peter 4:12–19 (ESV)

This passage gives us six lessons about suffering as a Christian. It shows us what makes suffering for Christ unique.

1. Suffering for Christ is expected.

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. 1 Peter 4:12 (ESV)

As Christians, expect to suffer simply because we utter the name of Jesus. Expect people will think we are a little different. Expect people will think we are weird simply because we love Jesus. Since Satan made a special target of Jesus, do not be surprised that as we become more like Jesus we experience a measure of the sufferings of Jesus.

Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you. 1 John 3:13 (ESV)

Don’t be surprised when you suffer as a Christian.

“Woe to you, when all people speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets.” Luke 6:26 (ESV)

These are strong words. If you are popular and nobody has a problem with your faith, there may be a problem with your faith. Our lives should resemble Christ enough to draw fire. The people who were popular in the Old
Testament were the false prophets. If you are always popular today, you are probably more like a false prophet than you are like Jesus.

If you are a high school student and you always fit in, there may be something wrong with your faith. Your life is too similar to the people of the world that nobody notices the Jesus inside of you. That is the reason you escape suffering.

Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted… 2 Timothy 3:12 (ESV)

Don’t you love Bible promises? You can take this one to the bank. If you are living a life that resembles Jesus, you will be persecuted. Guaranteed. If you never suffer, you need to ask yourself why nothing sets you apart.

Why do Christians who live godly lives always suffer? Living a god-honoring life in an ungodly world makes Christians an irritant to everyone’s consciences. When you actually speak the name of Christ, you become particularly offensive. People start yelling, “Separation of church and state.” They tell you not to push your faith on other people. They tell you all beliefs about God are essentially the same, which is a major fail blog.

If you don’t know God promises we will suffer for naming Christ in our workplaces, our schools and communities, you will be surprised when it happens.

If you were reared on the health, wealth and prosperity gospel where you were told Christ came to take away your problems and make you rich, you will be sorely disappointed when you start talking about Jesus and you lose your job. The Bible says don’t be surprised when you suffer for Christ. It doesn’t says you are guaranteed to be healthy, wealthy and popular because of Christ.

We may be rolled in pitch and lit on fire to burn like a campfire marshmallow. We may be torn to shreds by hunting dogs or we may simply lose the respect of our friends. Either way, we will suffer. Remember that Christianity doesn’t promise immunity from suffering, it promises the experience of suffering. Don’t be surprised.

2. Suffering for Christ is good for me.

Suffering for Christ purifies my faith.

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. 1 Peter 4:12 (ESV)

This suffering is described as a fiery trial. You may wonder why Peter called the suffering fiery? Peter was alluding to a verse in the Old Testament that many of his Jewish readers knew.

For you, O God, have tested us; you have tried us as silver is tried. Psalm 66:10 (ESV)
This verse reminds us that just as silver is melted down to burn away impurities or allow them to be scraped off the top, God brings trials into our lives to be melted down. It is only after silver is melted in the furnace that it becomes pure. It is only after Christians are melted down that sin and junk in their lives burn away and they become pure.

As parents, we often pray that God will protect our kids from trials. God promises us that because he loves us and our children, he will put us and our children through trials, especially trials for naming the name of Jesus. God uses trials to purify our faith, to grow our faith, and to mature our faith. Trust me, nobody grows in Christ until they have to suffer for Christ. Paying a cost for our faith is actually a good thing. God loves us too much to give us lives of perpetual ease. Suffering is to be expected. Suffering for Christ is actually good for me.

**Suffering proves my faith.**

At the beginning of 1 Peter, Peter used the same term *fiery trials* that he used at the end of the book. It is as if fiery trials booked this entire letter.

In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. 1 Peter 1:6–7 (ESV)

Trials don’t just purify our faith. They also prove the genuineness of our faith. When it gets tough to follow Christ, the phonies don’t hang around.

Do you remember the parable of the soils that Jesus told in Luke 8 and Matthew 13? In the parable, a farmer scatters seed, which represents the Word of God. The seed landed on four different soils. One of the faulty soils the farmer scattered seed on was called rocky ground. Look what Jesus said about rocky ground.

And the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe for a while, and in time of testing fall away. Luke 8:13 (ESV)

The word for testing in the Greek is the same word for trials. Trials and testing are one and the same. As soon as it gets tough to name the name of Jesus, phony Christians scatter like cockroaches when the lights go on.

Suffering for Christ purifies the church because phony Christians don’t hang around when it costs them something to follow Jesus. Nobody in this room should be surprised when they suffer for simply being a Christian. When you suffer for being a Christian, remember, it is good for us. God will use my suffering for Christ to purify my faith. Suffering for Christ is also good for the church because all the phony Christians run for the door. If we never suffer for Jesus, chances are we are blending too far into our culture. God promises we will suffer when we are living for him.
3. Suffering for Christ carries a blessing.

Not only is suffering for Christ good for us but when we properly endure suffering for Christ it is the pathway to incredible amounts of blessing in our life. If you want to be seriously blessed by God there is no other way to get there other than suffering faithfully for the name of Christ.

There are two ways we experience that blessing. It comes to us in the future and it comes to us in the present.

Suffering for Christ carries a future blessing.

But rejoice insofar as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice (be super rejoiced) and be glad when his glory is revealed. 1 Peter 4:13 (ESV)

Peter told us to rejoice when we start to suffer because our lives are like Christ. That is hard to imagine. When we suffer for being a Christian, it feels unfair. We live in a free country. We have freedom of religion. Why should we suffer because we act like Jesus?

If we live like Jesus, there will be times when we participate in a little of the sufferings of Jesus, even in a country with religious freedom. If we lived in a country that didn’t have religious freedom, like Syria and Iraq, we will especially suffer for naming Jesus. How should we think about this?

It is a badge of honor to suffer because I am like Jesus.

Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. Acts 5:41 (ESV)

When Peter and John were beaten because they were teaching in the name of Jesus, they consider it a privilege to suffer because of Jesus. Suffering because of Christ is a privilege. It is an honor.

Paul felt the same way.

From now on let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus. Galatians 6:17 (ESV)

Paul pulled up his shirt to show people the scars from the beatings, whippings and stonings he took because he spoke about Jesus. One time he was beaten so badly, they left him for dead. Paul didn’t complain about his beaten and scared body. His scars were badges of honor. It was a privilege to suffer because of the name of Jesus.

The world hates Jesus. The world couldn’t get to Jesus. Paul was enough like Jesus that they beat him instead of Jesus. That was an honor. We need to think of any suffering we take for the name of Christ the same way. The world still wants to kill Jesus. They can’t get to him. When I live like Jesus, they will go after us because we are like him. That kind of suffering is a compliment. It is a privilege. Every scar on a Christian’s body that was received because he named Christ is a badge of honor.
For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake… Philippians 1:29 (ESV)

Peter told the Philippians their gift from God was not only that they would come to know Christ, but that they were privileged to suffer for Christ. It is a privilege to suffer for Jesus. Reframe your thinking.

**The degree of my earthly suffering for Christ corresponds to the degree of my eternal joy with Christ.**

…that you may also rejoice (be double rejoiced) and be glad when his glory is revealed. 1 Peter 4:13 (ESV)

Let’s look at this verse again. Not only is it a privilege to suffer because we are like Christ but when Christ returns, we will be rewarded because we suffered for the name of Christ. There is a play on the words in the Greek that is cloaked in the English. Peter said to rejoice when we suffer that we may rejoice rejoice (be double rejoiced) when his glory is revealed. Rejoice now in the privilege of being so much like Jesus that you suffer for Jesus. Be doubly rejoiced when Christ returns because the degree to which we are willing to suffer for Christ on earth will correspond to the degree of our joy in eternity. In fact we will doubly rejoice. It is a two for one deal. The degree which we suffer for Christ on earth will be doubly repaid by our eternal joy and reward in heaven.

Every one of us is a hedonist at heart. We are pleasure seekers. Some of the greatest pleasure we can have for all eternity are pleasures obtained while on earth that we purchased because we willingly suffered for the name of Jesus.

In Matthew 20, the mother of James and John came to Jesus and asked that her sons would sit with Jesus in his glory, one on his right and the other on his left. Those are the positions of highest honor next to Jesus. What did Jesus say?

Jesus answered, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink?” Matthew 20:22 (ESV)

Jesus’ point is the positions of greatest glory next to him are reserved for those who suffered immensely because they were like him. The degree of my earthly suffering for Christ corresponds to the degree of my eternal joy with Christ.

Paul taught the same thing.

...and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him. Romans 8:17 (ESV)

Our willingness to suffer like Christ will connect to the degree of our eternal glory and joy when we are with Christ.

How do we apply this? Live an aggressive Christian life. Be bold in your faith. Don’t be afraid to talk about Jesus at work or with your friends, even if it is socially unacceptable. Don’t be afraid to act like Jesus and talk about the good
news of Jesus, even if you suffer because of it. You are gaining a great eternal
reward. Expect to suffer for living like Christ and speaking about Christ. Just
remember you will be doubly rewarded by Christ in the end.

**Suffering for Christ carries an earthly blessing.**

If you are insulted for the name of Christ, **you are blessed, because the Spirit of
glory and of God rests upon you.** 1 Peter 4:14 (ESV)

The blessings of suffering for the name of Christ are not all in eternity.
God also promises to bless us in this life. Peter said when we are insulted for the
name of Christ, we are blessed by God. Specifically this is talked about naming
Jesus in a public forum. This is the football player in the NFL that spoke about
Jesus on CNN so his interview was cut off midstream simply because he started
talking about Jesus. This is Hobby Lobby going to court because they don’t want
to be forced by the government health care system to fund employee abortions.
This is being thought weird because you are reading your Bible in study hall on
your phone at school. This is quoting a Bible verse to explain your actions.
When this happens, we are blessed.

What does the Bible mean when it says we are blessed? It doesn’t mean
we will become rich or wealthy. It doesn’t mean life will become easy. The
blessings God promises are that a special measure of the glory of God and the
Holy Spirit’s presence in our lives in those times of suffering. When you are
suffering for Christ, you will know the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in an
unprecedented way.

Some of us waddle along in life wondering if God is real. We do not have
anything moments of great spiritual significance to reflect upon. I have a solution
to move anyone out of that type of spiritual gridlock.

Take a public stand for Jesus. Be persecuted because you talk about
Jesus at school or work. God promises he will send the presence and power of
the Holy Spirit into your life. The Holy Spirit will carry you through those times of
suffering in a way you have never experienced. Maybe one of the reasons many
of us don’t experience Jesus’ presence in a notable way is because we don’t live
our faith in a notable way.

Peter also said the Spirit of Glory rests on us in those moments when we
are naming the name of Christ and suffering for it. The Spirit of Glory is the
Shekinah Glory spoken about in the Old Testament. There are times in the Old
Testament where God’s presence so envelopes a place there is a cloud that
literally glows with God’s presence. At the dedication of Solomon’s temple, the
Shekinah Glory of God’s presence showed up and filled the temple. The cloud
that led the nation of Israel in the wilderness, which was a cloud by day and a
pillar of fire by night, was a manifestation of the Shekinah Glory of God. Peter
said when you are insulted for the name of Christ because you are living like
Christ, in those moments, the Shekinah Glory of God’s very presence will come
to rest on you. That is a serious blessing.
I think the best illustration of this is Stephen in the New Testament. We find his story in Acts 6:8. He was boldly proclaiming Jesus. Wicked men were stirred up against him. They ultimately stoned him for naming the name of Jesus. As he was facing a life-or-death situation for naming Christ, the very presence of God’s Shekinah Glory was indwelling him and shining through his face.

And gazing at him, all who sat in the council saw that his face was like the face of an angel. Acts 6:15 (ESV)

As Stephen was dying, look at the unprecedented intimacy with God through the Holy Spirit that he was privileged to know.

But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. Acts 7:55 (ESV)

When we suffer for naming the name of Christ it is different from other kinds of suffering. The same fullness of the Holy Spirit and the Shekinah Glory of God that was seen in Stephen’s life as he suffered for Jesus is promised to rest on each one of us when we suffer for naming Jesus. If you read accounts of martyrs you find again and again incredible peace and courage in the face of death. Where does it come from? Right here!

We learned to expect to suffer when we act like Christ. We know suffering for Christ is good for us. It purifies our faith. It proves our faith. We know we are blessed in this life when we suffer for Christ and we are doubly blessed in eternity when it comes to our eternal rewards. These blessing are so appealing that Peter wants us to remember that not all suffering carries these blessings. It is only suffering because we are a Christian.

4. **If I suffer, make sure it is for being a Christian.**

But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name. 1 Peter 4:15–16 (ESV)

Peter gave us a quick list. Don’t suffer as a murderer. Everyone can agree on that one. Don’t suffer because you are a thief. Everyone said “Amen” to that. Don’t suffer as an evildoer, that means don’t suffer for carrying out any form of evil. That pretty much covers anything else that murder and thievery left off the list. Then he throws a curveball. Don’t suffer as a meddler.

What is a meddler? This is the only time the word is used in the New Testament. It literally means looking over someone else’s shoulder to see what they are doing. Doesn’t it annoy you when you are tapping out a text message on your phone and somebody strains their neck to read your text messages? My son told me this week that is called creeping. When you have a creeper you look back at them and tell them to, “Mind your own business.” Peter was going from the really bad sins of murder and stealing to the very light sin of being a nosey busybody, of being a creeper. As a Christian, don’t even suffer for creeping.

While the same word isn’t used again in the Bible, the same thought comes up again and again.
…and to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you,, 1 Thessalonians 4:11 (ESV)

For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies. 2 Thessalonians 3:11 (ESV)

As Christians, don’t even busy yourself reading the tabloids at the checkout aisle that discuss how Bruce Jenner is becoming a woman. Don’t even repeat information about your friends that are getting a divorce. Don’t be even be a creeper.

Peter’s big point was to make sure that if you suffer it is for nothing other than living like Christ and speaking about Christ. These incredible promises and blessings are only guaranteed for Christ-like living. Not because you are suffering as a crook, a murderer or for acting rude and reading somebody else’s text message.

At this point, some of Peter’s audience was questioning their faith. When they came to Jesus they didn’t realize that meant they were guaranteed to suffer. They are beginning to wonder if the Christian life is worth their suffering. Maybe they should walk away from the faith.

5. Suffering for Christ now, is nothing compared to suffering for all of eternity later.

For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And “If the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?” 1 Peter 4:17–18 (ESV)

This verse is very important. It is often misunderstood. It makes a point that will reframe the way you think about suffering in the Christian life.

Peter said that in this last stage of God’s plan. God’s judgment is not just when Christ returns but it is until Christ returns. Right now God’s judgment has begun and it has begun with the household of God, the church. The judgment the church experiences is not a judgment to pay for their sin. Jesus already did that. God’s judgment upon the church is a purifying judgment to mature us and rid of us sin. It is also a proving judgment that proves the genuineness of our faith. It is a blessing judgment that results in greater eternal joy and greater earthly experience of God’s Holy Spirit.

God is intentionally purifying and proving his church by judging it. This is why God promises us trials and suffering in this life. Sometimes that purifying suffering is very hard. It is being torn to death by hunting dogs and rolled in pitch to burn like a torch in the night.

If this is what God’s purifying judgment is like for the church that he loves, imagine what will happen to those who don’t obey God and die apart from Christ and face God’s full wrath. That is mind-blowingly horrible.
The biblical picture is that everyone will suffer. Christians will suffer now, especially when they name Christ, but our suffering is good. It purifies us and ultimately blesses us. The only other option is to walk away from Christ and escape God’s purifying judgment now but face his full wrath against sin for eternity later. That is the only other option. Everyone will suffer. I know this is hard to hear, but it is biblical.

Peter threw in a verse that is often misunderstood to support his point.

And “If the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?” 1 Peter 4:18 (ESV)

It sounds like our salvation is in question. That is not what Peter was teaching. Peter was quoting from Proverbs 11:31 in the Septuagint, which is the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament, that all the Greek speaking people of Peter’s day used. If you look up Proverbs 11:31 in your Bible, it will read a little differently because it was translated of the Hebrew.

If the righteous is repaid on earth, how much more the wicked and the sinner! Proverbs 11:31 (ESV)

Notice the verse is comparing life of the righteous on earth with life of the ungodly and sinners in eternity. Now let’s read the Greek translation from the Septuagint.

If indeed the righteous is scarcely saved, where will the ungodly and sinful appear? Proverbs 11:31 (LES)

The verse reads a little differently but it keeps the same idea. The key to understanding this verse is the word scarcely. It means with great difficulty. If the righteous are saved by going through great difficulties in this life — God’s purifying and proving judgment — what will become of the ungodly and the sinner in eternity?

The difficulty that is talked about in this verse is not the difficulty of being saved, it is the difficulty of suffering in this life faced by those who are saved. Peter showed us from the OT that the life of a Christians will be difficult. Take heart. That suffering will be used by God to purify our faith, to prove our faith and to bless our lives both now and in eternity.

6. When it is God’s will that I suffer, trust my soul into God’s hands and continue doing good.

Therefore let those who suffer according to God’s will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good. 1 Peter 4:19 (ESV)

Then Peter summed it up. When you suffer according to God’s will, sometimes it is God’s will that we suffer. Don’t freak out. Don’t be surprised. Expect to suffer. Know the suffering is good for us to purify and prove us. Know that God will use it to bless us in this life and in the next.

As you suffer, entrust your soul into God’s care and continue to do good. Trust your soul into God’s hands. He knows what he is doing when we are
suffering. We just have to continue doing good and know that even our suffering is not out of his hands.
Life Group Work Sheet
1 Peter 4:12-19

February 15, 2015

Getting to Know Each Other

1. Have there ever been times in your life when you have suffered hardship because of your own stupidity?

Read 1 Peter 4:12-13

1. What did Peter see in the image of fire that is beneficial in the life of a Christian as it pertains to trials and suffering? Are all difficulties in life necessarily fiery trials? Why or why not?

2. Can you think of examples in the Bible where God brings glory to his name through the suffering of his people?

3. How can Pastor Saeed (imprisoned in Iran for his faith for multiple years) rejoice in his suffering? When you suffer, how can you rejoice in your suffering?

Read 1 Peter 4:14-16


2. Read 1 Peter 2:12, 15; 3:9, 16; 4:4, 16. What type of suffering is Peter referring to in these verses, physical or verbal? What would this look like in your workplace? What would God's blessing in this suffering look like?

3. What questions should we ask ourselves when we suffer? Why is it important to know the reasons for our suffering?

Read 1 Peter 4:17-19; Ezekiel 9:6

1. How does knowing God's refining judgment begins with the household of God help you understand the trials Christians face in this life?

2. What does it mean to "entrust" yourself to God? Why can we entrust ourselves to God and continue to do good in the midst of trials?

3. Read Proverbs 11:31, which Peter quotes in v. 18. It compares the life of the righteous on earth with the sinner in eternity. How does the refinement through suffering Christians experience on earth compare to the judgment facing those who die apart from Christ?
Next Steps - Read Philippians 1:12-14

1. Do you find yourself feeling more courageous to talk about your faith knowing that you are blessed when you are persecuted and the great wrath those apart from Christ face?
February 22, 2015

Good morning. It is great to have you at CrossWinds. My name is Kurt. I am one of the pastors. Like all the pastors at CrossWinds, I count it a privilege to serve you. In a moment, you will see why that is important.

As a church, we are studying the book of 1 Peter. In this letter, Peter spent a great deal of time talking about suffering. Last week, we looked at a particular kind of suffering, suffering for being a Christian. In those times when we suffer for our faith, God promises unique blessing upon us in this life and the next because we have suffered for Jesus. This hit home when we saw the beheading of 21 Coptic Christians by ISIS. If you missed the message, I encourage you to listen to it online at www.CrossWinds.tv. It will completely reframe your understanding of suffering in Christian life.

This morning, it appears Peter made a sudden change of subject. He was talking about entrusting our lives into God’s care and continuing to do good while we suffer, but in the next verse, Peter started talking about elders — church leaders, and their relationship to the people they pastor. Why the sudden change? Maybe there wasn’t a change.

Without getting into the details, Peter built his understanding of God’s purifying judgment on the church from the book of Ezekiel. In the book of Ezekiel, God’s purifying judgment began with a special group in the church. Can anybody guess what group God has a special focus on purifying and maturing? Church leaders. Ezekiel 9 talks about God using purifying judgment on the leaders of his people. Look what it says.

“Kill old men outright, young men and maidens, little children and women, but touch no one on whom is the mark. And begin at my sanctuary.” So they began with the elders who were before the house. Ezekiel 9:6 (ESV)

The purifying judgment of God’s people began with the leaders of God’s people. Peter was not switching subjects. God’s people will face trials to purify their faith but the leaders of God’s people are the first in line to face those trials. If you are a spiritual leader in the church, you need to be prepared to be matured through suffering.

You and I know that whenever a church leader faces problems there is a temptation for him or her to become harsh and overbearing on the people. There is also a temptation for the people of the church to undermine the leadership of a church when they are suffering. Peter addressed both of these situations. How should spiritual leaders lead a church and how should the people of the church follow the leaders of the church, especially when times are hard? These are very important questions.
So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly: not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” 1 Peter 5:1–5 (ESV)

The first thing pastors must remember is their job description.

The Pastor’s Job — Shepherd the flock like Jesus shepherds us.

So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you… 1 Peter 5:1–2 (ESV)

Who are the elders?

Many people think of elders as old men. Was Peter addressing an age group? Elders are not necessarily older men. Elders are the spiritual leaders of the local church. Many spiritual leaders are older men, but chronological age does not necessarily equal spiritual maturity. We see this when Paul wrote to Timothy, in the books of 1 and 2 Timothy. Timothy was a young man but he pastored churches. He was one of the elders. Paul even told Timothy to make sure people did not look down on him because of his age. Elders are the spiritual leaders of a church. They are not necessarily older men.

What are the qualifications of an elder?

The Bible gives these qualifications in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. I encourage you to read those qualifications tonight in your Life Group. The qualifications pertain to someone’s life, character, reputation, gifting and spiritual maturity. It isn’t just who wins a Bible trivia contest. Spiritual leadership is not just knowledge, it is character.

I should note there are different terms in the New Testament used to describe the spiritual leaders in the church. The terms elder, pastor and overseer are used interchangeably. The terms talk about the different aspects of the same office.

• The term elder talks about spiritual maturity.
• Overseer refers to oversight and guidance.
• Pastor talks about the role of care.

While there are at least three different areas of spiritual leaders involving spiritual maturity, oversight and care, Peter focused on how leaders in the church lead. That is described as shepherding. Leaders should shepherd. The problem is that under pressure from the world around us, church leaders have started using different metaphors to guide their leadership. As a result church can
become a terrible place because the leaders of the church are not thinking of leadership the way God tells them to lead.

**How have we misunderstood spiritual leadership?**

**Pastor as entertainer** — Some people see the pastor's job as entertaining the people. His job is telling funny stories. His job is to be Jay Leno and Jesus rolled together. He is to amuse people with funny stories trying to make the feel good. Many churches buy into this pastoral style of leadership. That is the wrong metaphor. You don’t want pastors and spiritual leaders who see themselves as entertainers. Entertainers draw crowds but unless they shepherd the church they won’t grow the church. You want pastors that are shepherds.

**Pastor as CEO** — Some people see the pastor’s job as a CEO. This is the business pastor. This is the pastor that has the ability to get things done, to organize people and build structures. This leadership style usually filters into the rest of the church’s leadership as the church is run like a corporation. While there are business aspects to the church, the church is not a business. It is a church. The bottom line is not ultimately about a spreadsheet and budget numbers. It is about shepherding individual people. If you adopt the wrong metaphor, you are asking for disaster.

**Pastor as spiritual butler** — Some people view their pastor as a spiritual butler. His job is to marry, bury, baptize and visit in the hospital. He is at your service. The problem with this metaphor is the pastor is seen as your servant, not your spiritual leader. That is the wrong metaphor. The Bible tells us pastors and elders are shepherds. Shepherds lead. We have to stick with the shepherding metaphor or church leadership will cause disaster.

**Why is spiritual leadership called shepherding?**

I didn’t know much about sheep and shepherding. I assume most of us are in the same position. This week I did a little research on sheep and shepherds to better understand this leadership metaphor.

**Sheep get lost. They need a shepherd to look for them.** Did you know sheep are one of the few animals in the world to have absolutely no homing instinct? They can become totally lost even if they are only a few miles from their home. If you take sheep into unfamiliar territory, they will walk in circles until they collapse. They have no idea how to find home. That is why they need a shepherd. They need a shepherd that will search for them when they are lost because they can’t find their way home.

*What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing.* Luke 15:4–5 (ESV)

The Bible describes each one of us as sheep. We get lost much easier than we realize. The pastors, the spiritual leaders have the job of looking for us
when we are missing and bringing us home. Shepherds don’t just care about large crowds of sheep, they care about individual sheep. You need to have that metaphor in your mind if you want to be a leader in the church. Church leadership is not about the numbers. It is about caring for individual people who get left behind and need a shepherd to look for them.

Sheep are easily lead astray. They need a shepherd so they are not deceived. Sheep are easily led astray. In New Zealand, the way they lead the sheep to the slaughter house is by putting a trained male sheep in the flock. He bleats and calls for the other sheep to follow him. They follow him into the slaughter house because sheep are easily led astray. Interestingly, the trained sheep that leads the others into the slaughter house is called the Judas sheep. I think it is an appropriate name.

Since sheep are easily led astray, the shepherd’s job is to protect them from getting fooled and being destroyed.

All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. Isaiah 53:6 (ESV)

The sheep metaphor reminds us we are easily led astray. We need spiritual leaders who look out for us so we don’t go our own way, and even to our own death, because we are following the crowd.

This past week I was in California for meetings. On one of my connecting flights to Sioux Falls, I sat next to this huge guy who was friendly as a teddy bear. We had a great conversation. He lost his mom recently from cancer. I recently lost my mom from cancer. It turns out he attends Christ Community Church in Omaha. They are in a sermon series on Exodus. As a newer Christian, he finds it hard to understand. He then told me is is beginning to listen to Joel Olstein instead of church. In my mind red lights are flashing. I am thinking, “He is following the Judas sheep.” My job as his new pastor for the last 36 minutes, was to keep him from being led astray. He has no idea that Joel Olstein’s teaching is not biblical teaching. It is a counterfeit. The job of a shepherd is to keep his people from being led astray.

Sheep need good food and water. The shepherd provides good food. Sheep are one of the few animals that cannot sense water. Most animals can smell water in the wind and lead themselves to a watering hole. Sheep cannot. If left on the open range they will literally die of thirst when a watering hole is only a quarter mile away. The only way they can find a new watering hole is if the shepherd leads them. Not just any watering hole will work. Sheep are not smart enough to avoid stagnant water. They drink it and get sick. Sheep are afraid of rushing water. They won’t drink from fast-moving water, even if they are thirsty. A shepherd needs to lead them to gentle-flowing, clean water.

Food is also a problem. If sheep eat grass that is too wet they develop a problem called food rot which results in diarrhea and sickness. If sheep run out of grass, they eat dirt, which has no nutrition and gets them sick.
The sheep need a shepherd to get them the right food and water so they stay healthy and grow strong. In the same way the spiritual leaders of the church have a responsibility to feed the people good spiritual food.

He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. Psalm 23:2 (ESV)

**Sheep are defenseless. They need a shepherd for protection.** Sheep are a defenseless animal. They can't kick. They can't scratch. They can’t bite. They can’t jump. They can’t run. When attacked they just die. They have absolutely no defense mechanism, except for their shepherd.

Sheep can even die of flies. Flies lay their eggs in the dense wool of the sheep and when they hatch, the flies swarm around the sheep's face until the sheep is literally driven mad. Some sheep even die of fly frustration.

Enter the shepherd. He cares for his sheep. He cleans out the wool and scatters the flies. When a wolf or a lion attacks the sheep, he defends them. He is evening willing to lay down his life for them.

But David said to Saul, “Your servant used to keep sheep for his father. And when there came a lion, or a bear, and took a lamb from the flock, I went after him and struck him and delivered it out of his mouth. And if he arose against me, I caught him by his beard and struck him and killed him. 1 Samuel 17:34–35 (ESV)

Put yourself in a church facing trials. As a spiritual leader in the church, your job is to protect your sheep. You are not willing for even one of your sheep to perish. You feed your sheep. You protect them from being led astray or falling away. You lay down your life for individual sheep. Your job is not to entertain. It is not to run a corporation. It is not to be a spiritual butler. It is to be a good loving shepherd. If you miss this metaphor, things won’t go well under your leadership.

**Who created the shepherd model of church leadership?**

The reason the spiritual leaders in the church are called to think of themselves as shepherds caring for sheep is because that is the way God cares for us. David describes this in Psalm 23.

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. Psalm 23:1 (ESV)

Jesus said I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. John 10:11 (ESV)

You can’t understand how church leaders should lead until you understand that human leadership in the church is connected to the way God leads us. Pastors can’t shepherd the flock until they understand they are to care for the people of God like God cares for them. They are to be patient with people and love them, like God is patient with us and loves us. If you miss this, you will miss the job of spiritual leadership.
The shepherding of leaders in the church is an extension of God's shepherding in our lives.

You led your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron. Psalm 77:20 (ESV)

The way God shepherded his people in the wilderness was by the hand of Moses and Aaron. God shepherds his people not just through the Holy Spirit and Bible study but he also shepherds his people through human leaders. Moses and Aaron were imperfect leaders but God shepherded his people through them. The same is true today. God's people still need shepherding. God ordained that part of care of his people comes through shepherding leaders in the church.

This is why church leaders must think of their jobs by the right metaphor. They are an extension of God's shepherding in the congregation's life.

The Pastor's Pitfalls

I told you Peter was building his thoughts from the book of Ezekiel. In Ezekiel, we find God taking the leaders of the people to the wood shed because they were no longer shepherding the people. Let me show you.

The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the injured you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought, and with force and harshness you have ruled them. Ezekiel 34:4 (ESV)

Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the Lord: As I live, declares the Lord God, surely because my sheep have become a prey, and my sheep have become food for all the wild beasts, since there was no shepherd, and because my shepherds have not searched for my sheep, but the shepherds have fed themselves, and have not fed my sheep, therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the Lord: Thus says the Lord God, Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will require my sheep at their hand and put a stop to their feeding the sheep. No longer shall the shepherds feed themselves. I will rescue my sheep from their mouths, that they may not be food for them. Ezekiel 34:7–10 (ESV)

We could make a whole sermon on leadership pitfalls from those verses. Let's summarize them all by saying the failure of spiritual leaders usually come from a failure of the leaders to shepherd the people. They don't help the discouraged. Those who are lost or led astray, they don't hunt down. Instead of dealing gently with the sheep, they deal with them by force and harshness. Instead of giving their lives for the sheep, they are making the sheep give their lives for them.

Peter gave us three examples of what it looks like when spiritual leaders go bad.

Attitude — Leading because I have to not because I get to.

…not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you… 1 Peter 5:2 (ESV)
In some churches, church leadership is thought of as a necessary evil. Somebody needs to be on the board to oversee the budget and finances. The church leaders would rather be on the golf course but they reluctantly agree to serve on the board. Somebody needs to visit the hospital. The church leaders would rather have all their time to themselves but they reluctantly agree to make visits.

God doesn't want men leading the church who view church leadership as a joyless duty. He wants men filled with excitement for the opportunity to serve Jesus by shepherding God's flock. Pray that God would raise up more of these kind of men at CrossWinds. Men who lead not because they have to but because they understand it is a privilege. They want to lead. Leaders in the church should not feel it is a duty or inconvenience to serve but it is an honor.

Why is this important? If you don’t see shepherding as a privilege, you won’t be a good shepherd. Your poor attitude will come out in everything you do. If you are a pastor or if you are an AWANA teacher or if you serve as a leader in the youth group or you lead on the worship team and you view your service in the church as a grudging job not a privilege and a joy, you are in a very dangerous place. You attitude will leak. It will hurt the sheep. Does that mean spiritual leadership is always easy? Of course not. We must always keep the mindset that it is a privilege to serve God by serving his people.

**Motive — Serving to get from people instead of give to people.**

...not for shameful gain, but eagerly... 1 Peter 5:2 (ESV)

If you are a spiritual leader, you must serve for what you can give to people not for what you can get from them. God doesn’t want spiritual leaders who think of the church as a way to stroke their ego or enrich their pockets. Some pastors grow rich from their church. They have book deals, speaking deals and large salaries. A church can boost the ego if you become a Christian celebrity.

Shameful gain means a church leader uses the church for riches and self-promotion. That is a pitfall. The only name we are promoting and the only name we want people remembering is the name of Jesus, not our own. Serving eagerly means serving people because you want to give to them, not because you want to gain from them.

Let me tell you the way things usually work in the Christian speaking world. If you are someone of notoriety, you get an agent. The agent handles your bookings for churches, conferences and events. It is common for Christian celebrities to charge $7,000-$14,000 or much more to arrange for a Christian celebrity to speak at an event for 30-45 minutes. Christian celebrities use their fees for financial gain.

Other Christians of notoriety don’t use an agent. They schedule things themselves to stay cheap. They charge for their mileage and ask for a love offering or a modest honorarium. They may be worth more but they don’t want to
miss an opportunity to serve the church because large fees cut off many opportunities. Some Christian celebrities use the church as a way to wealth, others use it as a way to serve.

…and constant friction among people who are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain. 1 Timothy 6:5 (ESV)

This doesn’t mean that Christians shouldn’t use an agent. It doesn’t mean Christians can’t charge a fee. It means you have to look at your motivation. Are you about serving people or using people to serve you.

Some people read this and believe pastors shouldn’t be paid. It says the church is not a place for shameful gain. It doesn’t say the church is not a place for honest gain. From the very beginning of the church we find pastors and church leaders were paid so they could devote more of their time to shepherding the church.

Let the one who is taught the word share all good things with the one who teaches. Galatians 6:6 (ESV)

Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard without eating any of its fruit? Or who tends a flock without getting some of the milk? 1 Corinthians 9:7 (ESV)

Churches have a responsibility to care for their shepherds, that includes paying them for their work. I can tell you CrossWinds is very kind in paying their pastors. I am very thankful to serve such a good church. Pastor are to serve for honest gain to enable them to serve people.

Authority — Leading by authority instead of example.

…not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. 1 Peter 5:3 (ESV)

Domineering is asserting your will over others by throwing your weight around. Domineering is acting as a spiritual bully. There is no room for this in the church. If you are around the evangelical church for any length of time you discover many churches have spiritual bullies in positions of leadership. That is not good.

Church leaders are not to lead by their position of authority but by the Word of God and the example of their lives. The goal is that spiritual leaders say, “Follow me as I follow Christ.” I urge you, then, be imitators of me. 1 Corinthians 4:16 (ESV)

Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. Philippians 3:17 (ESV)

My desire is that all the pastors, elders, Leadership Board members, greeters, ushers, and CrossWinds University teachers all lead by example. We
never ask people to do things we are not willing to do or are not already doing ourselves.

A few years ago we had the problem of a leaking roof and a flooding basement. It was a serious situation that would put CrossWinds in debt. As I prayed about how to deal with the situation, I knew the church needed to give sacrificially. I felt God calling myself and the church's leadership to lead by example.

The board gave sacrificially to that project before we shared it with the congregation. We needed to lead by example. As your pastor, I also needed to lead by example. I told the board I gave my next two paychecks to help eliminate the roof and basement debt. It was only after the leaders gave sacrificially that we came to the congregation and offered you the opportunity to give. That is because God calls leaders to lead by example.

**The Pastor’s Reward - The Unfading Crown of Glory.**

And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. 1 Peter 5:4 (ESV)

Shepherding God's people can be a tiring job. It can involve evenings away from home. It involves ugly messes like trying to reconcile a divorce. Spiritual leadership usually means lots of earthly work with little earthly reward. Peter wanted those who shepherd the people of God to realize that when Jesus, the chief shepherd, returns, he will reward those who shepherd his people. He will reward us with the unfading crown of glory. We don't know exactly what that looks like but it looks pretty good.

While spiritual leadership doesn't have much earthly pay, the retirement package is out of this world.

**The Congregation’s Job - Submit to their Spiritual Leaders.**

Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders… 1 Peter 5:5 (ESV)

Most commentators believe Peter was not speaking with reference to age. He was simply speaking to those who are not elders in the church. If the younger folks in the church are supposed to be subject to their spiritual leaders, that certainly means everyone else in the church should be subject to the spiritual leaders.

This point feels awkward. It feels almost self-serving. Before I talk about this I want to remind you I am just teaching the text. The job of the congregation is to submit to the spiritual leaders of the church. Incidentally, that even applies to me. I do not lead unilaterally. I submit to the Leadership Board. I report to that board. We are all under authority.

What does submitting to spiritual leaders look like?
Being subject means affirming and supporting the need for local pastoral leadership in my life.

It means realizing God describes us as sheep. We need God to shepherd us through others. We need pastoral leadership our life. That means being a part of Sunday morning teaching, CrossWind University Classes, Life Groups, CrossWinds Academy and AWANA. The local church is not just a bunch of programs but the programs of the church are all part of God’s intended care for your soul.

It means being willing to admit you need to be part of a local church. It means admitting you need pastoring and shepherding in your life. Many Christians today don’t believe they need shepherding. They love Jesus but they avoid the church.

If you think all you need is your Bible and a cup of coffee, when you come to a local church like CrossWinds, you will be cynical of the leadership and the teaching. You will never get involved or serve others. You will be unwilling to have a shepherd in your life.

You need to believe that no matter how good your life is, being part of a local church and having a shepherd that watches over your soul is part of God’s plan for you. You need it. You need to be under the local teaching of God’s word. You need to be involved in relationships where people care about you and where you care for and serve others. You need to be involved using your gifts. You need to believe this.

It means seeking your pastor’s teaching and counsel.

Thank you for showing up. I know there are plenty of things to do on Sunday morning besides study God’s Word. Thank you for showing up. Thank you for connecting on the Internet if you can’t be here and making it a priority to be fed spiritually. Part of a congregation’s job is being willing to receive teaching.

Your pastors and leaders are also here to provide you with counsel. We are committed to your spiritual care. It breaks my heart when I see some of you going through a divorce or you are out of a job or life is falling apart. We want to counsel and encourage you through those times. God gives you shepherds to help you. Take advantage of those who are trying to care for your soul.

It means becoming a member of my local church.

There are many people who love to attend church but they don’t want to join a church and make a formal association with a church body. I know some of you came from a poor church experience. I encourage you to take a step of growth. Become a member and get involved with both feet. You need to be shepherded. You need the relationships. Your leadership is needed in your own church. Many of you have been here forever and you love Jesus but you could never serve your church in any official capacity because you are not a member. Become a member and admit we need spiritual leaders who will care for your soul.
It means participating in the structures and programs designed to care for your soul.

Pastoral care and leadership can’t always be expressed through one on one meetings and the pulpit. Just as Moses appointed leaders to care for smaller groups of people, we do the same. We have Life Groups that do meals together and spend time together. We have women’s ministry on Tuesday morning. We have AWANA for kids on Wednesday morning. We have CrossWinds Academy for kids on Sunday morning. Ask Jesus to give you a good view of this and to receive church programs into your life not as intrusions into your schedule but as gifts from God to care for your soul. Your soul needs more care than 45 Sunday morning sermons can provide.

When you join a group, don’t dive in with an attitude of cynicism but believe God has something for you and that God has you there to encourage someone. Befriend people. Be open to people. The good shepherd is behind all this. Programs are not just another event. They are expressions of God’s shepherding care for your soul through your local church.

The Church’s Attitude — Clothe Yourself With Humility

Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” 1 Peter 5:5 (ESV)

What keeps the church together in good times and hard times is the attitude of the leaders and of the people. That attitude can be described in one word. Humility. Leaders should not be proud, instead their job is to shepherd and serve. Members of the church should not be rebellious but are to humble themselves and put themselves under their leader’s care. Humility is to think about others instead of themselves. It is embodied in Jesus.

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Philippians 2:3–4 (ESV)

While we covered the job of the leaders and the job of the people. The job of everyone is humility. We are not to look out for others before ourselves that any church can thrive.

Conclusion

Where do we go from here?

Humble Sheep — Every one of us needs to humble ourselves and admit our need to not just have God as our shepherd but our need of the shepherding of spiritual leaders in our lives. Humble yourself and see the teaching and programs of your church as part of God’s shepherding care for your soul. If you are uninvolved, I encourage you to repent. See the people, teaching and programs of CrossWinds as part of the way God cares for your soul. Become a member. Get involved and serve others.
**Humble Shepherds** — If you are in any form of leadership at CrossWinds, humble yourself. Don’t make people serve you, serve them. Lead by the example of your life before the words of your mouth. Care for individual people not just numbers. Keep the right metaphor. You are a shepherd. This week care for individual people.
Getting to Know Each Other

1. How would you define a healthy church? Would you consider CrossWinds a healthy church? Why or why not?

Read 1 Peter 5:1-3

1. What image does Peter use to describe church elders? Why is this an appropriate description of church leadership?

2. What qualities does a shepherd have that are important in leading a healthy church?

3. Read John 21:15-17. What does it mean to “exercise oversight”? Share a story of how one of your pastors has done this for you.

4. Why is it important that a leader in the church perform his duties willingly? Why is it important that a leader not be out for selfish gain or be domineering over others? What do these look like in real life?

5. Read Mark 10:35-45. What is the danger of church leadership not taking this passage seriously?

Read 1 Peter 5:4

1. Read Psalm 23:1; John 10:11. Who should elders be looking to as an example in their leadership? Why is this important? How does this raise their expectations while also being a relief?

2. Here Peter says that faithful elders will receive a reward at Jesus’ second coming. Is it wrong to be motivation by heavenly rewards?

Read 1 Peter 5:5

1. What responsibility does the congregation have in response to leaders in the church? What actions can we as church members take in order to be subject to the elders?

2. What would CrossWinds look like if the leaders and congregation obeyed Peter’s exhortations on a regular basis? How would this affect our church, our community, and our world?

Read Philippians 2:1-11
1. What one thing can you as a leader or as a church member do this week to show humility and consider others more significant than yourself?
March 1, 2015

Good morning. My name is Kurt. I am one of the pastors. I want to tell you about one of the hardest parts of my job — it is watching the back door. The front door is easy. I watch people come and go each week by the church’s front door. I look forward to seeing them the following week. The hardest part is watching the back door. That is the part that worries me. I am not speaking about a literal back door but I am referring to people who walk away from the church and do not return.

As elders, charged with shepherding the flock, we keep a list of folks that haven’t attended church in a few weeks. Since shepherds look for the lost, we give people a call to let them know they were missed; we love them and offer to pray for them. Most of the time we discover people were simply traveling for business or they were out of town on family affairs. Those calls are a joy-filled conversations. They are an opportunity to reconnect with people we love and miss.

There are other conversations that aren’t as easy. There are people who worship at CrossWinds but do not return. They slowly drift away and stay away. Why do they leave?

• For some it was a period of suffering in their lives or in the life of a loved one that pulled them away. They prayed for healing but God didn’t answer their prayer in the way they expected. Out of bitterness, they began ignoring God because they concluded he ignored them. They drifted away.

• For others, it was the distractions of life, the vanity fair nature of this world. They were busy with school sports, vacationing with family and so many busy events on the weekend that over the course of time, Christ — and his church — became nothing but a foggy memory. As a result, they drifted away.

• For others, the cost of following Jesus was too high. When they became Christians, they thought all their problems would go away and now they realize their problems were only beginning. As it says in 2 Timothy 3:12, all who live a Godly life in Christ will suffer. They didn’t realize they were signing up to pay a high price. They drifted away.

• Still others have found themselves ensnared by sin, guilt and shame. Unable to break free from persistent patterns of sin, they became certain God was sick of them. They were sure they exhausted his forgiveness. Sin-sick when they look in the mirror, they drifted away.

As Peter came to the end of this letter, he was aware of the temptations we face either from laziness, distractions or outright persecution, to walk away from Christ and his church. He knew there would be times when we are faced with the choice to reject Christ or die, like we see with ISIS in the Middle East.
Peter had one clear message for each of us as he closed his letter. Stand firm. Stand firm no matter what hits you. Stand firm no matter what it costs you. In these closing verses he told us what we need to know to be able to stand firm when everything else is pulling us away.

Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen. By Silvanus, a faithful brother as I regard him, I have written briefly to you, exhorting and declaring that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it. She who is at Babylon, who is likewise chosen, sends you greetings, and so does Mark, my son. Greet one another with the kiss of love. Peace to all of you who are in Christ. 1 Peter 5:6–14 (ESV)

As we look at this text, I want to begin at the postscript then return to the earlier verses.

Closing Words

By Silvanus, a faithful brother as I regard him, I have written briefly to you, exhorting and declaring that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it. She who is at Babylon, who is likewise chosen, sends you greetings, and so does Mark, my son. Greet one another with the kiss of love. Peace to all of you who are in Christ. 1 Peter 5:12–14 (ESV)

Who was Silvanus? Silvanus was the man Peter instructed to carry this letter to the churches in Asia Minor. He was not simply a post man. Silvanus was not just told to carry the letter but he was also instructed by Peter on how to read this letter to the churches he visited. Silvanus was the stand-in preacher for Peter on Sunday mornings when he read Peter’s letter. Silvanus’ job was to read Peter’s letter like Peter would have read it. Silvanus was preaching Paul’s words in his place by reading his letter.

Where was Babylon? Obviously Peter was not speaking about the literal Babylon. History tells us Peter was writing from Rome. If he was writing from Rome, why did he speak about Babylon?

Babylon typified a culture in opposition to God. In this time, Rome was the culture that was opposed to God. A few weeks ago, we learned Christians were already suffering for their faith socially. In a few years Nero would accuse the Christians of setting the great fire of Rome and horrific levels of physical persecution began that lasted for 200 years. This is why Peter wrote about Babylon. He is writing from Rome, a culture in opposition to the gospel, much like ISIS is today.
What is this kiss of love? It is not a romantic kiss. It is an expression of a warm welcome and friendship. This is similar to the kiss you see given on both cheeks between men in some foreign cultures today. Peter wanted Christians to express warm welcome and hospitality.

I want to drill into verse 12. Peter said he wrote briefly, exhorting and declaring that this is the true grace of God. What is the true grace of God? In one word, it is Jesus and the hope we have of eternity with him. Peter began his letter by introducing us to this living hope.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you… 1 Peter 1:3–4 (ESV)

There are no other options. Jesus died in our places, for our sins. Jesus was born again. Jesus is our living hope. One day Jesus will return. He will judge the world. As Christians, we are looking for that final day. We are looking forward to the return of Jesus. On that day we will get our inheritance from God which we do not deserve. We live looking forward to this day in the future.

Peter told us to stand firm in this. Don’t drift away from Christ. Don’t drift away from the church. Don’t walk away from Jesus out of fear or laziness. Don’t give up your hope.

In the preceding verses, Peter told us how to stand firm in Jesus — our hope — when everything else is pulling us away. If you want to stand firm, here is what you need to know.

To stand firm, I must understand God’s pattern for my life.

Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you… 1 Peter 5:6 (ESV)

Humbling myself means submitting to God’s pattern of suffering before glory.

When he said humble yourselves under God’s mighty hand, that is not just something we do but it is a reminder of the way God works. Humiliation always comes before exaltation. This is the way God worked in the life of Jesus. It is also the way God works in the life of his people.

Jesus took on the form of a humble servant. He went from creating the universe and receiving unceasing worship, to pouring all of himself permanently into a human body, choosing to limit his divinity by constraining himself to humanity. Then he humbled himself to die a gruesome death on a cross that he did not deserve. It was not just any gruesome death, but in his death, God the Father poured out all the wrath every Christian deserved to endure for all of eternity for their sins upon his own son. It was only after the ultimate in humiliation that he was given the ultimate in exaltation and given what Philippians says is the name that is above every other name. It was only after his humiliation that he was exalted to the highest place. It is the same with the
people of God. Suffering and weakness in our lives now always precedes the glory of our eternal inheritance.

If you don’t understand this pattern you will not stand firm. You will give up. You will be shocked when you suffer and want to give up as you suffer.

You will think Christianity doesn’t work because the Christian life is hard and you thought Jesus came to make you comfortable and successful. Nothing is out of whack when we are humbled. God is at work in our lives conforming us to become more like Jesus. To become like Jesus we must follow the pattern of Jesus, suffering first and exaltation later.

No place in the Bible does it say Christians will be loved and adored and heaven will be an afterthought. It says we will be despised and rejected on earth. This was a constant theme throughout 1 Peter. We may face suffering now, but remember the pattern. Glory is coming.

We have learned that our faithfulness in the midst of suffering now is directly connected the the greatness of our joy and glory that we will experience when Christ returns. That was the pattern for Jesus. That is the pattern for God’s people.

Humbling myself means bending my purposes for my life to God’s purposes for my life.

Humbling ourselves also means letting God work as he wills in our lives and not demanding life always be the way I want it. Humbling myself means bending myself to God’s purposes for my life even if his purposes are not things I would normally choose. Humbling myself may mean accepting a difficult marriage, if that is the way God wants me to honor him. Humbling myself may mean accepting a disability either in myself or in a loved one that God allowed into my life that I didn’t plan for. Humbling myself may mean accepting a period of unemployment or underemployment as part of God’s refining hand, even though I didn’t plan for it. Humbling myself means accepting the humiliation God sends into my life as part of his good plan to conform me into the image of his own son through suffering.

When I say this we must remember God’s character. God is not vindictive. He does not have morbid joy when we suffer. He is a loving father that comes to us, and at times, leads us into difficult circumstances that we would not choose. He leads us into those times for a loving purpose. He uses those trials to mature us, to purify us and as an opportunity for us to bring glory to his name in the midst of them. God promises I won’t face those times alone. He promises to be with us. We must trust that God has a good plan for us in our tough times. Humbling ourselves under God’s mighty hand means saying, “God, your will be done, not my will be done.”

Humbling myself means trusting in God’s timing of rescue.

It also says “at the proper time God will exalt us.” In our minds, what is always the proper time for God to rescue us of our suffering and humiliation?
Right now. Like a good father, he knows that always exalting his children when they demand it can be the most unloving thing a good father can do for the children he loves. He knows there is a proper time to lift us up to rescue. We must trust his timing.

When it feels like God is not listening in the midst of our suffering, it is easy to question God's character or even his involvement in daily life. When we feel that God is not there, we must remember that God is not ignoring us. We know he loves us because we know his character. If he has given us his own son, he will certainly give us all things. We must humble ourselves and trust that God loves us but he also knows the proper time to exalt us. We don't.

If you have known Christ for a while, you know that even though you didn't enjoy the rough times of life, it was in those times that God carried you. It was in those times God matured you. It was in those times you experienced profound intimacy and comfort from God that does not happen in the easy times. Today, when you look back on the rough times, they are precious to you. You can see that God exalted you in the right time.

Even if God chooses to exalt us and rescue us from suffering and trials in this life, and many times he does, we must remember those rescues are not what we live for. He may restore your marriage but your spouse will eventually die. He may restore you from unemployment and give you a wonderful job but someday we will retire. He may snatch your life from the jaws of death and gift you with flourishing health but one day you will die of old age.

The restoration of our earthly lives is not the exaltation we are living for. We are looking to the day when Christ returns and every enemy that stood against us is conquered, even death itself. We are looking for the day when our new identities in Jesus are fully revealed. We are looking to our restored bodies that will forever pulsate with vitality and energy. We are looking forward to an entirely restored universe where heaven and earth are combined and the effects of sin are forever gone. We are looking forward to the day when for all of eternity Christians are the grand display to every spiritual being and every physical being in the entire universe of what is looks like for God to show the maximum amount of kindness, the maximum amount of love and the greatest amounts affection that will ever be displayed or can ever be displayed in the entire universe and for all of eternity. That is who we are. That is the day we are living for. We are the grand display of the greatest amount of undeserved love, kindness, affection and intimacy that could ever be shown. We deserve eternal, conscious, never-ending punishment, yet God adopts us to be brothers and sisters of Jesus, the highest and most glorious being in the universe. That is the mind-bending exaltation we fix our eyes on when we suffer. That is what enables us to endure the humiliations of this life because we know that the pattern is humiliation first, exaltation later. We follow in the footsteps of Jesus.

To stand firm, I must know God cares for me.

…casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. 1 Peter 5:7 (ESV)
If you are going to stand firm in your faith when life is hard, you must realize how much God cares for you. There is a connection between verse 6 and verse 7. We are told to humble ourselves under God’s mighty hand. How are we to do that? The scriptures tell us we humble ourselves by casting all our anxieties on God.

In some of my research I ran across an interesting observation. One theologian noted that worry and anxiety in the life of a Christian are a form of pride. Have you ever considered these as prideful?

Have you ever carried luggage into a hotel? Some of us try to be studs and carry two or three bags at once. What do we say when someone offers to help? What do we typically say? “No thanks. I am good. No help needed.” We could use help, but because of our pride we tell people we don’t need help carrying our burdens. We do the same thing with God. We get weighed down with all kinds of pressures, anxieties and burdens. God comes to us and says, “Can I take your worries? Will you cast all your anxieties on me?” What do we say to God? “I can handle it. I don’t need your help.” God is offering his mighty power on our behalves to carry our burdens but we don’t want to take advantage of it. God says, "Humble yourself. Give me all your worries. Let me take care of them. I care for you."

Do we believe this? Do we really believe this? How much of our anxieties, worries and burdens do we give to God in prayer and then leave them at his feet because we trust him to love us and care for us? This is something we struggle with.

Have you ever talked with someone about something that excites you? While you are pumped up, you can tell from their body language they really don’t care what you have to say? Last week I was in California at a pastor’s conference. I was sharing at the breakfast table with other pastors what I learned the night before about shepherding. I started to monopolize the conversation with my excitement and I noticed some of the guys develop that zoned-out look on their face. When I paused in the conversation, one of the guys jumped in and completely changed subject to talk about retirement. I thought to myself, “I just got schooled. I don’t think these older pastors give a rip about my exciting discoveries on shepherding.”

I have news for you. God has never done that to you. He will never do that with you. If there is a burden on your heart, it could be big or small, he listens closely because he cares. God does not put us on pause because he is too busy handling prayer requests for ISIS. There is no concern in your heart that is too small. He says, “Give me your burden. Stop trying to carry it by yourself. I am the God of the universe. I can do a much better job carrying your burdens than you can. I care about you.”

God doesn’t just invite us to give our anxieties to him. He tells us to cast our anxieties on him. This is not casting like fishing where you throw something away then reel it back. This is throwing our burdens to God in prayer and leaving
them in his hands, trusting that he will take care of those things that weigh down our souls. We can leave our worries at the feet of God and go away with peace.

The only way to stand firm in the hard times is to know we are not carrying our worry and anxiety alone. Leave your burdens at the feet of Jesus.

Some of you are not Christians, and as a result you feel weighed down. You are carrying bitterness and disappointment. Life feels out of control. Today God is inviting you into a relationship with him through his son Jesus. That relationship does not simply mean you will spend eternity with him but it means he loves you now. Beginning today you can give him the anxiety and worries of your life. He cares for you. He will work things out for you. Today, turn to Jesus and be saved for all eternity and you will also be freed from your burdens.

**To stand firm, I must understand the enemy against me.**

Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. 1 Peter 5:8–9 (ESV)

This is the third time Peter told us to be sober-minded. It means to be clear-headed. It means to be alert. Don’t be unaware. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a lion waiting to devour you. Peter’s point was that we need to be alert to the spiritual realities of life. There is a real devil that wants to destroy us. There are two errors Christians fall into with the devil. Some Christians err in developing a fascination with him. Other Christians err in ignoring the reality of his existence. Peter kept us from falling off either end. He told us the devil is real and we need to be aware that he is seeking our destruction.

The Bible tells us the devil is not equal in force or in power with God. That is the belief of eastern religions with the ying and the yang. They believe good and evil are equal but opposite forces locked in eternal conflict. That is not what the Bible teaches. The Bible says the devil is a created being. He was an angel that rebelled against God. Today he leads other fallen angels in rebellion against God.

Revelation 12:9 says Satan is the deceiver of the whole world. He is the father of lies. The devil is the ultimate liar and deceiver. That is what he does to the world and what he tries to do to us. He tries to deceive us.

The title “Satan” means adversary. He is always our enemy and never our friend.

The title “devil” means slanderer. He tries to ruin our names before God and God’s name before us. That pretty much sums up Satan’s work. He tries to
deceive us, fight against us and speak evil about us. What does this look like in everyday life?

• He tries to exploit every indwelling sinful desire in our hearts and lead us to temptation and sin.

• He tries to take any sin we commit and use it as a foothold to take further ground in our lives and use that foothold for earthly and ultimate eternal destruction.

• He tries to separate us from the people of God and the book of God. He knows that when we are apart from God’s people and God’s Word, we are vulnerable. Satan is behind trying to keep you away from church and Bible reading.

• He wants to lead us into activities that cloud our minds and dull our senses to make us spiritually unproductive. That is drugs, alcohol, and foolish activities that preoccupy our minds and waste our time.

• Satan loves to convince us that we can handle the problems of life by ourselves. His original sin is pride. He tries to cultivate pride in place of humility.

While Satan is powerful, we do not need to fear him. Jesus was completely victorious over Satan on the cross. One day, Satan and his demons will be thrown into the lake of fire which was prepared as their final resting place of eternal and just torment. In the meantime, in God’s wisdom, he allows Satan to roar as he seeks to devour God’s creation and his people. Why has God not vanquished Satan? We know God has a good purpose for allowing Satan to continue to roam.

Even though Satan is like a destructive lion on the earth, he is also a lion on a leash. He can bark and he can bite but he can only go as far as God allows. We see this in the book of Job. Satan couldn’t do anything against Job unless God allowed him. God holds the other end of Satan’s leash.

When Peter said Satan was prowling around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour, he was referring to the suffering faced by Christians. Satan uses persecution to instill fear in the heart of Christians in hope that they will withdraw from God as they run in fear. Satan uses persecution to turn Christians away from standing firm.

This is why we need to stay sober-minded. We can’t allow ourselves to grow spiritually careless. There is a spiritual war against us. The physical earth is a spiritual battleground where Satan is trying to oppress and conquer the children of God.

**How do we resist the devil?**

The best way to resist the devil is to believe the truth of God’s Word about Jesus and the good news of his life, death and resurrection. That is called the gospel. Satan doesn’t want you to believe the truth of the gospel. He doesn’t want you to
believe the cross of Christ is enough to forgive and cleanse you from even dark and hideous sin. He does want you to believe the cross of Christ is enough to cleanse you from repeated failures and repeated sins. He doesn’t want you to believe the gospel will transform you through the power of the Holy Spirit into a completely new person. He doesn’t want you to believe that Christ gives us the power and strength to say, “No” to sin. We resist the devil by believing the gospel.

To stand firm, I must believe God’s promise about my final future.

And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen. 1 Peter 5:10–11 (ESV)

This is God’s promise to us. After we have suffered a little while on earth, the God of all grace will himself restore, confirm and establish us. What is the hope that we know we can stand firm on? Our hope is that after our failures and struggles in this life we will one day see God face to face. It is God’s promise to us!

Our hope is not in our strength. It is not in our own doing or willpower. Our hope is the God of all grace — who called us to himself — will carry us through to our eternal home. Remember that it was God who came looking for us. He rescued us from all of our sin and death. He sought us first. This God of all grace will keep us to the end.

The God of the universe, because of his unfathomable grace through Jesus, will carry us home to heaven. On that final day, when Jesus is revealed and our identity as the forgiven, restored and established sons and daughters of God is revealed; when we are seen as the grand display of God’s kindness, forgiveness, love and restoration that can never to be topped or repeated for all of eternity; on that final day we will see the hope we lived for, the hope we suffered for and the hope we longed for. On that day we will shout at the top of our lungs, “All glory to God, all glory to God. To him be dominion forever and ever. Amen.”

That is the message of 1 Peter.

Prayer

Father, we thank you for 1 Peter. We thank you for our identities in Christ and for the future hope that we look toward. Thank you there is hope in our hard times. Thank you that we can cast all our burdens on you and leave them at your feet knowing you will carry them because you care about us.

Even though Satan may roar and tear at our flesh, I thank you he is a defeated enemy. Thank you that after this life of earthly humiliation we will be received home to glory and to mind-boggling exaltation as the grand display of you kindness. Help us stand firm on this hope. Amen.
Getting to Know Each Other
1. Have you ever gone through a difficult situation in your life and felt like you were the only one going through it? Like you were alone? If willing, please share.

Read 1 Peter 5:6-7
1. Read Matt. 23:12; Lk. 14:11; 1 Cor. 10:13. In order to stand firm, what is the pattern God uses in our lives to save us, redeem us, and conform us to the image of Christ? Why is it important to understand that humility comes before exaltation?
2. We are told to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God. How? What does this look like in your life? Share an example.
3. What are worry and anxiety really a result of? Why is it important to cast our cares upon God?

Read 1 Peter 5:8-9
1. Read Matt. 24:42; 25:13; 1 Peter 4:7. Peter tells us in chapter 4 to be sober-minded in light of the end. How does his command there related to his command here? Why does Peter tell us that we are to be sober-minded and watchful in life? What does this look like in the life of the believer?
2. What are some ways that the devil is at work in this world? Is the image of a roaring lion a good description? Why or why not?
3. Read Rev. 12:9. Here we are told that Satan is the deceiver of the whole world. What are some of the things that Satan does in the life of the believer to deceive us?
4. Though Satan is powerful, we need not fear him. Why? What do we need to believe in order to resist the devil?

Read 1 Peter 5:10-11
1. In order to stand firm, what do we need to believe about the promises of God? The promises of God for the future? What are some of these promises?
Works Referenced


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