

Message Transcript

REFINED BY FIRE | WE STAND FIRM

AARON BROCKETT | AUGUST 2, 2025

Hey, if you would across all of our locations remain standing to your feet. Isn't that a great lyric to a song? Who else is worthy? Man, that song has been on repeat in my truck all summer long. And it's such a great reminder that in a world in which we are so tempted to offer our attention and our affection to so many other inferior things, that only He and He alone is worthy of it all. It's so great to come together with our church fam across all of our locations. We sing that anthem together and even if we don't fully yet believe it, or maybe we're not living by it, we are able to lift up our voices to it so that way we bring ourselves in alignment with it.

So, right now let's just pray together at all of our locations. Father, we come to You today and we acknowledge that there is no one or no thing that deserves the honor and the glory and the praise like You do. Father, forgive us when we are tempted to give our allegiance and our affection to other lesser things.

So, as we come in here today we invite Your Holy Spirit into this place. You don't need our invitation, but we offer it because You are wanted here. So, we pray that we could feel the power of Your presence. We pray that we could have a fresh encounter with You, a fresh word from You.

Father, I pray that if there is a weary follower of Jesus here that they could be encouraged in this moment. Father, if there is somebody who is beginning to wander that You would lovingly bring them back. Somebody here, maybe they've got some hurt, some skepticism, maybe they don't know You, but maybe they could have an unexplainable encounter with You today. We just pray that. By the power of Jesus name we ask this. And everybody says: Amen and Amen and Amen.

Alright, man. It's so good to be with you. Feel free to take a seat. I want to welcome everybody today across all of our locations, anybody who may be joining us, our church fam, online from around the world. So good to be with you. So good to be back with you. Those of you who have been wondering where I've been and those of you who are new to our church wondering who I am, that's fair. My name is Aaron. I get the high honor of serving as one of your pastors around here.



And I've been away on something that the elders and you all grant me, very graciously, every summer called an annual study leave.

And really what that is, I just take a certain number of weeks during the summer and take what I normally spend on weekly sermon prep, which is roughly about 15 to 20 hours a week, and I just get a chance to redirect that toward future prayer and planning and just the direction of our church.

It's such a gift to be able to go to God's Word and just to be reminded that I have worth to Him as who I am, as a son of the King, and not just for what I do for Him. And then to just ask God for direction for our church.

It's been a really, really productive summer in the sense that I feel kind of a sense of renewal in my life with Him. I've always told you all that I want to preach out of the overflow of my heart and it takes some time to kind of get away to do that. I've been able to plan most of where we are headed in 2026 as far as sermons go. So, super excited about all of that.

It's great to be back with you. There is no other place I'd rather be than here. And man, can we just honor Pastor Ryan, and Bart, and Chad and our whole pastoral team who did such an amazing job. When I was traveling I'd be sure to tune in online. And they just really blessed me with their teaching. If I was in town I was able to visit another location. So, it was just great to meet and visit with people and pray with people at our other campuses.

Last night we kicked off our Saturday evening services across Northwest and Carmel. We had just shy of 2,000 people. So, great start to Saturday nights. It's been a good weekend.

Today we are kicking off a brand-new series of messages called We Stand Firm. So, for the next nine weeks we're just going to go verse by verse through the New Testament book of 1 Peter.

Today is kind of an introductory message. I want to encourage you to be back every week of this series. If you have a Bible (and I hope you brought a Bible with you, if you didn't bring it next week) go ahead and turn to 1 Peter, chapter 1. We're going to walk through the first 12 verses of chapter 1 together.

Now, I don't know if any of you have ever been outside of the culture or the country in which you grew up. But if you have, you probably experienced a little bit of discomfort known as culture shock. I remember the first time that I ever left the United States, I was in college. I signed up to go on a one month mission trip to Russia. I was 19 years old.



And I remember as soon as the plane landed in Moscow and we got off the plane, I was just confronted with all kinds of new things: strange environment, strange surroundings, strange smells, different language, strange food. And keep in mind this was the mid-1990s. So, no cell phones, no social media. In fact, there was no way to easily communicate with anybody back home. And man, I felt so disconnected, so far away from home. And that just added to it.

I remember traveling from the airport to our host homes and it was late at night. It was between 11 and 11:30. And, at least in the summertime, Moscow doesn't get dark until really late. It was late but it was still light. So, that was disorientating. I'm sure that jet lag didn't help.

I remember very vividly walking along the sidewalk realizing I couldn't communicate with family and friends. I was going to be here for a month and everything was new. And I panicked. Looking back, I had a little bit of a panic attack brought on by culture shock.

Now, culture shock defined—I'm just going to read a definition so that we are all on the same page. It just simply says this. Culture shock is the feeling of confusion, anxiety, or disorientation that people often experience when they move to or interact with a culture that is significantly different from their own. Now, as we begin our study in 1 Peter, Peter is going to kind of mention this. In fact, this is the tone over the letter. He's writing to new Christians. He uses the term foreigners or exiles to communicate that they were experiencing a type of culture shock. As new Christians they were harassed and arrested and beaten and canceled for their allegiance to Jesus. And their lives had become unstable and their future uncertain.

Now, as you might imagine, this would be true for anybody, that would bring a great amount of discouragement that would lead to despair, because following Jesus was not exempting them from pain and problems, but it actually invited more of them and intensified them.

And some of them, as a result, were tempted to bail on or blame God. So, Peter writes partly to remind them that this world is not their home. We're going to see it in the text. He calls them foreigners. But he also writes partly to equip them to stand firm in their faith because eventually, one day, Jesus would return to usher in a different kind of Kingdom, which their citizenship was a part of.

I don't know. Maybe somebody listening to the sound of my voice right now, you are just going through something really difficult, confusing, or painful in your life. And you have this impression that if you've given your life to Jesus, things would get easier or would at least make more sense, but now you're beginning to get worn down a bit because it's not.



And maybe you, yourself, are tempted to blame God or to bail on God. Maybe your emotions could be articulated with this question right here: What good is faith when faith doesn't always make life good?

Now, I don't want to over speak here and say that faith isn't always good, as if there are not blessings in it, but oftentimes maybe it fails to meet our expectations and we are like, "Well, I'm trying to be faithful. I'm trying to follow Jesus. So, why is it that my life is filled with so many trials and difficulties?" That's a great question. And it is the question that really is kind of overarching 1 Peter that we're going to look at for the next nine weeks together.

Here's why I think this is so important. As your pastor I don't want you to have a crisis of faith. I want you to have unshakeable faith, to be able to stand firm even when life throws haymakers at you. Because if it isn't already, it will.

And, ultimately there is a great amount of hope in 1 Peter. What Peter does is he tells us where that hope can be found and he tells us how to hold onto that hope. It's been said that you can live without food for a few weeks, you can live without water for a few days, without air for a few minutes. You will not survive long without hope. You can go through a lot but if you can hold onto hope then you can remain faithful through it. That's what I want to build into you.

So, when the world seems unstable, uncertain, and unclear—would you all agree that this is kind of the world in which live in right now? I'm guessing that this study in 1 Peter is coming at a good time in your life because maybe right now you're facing some discouragement and some despair.

Maybe right now you see everything that is going on in the world and you're just trying to make sense of it. And you listen to people's opinions on it and people are so divided and you are tempted to despair.

Maybe right you're going through a hard time in a relationship that really means a lot to you and it doesn't matter how much you try to hold on to it, it feels like the relationship is falling apart and you are tempted to despair. Maybe right now you're really discouraged by things going on in your job or the direction of your career. Maybe you'd just love to have a job, but nothing seems to be opening up. And you are tempted to be discouraged.

Maybe you've got some sort of chronic pain going on in your body and it doesn't matter how many doctors you visit; it doesn't matter how much you change your diet, how many supplements you throw at it, it's really not changing anything and you are tempted to despair.



Whatever it is right now, and I bet it's something, we all face discouragement. We can look at other people outside and say, "Man, they don't seem to have any problems." But that's not true. All of us are facing, right now, some discouragement, some uncertainty, and some confusion regularly in life.

And I know that, even for myself, I can so easily fall into discouragement, even when things are going really well. All it takes for me is just a little bit of bad news. Just a little bit of the unexpected. Just a little bit of criticism.

This last week, on Tuesday, I was having a pretty good day. And then this notification came across my phone. I don't even know where it came from. I wish I could shut it off. It simply asked this question: Is your house disaster proof? I was like, "Well, I thought it was until now. And now I don't know." And now I'm having a bad day.

It's just a reminder that discouragement is just around the corner in all of our lives. It is not a question of if you'll go through difficulty in life. It's just a question of when and how. And instead of blaming God or bailing on God, I want to equip you to hold on to Him even in the midst of the greatest trials and difficulties.

Man, if you are going through a hard time right now, could I just encourage you with this? You are in good company with Jesus. I think oftentimes when we think about Jesus we think, "Well He didn't really have any problems. And He would have had the answer to everything. He would have been pretty happy go lucky—you know, the Mr. Rogers of Palestine."

That's just not the case. Listen to how the prophet Isaiah describes Jesus, "He was despised and rejected. A man of sorrows acquainted with the deepest grief." Jesus was a man of sorrows.

If you're going through grief, if you're going through pain, if you're going through difficulties Jesus knows exactly what that is like. He was acquainted with the deepest grief. Here's the conclusion of this. If the perfect, sinless Son of God was not exempt from sorrow and grief, then you and I won't be either.

So, knowing that we can't escape it, we've got to learn how to reframe our perspective on it in an accurate way so that we can stand firm through it. So, let's dive into the text. Verse 1 of chapter 1. It simply says this:

"This letter is from Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ."

So, the first thing that Peter does is he identifies himself. Oftentimes we can skip past that content in our Scripture reading. But I don't want to, especially in an introductory message because I think it is important for us to know the author behind this content.



You ever had a text message from somebody whose number isn't in your phone? And it's like a little bit of a lengthy text and you have no idea who it is from. Therefore, you have no idea what it is talking about? And you are like, "Who is this?" And you find out who it is and, "Oh, now the message makes sense."

In a very similar way that's why we don't want to jump too quickly past the authorship of the book. So, here are just a few things about Peter. For some of you this is just going to be review.

Peter was a fisherman by trade. He was called out by Jesus to a career change to be a disciple. He was part of the inner three. So, out of the 12 disciples Jesus had favorites. If anybody ever tells you you shouldn't have favorites, Jesus did. And Jesus' favorites were Peter, James, and John.

Peter walked on water—the only disciple to do so. Pretty impressive. He was the first to make a confession of faith.

But he also had some pretty big failures. Namely, he denied Jesus three times. He denied that he even knew Him at the crucifixion when he told Jesus that he would never deny Him. Big fail.

We saw Jesus interact with Him at least five times after the resurrection. Peter is honestly one of my favorite disciples primarily because he's just so easy to identify with. He had a big mouth. He talked before he thought. And he said a bunch of dumb stuff. I can relate to all of that. He also kind of comes across as just real and authentic and not real churchy—if you know what I mean.

So, if you are relatively new to church or maybe you're relationship with the church is a little bit at arm's length, Peter is your guy. Especially in comparison to the Apostle Paul, who also wrote much of the New Testament. When you look at these two individuals, what I love about this is that God used both of them in incredible ways, but they were very different. Paul was from Tarsus, a major city known for culture and education. Peter was from a small coastal fishing community along the Sea of Galilee.

Paul would have likely watched the history channel. Peter, man, he was an ESPN guy. Paul was a highly educated Pharisee. A Pharisee of Pharisees. Peter got his GED and he could tell you the difference between a carp and a croppie.



Peter is just a real dude. And he was a natural leader. He commanded the respect of his peers by sheer force of personality. And in every listing of Jesus' disciples, if you notice this, Peter's name is almost always listed first. His influence in the early church was enormous. And yet, in spite of all of that, he maintains his humility and his subordination to Jesus alone. He never used his gifted or excentric personality for self-promotion. He never used his proximity to Jesus for personal gain. And that would have been a big temptation for any reason.

I wonder if part of the reason why is because Peter had tasted utter failure and pain. For all of his accomplishments he was just as aware of his weaknesses and setbacks. I love Peter so much because he's just so human. I mean, he walked on water, which is amazing. But he also took his eyes off of Jesus and began to sink. He swore he would never deny Jesus but then before a night was over he denied Him three times.

And I don't know about you, but I can relate to all of that because I have these big aspirations to be faithful and follow Jesus consistently, and yet there are so many times I fall on my face. And I bet you can relate to that too.

One of my favorite scenes in the Scriptures takes place between Jesus and Peter post resurrection on a beach when Jesus restores Peter back to relationship and to ministry after he had denied Him three times.

If you remember the conversation, Jesus said to Peter, "Peter, do you love Me? Do you love Me? Do you love Me?" And Peter was starting to almost get offended like, "Lord, You know I love You." But He was asking him three times to cancel out the three denials. Man, I love that scene in the Scripture because Jesus is so merciful and so kind as He restores Peter out of his shame. When I visited Israel a couple of years ago, I got to visit that beach. And I took this picture on my phone. And that's the beach where Jesus had this conversation with Peter. And man, I didn't want to leave.

I always thought that after the resurrection Jesus and Peter kind of accidentally bumped into each other so they kind of had to talk. But no, when I went to the beach I realized that Jesus had to travel 100 miles out of His way to go find Peter. Peter wasn't looking for Jesus. Jesus was looking for Peter.

And I think that conversation brought about this resolve within Peter so that he says, "You know what? For the rest of my life..." until the day that he himself would be crucified, upside-down, a resolve was within Peter where I think he said this, "I betrayed Jesus once. I failed Jesus big time, but I am not giving in to fear and uncertainty ever again. I will stand firm until the end."



That's the man who writes this book that we are going to study for the next nine weeks. He writes 1 Peter 30 years after he has that conversation with Jesus at the beach. So, 30 years of faithfulness, 30 years of wisdom, 30 years of discouragement and God led him through it. Now he's going to loan us some of his wisdom so that we can stand firm for Jesus in the midst of our day, in the midst of our own fear and failures and uncertainties. So, he goes on in verse 2 and he says:

"I am writing to God's chosen people," circle that word, chosen in your Bible. "who are living as foreigners," circle that word too, "in the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. God the Father knew you and chose you long ago, and his Spirit has made you holy." (NLT)

Now, that word holy simply means set apart. So, if you are in Christ, you are holy. You don't feel holy, but you are holy. Not because of what you do or what you know but because that is who Jesus says you are in the Spirit, which He gives you. And holiness simply means that you are set apart—set apart for a godly purpose and a plan.

And then notice how he describes, not just them, but you and me today. He says, "You are chosen." You are chosen by God.

There is something within all of us that wants to be chosen, isn't there? From a very early age we want to be chosen for the team, we want to be chosen for the friend group. Later on we want to be chosen by a girlfriend or a boyfriend. We want to be chosen by an employer. We want people to acknowledge that we have worth and value. That is something within all of us.

And here Peter says you are chosen by the God of the universe who knew you long ago. Translation—He knows everything about you. I don't know about you, man. If everybody knew everything about me, I'd be like, "Uh oh."

I venture to say that nobody on earth knows everything about you. Some of you might be like, "No, my momma does." No, your momma don't. Nobody knows everything—nobody knows every thought you've had, every place you've been, every word you've uttered. Nobody knows everything. You know why we keep some things secret? We're afraid of rejection.

And here Peter says, "There is a God, the Creator of the universe, and in this vast universe He knows your name and He knows everything about you. And yet He still chooses you."



See, most of the time we're used to be chosen predicated upon our performance or our behavior.

About two years ago I got invited to play in this golf scramble tournament for charity. And I play just enough golf to stay frustrated. That's pretty much what I am. So, I showed up at this thing and it was a foursome. I didn't know any of the three guys. And I walked up and you know, I looked the part. I had the golf clothes and shoes and clubs. So, I walked up, we'd never met each other. And I could tell that they were all kind of sizing me up. I've seen the look before. It's a look some of you are giving me right now.

I walked up to the tee box and they are all kind of sizing me up and I could tell they were all looking at me like, "Does he have game? It kind of looks he might have game." So, I knew they were thinking that and I know the kind of game I had—incredibly insecure.

I get up to the tee box with all of this pressure. They are all standing behind me. And I like closed my eyes and I swung and I Happy Gilmore'd this thing like in the worst way. Just like way off. I hit the cart path. And I could feel the guys... I turned around and they were all gracious. They were like, "Oh, man. Take another one. It's a cold shot, first tee." I took another one and it went behind me. Listen. I got home that night and my wife was like, "How did it go?" And I was like, "That felt like junior high basketball where you show up with a basketball and everybody thinks you've got game and you airball for a three pointer and they write you off."

They just wrote me off for the rest of the day. If they could have picked teams, no way were they picking me to be on their golf scramble, because we're oftentimes chosen predicated upon what we bring to the table. We're conditioned for that.

Here's what Peter says, "God chose you when He knew everything about you, even in your absolute worst moments, He still chooses you." Would you just receive that today? There is a God who loves you and knows you and receives you and He chooses you. He gives you the freedom to reject Him, but He does not reject you. He's pursuing you.

And then Peter also uses this descriptor. He says you're foreigners in this world. Now, in the first century crowd, they had given their lives to Jesus, they were relatively new Christians, and so what they had done is they just swapped out the home jersey for the away jersey. They were Jews driven out of Israel to live in a foreign land. They were still God's people, but under the subjugation of a foreign enemy power.



So, when he says foreigners he's saying you are living in a land under the domination of an enemy power, you're not supposed to fit in here. Like, it would be sort of weird if you did. Now, we'll talk more about what he means next week, like how we are to live in this world. But he's basically saying, "You are a foreigner. You are an exile. So, don't think that this world is your home and base your sense of confidence in God upon earthly circumstances because your citizenship is in heaven."

As we traveled this summer we stayed in a number of hotel rooms—really nice hotel rooms that were relaxing. But not once did I think to myself, "You know what? I'm going to go ahead and put the utilities in my name." Not once did I say, "I'm going to go get some groceries and stock the shelves," or did I buy some new furniture or redecorate. Why? Because I was checking out soon. And many times we have a tendency to treat this earth as if it is our permanent home. So, when things get taken away from us or circumstances get threatening, we begin to panic when our citizenship is in heaven. We're going to talk more about that in this series.

Peter goes on and he says:

"As a result, you have obeyed him and have been cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ. May God give you more and more grace and peace." (NLT)
Notice how he links those two words together. Peace is predicated upon the grace that you have received.

"All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is by his great mercy that we have been born again, because God raised Jesus Christ from the dead." (NLT)

So, here's what Peter is doing. Before he gets into the meat of how we are to stand firm through trials and difficulties, he's got to lay out the theological groundwork so that we have a proper understanding of what God has offered us and what He has not. So, he says, "It is by His great mercy that you've been born again."

I love what Dr. Beaufort Bryant used to say. He used to say:
The Baptistry is a Tomb and a Womb

So, it's a tomb in the sense that your old self is buried with Christ under a watery grave, resurrected as a new creation in Christ. When you come up out of the baptistry that is symbolic of you being born as a new creation. We are put to death there and we are born again there, into the kingdom of God.



And it is by His great mercy that that is even possible. It is not dependent on how much you know. It is not dependent upon your morality. It is not dependent upon your performance or ability. And I'm so thankful that it is not.

Well what is it based on? It's based on the finished work of Jesus alone and your ability to put your faith in that. Jesus pursued you. He paid for you. He secures your salvation. Salvation is spelled as the old-time preachers used to say, not as D O, do. Salvation is spelled D O N E, it's done. And you've got to understand the difference.

So, he's talking about mercy and grace here:
Mercy is not getting what I deserve
Grace is receiving what I don't deserve

And understand that mercy is not getting what I deserve and grace is receiving what I don't deserve. So, in Christ, I don't get the punishment that I deserve but I actually get all of the blessings that I don't deserve that Jesus died for me to have.

Now, why is Peter going into all of this? Because he knows that when it comes to suffering and pain and trials, oftentimes the default thinking in our minds is, "Well, God, I just want You to be fair." And, man. I'm so glad that God is not fair. If He was fair, then I wouldn't stand a chance and neither would you.

See, due to my sin and rebellion... Let me just apply this to me and then you can apply whatever you want to you. Due to my sin and rebellion what I deserve is death and separation from God. We are born into sinful rebellion, which is why you have to teach your kids how to brush their teeth but you do not have to teach them how to sin. They already know how to do that.

Therefore, what we all deserve is separation from God. Now, the reason why I'm bringing this up is because we've had other kinds of philosophies sort of leap into the gospel that have actually diluted it; therefore it's led us to not have a proper understanding of trials, difficulties, pain, and suffering.

Here's what I mean. Many of us end up thinking that we're not depraved sinners in need of a Savior. We soften it. And we say, "Well, I know that I'm not perfect. But I'm like 80 percent good." "I'm like 90 percent good." "At the very least I have good intentions. It's just the 10 percent. I need Jesus to come and do some behavior modification in me."

And that is not the gospel. If you think that, then you think that God actually owes you a good life. It's almost like, "God, I've chosen to believe in You, therefore You owe me now."



See, I am not a good person with good intentions who sometimes makes mistakes. I am a sinner who has rebelled against God who needs complete saving. Can I just tell you this, man? If you were to restore me to my factory settings, I would likely cuss you out and steal your latte. That's what I would do. And it gets worse from there. I am not a good guy who just occasionally messes up. I'm a sinner who needs a Savior. And so are you. So, what happens is He takes on our sin and then imputes His righteousness to us. His Holy Spirit lives in us, reforming us, making us holy—that's the work of sanctification. That will be the case for the rest of your life.

So, because I've received what I don't deserve I have an overriding peace. Two fundamental truths going on at the same time. On my best day, I am not good enough. But, God in His grace has already been way better to me than I deserve.

See, I think that for many of us, even in the western church, those of us who call ourselves Christians, say we believe in God and go to church regularly, really what we're living our lives by is not a proper understanding of the gospel. It would be more along the lines of what I might call spiritual secularism.

Spiritual secularism is where we've taken some of the cultural ideologies of the day, we mix them with a few Bible verses and it short circuits our ability to stand firm. Here's what spiritual secularism says: "I'm good. So, God the of the universe owes me." That is not anywhere in the Bible. That's called karma. And it's false. The gospel says I am a wretched sinner, but God has been more merciful to me than I deserve. Therefore, when trials come, I gladly trust that He knows what He's doing

The gospel says this, "I'm a wretched sinner, but God (my two favorite words in the Bible) has been more merciful to me than I deserve. Therefore, when trials come, I gladly trust that He knows what He's doing and He's going to turn it for my good and His glory.

And if you have this idea that you're good therefore God owes you, listen to me, a crisis of faith is barreling down the interstate of your life and it is inevitable. And you will walk away. I want you to be able to stand firm. This is the place to begin—a proper understanding of the gospel.

So, going on in verse 3, he says: His glory.

"Now we live with great expectation, and we have a priceless inheritance—an inheritance that is kept in heaven for you, pure and undefiled, beyond the reach of change and decay." (NLT)



So, he equates our salvation to an inheritance that is kept in heaven. It's kind of like a trust fund. Second generation wealth usually doesn't go very well for people so the money is held in a trust until they are wise enough and discerning enough to be able to handle the money.

Here Peter says, "Hey, listen. This salvation is held in heaven for you. Jesus is the executor of that trust and He secured it." It's not threatened. It's there and Jesus one time said to us, "Don't let your heart be troubled. I go to prepare a place for you."

And then in verse 5 it says:

"And through your faith, God is protecting you by his power until you receive this salvation, which is ready to be revealed on the last day for all to see." (NLT)
So, Peter is saying, "Until that day, when our salvation is revealed, when Jesus returns and a new kingdom and a new heaven and a new earth comes and He restores all things, God is protecting."

Now, this is where I would say that most people who have a crisis to face deconstruct or walk away. One of the culprits is pain, suffering, trials, and difficulties. We have a tendency to say, "Why are all of these bad things happening to me? I'm trying to be faithful. And, God, if You were really good and You were really powerful, You'd deliver me from this."

And here Peter says, "God is protecting you by His power." It's kind of like, if God is protecting you and you don't really know it. It is kind of like the windshield of your car. The windshield offers you a lot of protection that you oftentimes take for granted because you're not feeling the resistance of the wind. And you can see through it. It's clear.

Any of you ever stuck your head out of the window at 70 miles an hour? And you are like, "Oh, man. This windshield is protecting me from way more than I thought. It's kind of like that. You're going to go, "Well, what is He protecting us from?" Well, in 1 Peter, chapter 5, verse 8 (we'll be there in a few weeks) Peter says these words. We've talked a lot about it around here. He says: "Stay alert! Watch out for your great enemy, the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour." (NLT)

That's complete. This isn't saying he's looking for somebody to mess with, he's looking for somebody to pick on, he's looking for somebody to push around. No. It says he's looking for somebody to obliterate. So, then he says: "Stand firm," by the way, that's where we got the title of this series, "against him, and be strong in your faith." (NLT)



Here's the question that I want to pose. If God is protecting us, and Satan wants to devour us, here's the question: Ever wonder why you haven't yet been devoured? Maybe you've been beat on pretty good. Maybe you're bloodied and bruising but not yet devoured. And Peter would say, "God is protecting you."

Now, listen. If you've sat under my teaching for any length of time at all then you know that I don't want to blame every bad thing on demons under every rock. And I think sometimes we just do that. If my Wi-Fi goes out, I don't go, "Ah, Satan is coming against me again." It's like, "No the Wi-Fi just went out." Alright? But you do have an enemy who wants to devour you. And God is protecting you from being devoured. And actually some of the punches He allows through are just giving you resolve to deepen your faith.

I'm reminded of the conversation that Satan had with God over a guy named Job in the Old Testament. Condensed version here—Satan goes to God and he says, "Hey, the most faithful man on the face of the earth is this guy named Job. "But, you know what? The only reason why he is faithful to You is because he is so successful. He's wealthy. He has a beautiful wife. He's got kids. He's got a ranch. He has this amazing camel that he drives around. You know what? If you were to take all of that away from him, he'd surely curse you, God. In fact, he's only following You because You've blessed him. I bet You if we took all of that away, he'd walk away."

And God goes, "I'll take that bet." So, here's what God did. God lowered the hedge of protection. He didn't drop it. He lowered it so that Job's faith could be tested and proven genuine.

And there were still limitations on what Satan could do. It was not a free-for-all. So, he could attack his belongings but not his body. Later, he could afflict his body, but he couldn't take his life. So, Job was partially shielded by God's power. And listen. God only allowed the pain that would prove beneficial. See, that should be reassuring to us. Even the enemy cannot operate outside of God's authority. God is sovereign. Not only over the good things in our life, even over the painful things in our life.

And Satan wants to steal and kill and destroy. So, the question is: Why haven't you been? And I think the answer is that we are shielded by God's power more than we realize. We often don't know it. And we don't give Him credit for it. We say, "Well, why would God allow this to happen?" Man, I do not know. I am not God. And we won't know on this side of eternity. But I do know that God has a track for using it for our good.



In Luke, chapter 22 Jesus has another conversation with Peter in which He says this:

"Simon, Simon," that's just another name for Peter, "Satan has asked to sift each of you like wheat."

Very similar conversation that Satan had with God over Job. Except this time it's Satan and Jesus. And he's asking if he could get in the ring with the disciples so that he could choke them out. And Jesus says:

"But I have pleaded in prayer for you, Simon, that your faith should not fail." Notice He didn't say, "No. I stood in the way and kept him from attacking you." He said, "He's going to attack you. What I prayed is that you wouldn't fail when he attacks."

"So when you have repented and turned to me again, strengthen your brothers." (NLT)

This seems to be a reference to Jesus knowing that Peter is going to deny Him so He says, "Hey, once you deny me and you repent, then I want you to use that to strengthen and encourage your brothers and sisters in Christ." Which is what Peter is doing in this letter to you and me today.

So, Jesus seems to know a couple of things. He seems to know that Peter is going to fail the test, but that he won't fail in his faith. That's reassuring. You can fail the test and still remain faithful to Him.

Jesus allowed Peter to be tested knowing he would fail. Why? This is where you need to listen really carefully, it's because that would teach him more about his human weakness and his need for God than having everything go his way, make a million dollars, and have everybody think he was amazing. And it was this that prepared him more than anything else to lead God's people. And in that moment it didn't make any sense to him, but in the long term it would prepare him.

Can I just encourage you today? Man, are you going through anything? I bet you are. I bet that if we could pull the curtain back on all of the challenges and the trials and the difficulties that people in our church are facing and we could all see it, it would be overwhelming.



When you are tempted in the moment in your tiredness and grief to question God's goodness or control, that's normal. But can I encourage you to stand firm? Can I point you to His faithfulness in the life of Job, in the life of Peter, and countless others to remind you that God has a track record of using the enemy's attacks against the enemy and to strengthen those who go through the pain?

Case in point. The crucifixion. I mean, the crucifixion of Jesus, which implies the epitome of pain, Jesus had to go through that to bring about the salvation of the world. I think if the demons realized that God was going to use Jesus' pain to bring about the salvation of the world, they would have stopped cheering for it and they would have tried to stop it. But God was using the enemy's attack against the enemy to bring salvation to the world.

So, right now, as you are going through something can I just tell you this? We'd love to have God take it all away. We'd love to have God explain it. But Jesus gives us something better. Jesus says He's interceding for us. Hebrews 7:25 tells us right now Jesus is interceding with God on your behalf.

Translation—Jesus not only chose you and sees you, He's praying for you right now. He knows what you are going through. He knows the pain you are dealing with. He knows the grief that you have and He's pleading in prayer for you just like He did for Peter.

I love praying for you. I have people DMing me, texting me, finding me in public, "Hey, Pastor. Will you pray?" It's an honor for me to do so. Lots of times one of you will just pop into my mind and I'll just pray for you right there on the spot. You know what? You know what's better than having your pastor pray for you? Having Jesus pray for you. And Jesus is praying for you right now. Praying what? For a problem free life? No. That you would stand firm in the midst of it. And even right now, if your faith is being tested, Jesus is thinking of you and praying for you (that's not my opinion, that's Scripture) that your faith would not falter or fail. So you stand firm.

Peter actually in verse 6 says:

"So be truly glad. There is wonderful joy ahead, even though you must endure many trials for a little while." Why? "These trials will show that your faith is genuine. It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold—though your faith is far more precious than mere gold." (NLT)

Man, I wish this wasn't the case, but trials expose where our hope truly is. Trials reveal what you truly believe. Trials reveal areas in your life where maybe you're trying to control things and you're not really trusting God and so as soon as something bad happens you say, "Well, God, clearly you've forgotten about me so move over. I'm going to take over now."



But I want you to know that:

Faith that is not tested is a faith that cannot be trusted

And God allows trials, God allows tests not to trip you up but to purify that faith in you. It's like steel that gets heated up and all of the impurities come to the surface so that it can be stronger later.

And, man, if you are in a trial right now can I just urge you to not give up? In 2 Corinthians, chapter 4 it says:

"Our present troubles are small."

I don't think he's trying to minimize them or be insensitive to our problems, he's trying to reframe our perspective on them. He's saying that in light of eternity, they are small:

"... and they are not going to last very long. Yet they produce for us a glory that actually outweighs them and will last forever. So, we don't look at the troubles we can see now; rather, we fix our gaze on the things that cannot be seen. For the things that we see now will soon be gone, but the things we cannot see will last forever." (NLT)

Translation of everything he just said, "Man, when you get to eternity, this life is going to seem like a blip.

Have you ever looked back on a season of your life? Have you ever scrolled through your photos on your phone? Let's just say, I don't know, 2018 or 2019 and you're looking through all of your photos. You are like, "Man, I remember that season. And, man, it just seems like a blink."

Those of you who have kids, "Oh, man, I remember when my kids were little. The days were so long. But you know what? The years were so short and they just went by like that." I think that is what he is talking about.

But in eternity, when Jesus returns to a new heaven and a new earth, we're going to look back on this present life and we're going to think about our troubles and we going to go, "Man, I am so glad I didn't let go of my faith because it just went like that [a snap of the finger]." And he's putting it all in perspective so he says, "You fix your gaze on what is to come."

Let me finish up the passage. He says:

"So when your faith remains strong through many trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honor on the day when Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world. You love him even though you have never seen him."

In fact, he's acknowledging how odd it is to love Jesus when you can't see Him.



But he says:

"Though you do not see him now, you trust him; and you rejoice with a glorious, inexpressible joy. The reward for trusting him will be the salvation of your souls. This salvation was something even the prophets wanted to know more about when they prophesied about this gracious salvation prepared for you. They wondered what time or situation the Spirit of Christ within them was talking about when he told them in advance about Christ's suffering and his great glory afterward.

"They were told that their messages were not for themselves, but for you. And now this Good News has been announced to you by those who preached in the power of the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. It is all so wonderful that even the angels are eagerly watching these things happen." (NLT)

Here's what he is saying here. He's saying, as the Old Testament prophets were prophesying about the coming Messiah, the Holy Spirit was guiding their pen. And they were like, "Huh, I wonder what I'm writing. I don't understand this. I don't get it. I don't see it."

The angels didn't fully understand. When Jesus was being crucified, do you know that the angels had their swords drawn ready to intervene and God had to restrain them because they didn't know what He was doing. They didn't fully understand.

And Satan didn't fully understand.

Peter is saying this. What was hidden from the prophets and what was hidden from the angels and what was hidden from Satan has now been revealed to you. And what seemed like a painful trial, God was actually using for our good. Isaiah 53:5 says, "Jesus was pierced for our transgressions and He was crushed for our iniquities and by His wounds we are healed."

We understand that Jesus' suffering was for His glory and our hope. And the cross itself was Jesus' most brutal hour and at the same time His finest hour that provides us with the possibility of the forgiveness of sin and the hope of eternal life.

So, the point is this. The most painful hour for Jesus is where our hope can be found. And that means that God can take the most painful circumstances and redeem them for our good. So, you hold on. You hold on.



Revelation says that God is keeping track of every tear that you shed. And He's keeping them in a bottle. Meaning that one day He's going to reconcile every tear and He's going to pull it up and say, "Yep, I know about that one. And I'm going to make things right."

It's what led Tolkien in the Lord of the Rings to say, "Every sad thing will come untrue." Because there is a God who knows you and chose you and He knows exactly what you are going through and He's going to reconcile all of the pain and all of the hurt and all of the suffering. All of that stuff will come untrue because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Man, don't let go. Don't let your faith fall through.

I don't know how many of you recognize the name of Joni Eareckson Tada. She's in her 80s now so she is largely out of public life. But for many years she was a pretty prominent Christian voice.

She had a tragic accident when she was 17 years old. She dove into a lake and hit her head, I think on a rock, and broke her neck and she is a quadriplegic for life. She doesn't have the use of her arms or her legs. She is confined to a wheelchair still to this day.

And she actually gave her life to Jesus after that tragedy and talked a lot about pain and suffering and how God was using it to refine her and redeem her. She learned to paint by holding a paint brush in her mouth. And she was a great source of hope and encouragement to so many people.

She had this unique relationship with Larry King on Larry King Live. He had her on the show a lot. I think, largely, because he was somewhat baffled by her. He couldn't understand why she could be so joyful in the face of her circumstances.

I love what she said one time on his program. I want to read the quote to you. She said to Larry King:

I hope I can take this wheelchair to with me to Heaven. If I could I'd say, "Lord, do you see this wheelchair? Before you sent it to Hell, I want to tell you something about it. You were right when You said in this world we will have trouble. There is a lot of trouble being a quadriplegic, but You know, the weaker I was in that thing, the harder I leaned on You. And the harder I leaned on You, the stronger I discovered You to be. Thank You for the bruising of a blessing it was, this severe mercy. Thank you."



And, oh, to have that kind of perspective. This is a bruising of a blessing. When I'm going through something difficult and I'm weak those are the moments that I discover just how strong God is.

And this leads me back to that refrain of the song that we have been singing, "Who else is worthy?" And the answer is: Nobody and no thing.

So, in a world where we are tempted to prop up our sense of well-being or self-worth on things that falter and fail us, in the midst of the pain and in the midst of the struggle and in the midst of the fear and the uncertainty those are the moments in which we lean on Him all the more because He's stripped out everything else that we've been leaning on. And it feels like a curse, but it is not. It is a blessing.

Right now in the quietness of this moment I just want to lead our church family in a prayer. So, if you would just bow your head and close your eyes. I don't know where you are right now with all of this. Maybe this is a really difficult message for you to receive. And if so, I just want to ask the Spirit of God to meet you right where you are. I just want to pray over you. And if you can't bring yourself to pray this, then let me be your mouthpiece to pray it for you. You just claim this prayer.

Father God, I just come to You right now and I need Your help because I'm going through it. So, first of all, would You meet me in it. I've been clinging to so many other things that just are not proving worthy. They are not delivering what they promised that they would. So, I'm at the end of my rope.

So, would you please forgive me for dismissing you, overlooking you, blaming you for the challenges and the trials and the difficulties in my life as if You owe me. God, You owe me nothing. You've offered me everything through the sacrifice of Your Son, Jesus Christ. So, even if You never did another thing, You've already done enough. So, would You please forgive me for my attitude toward You for allowing temporary pain and circumstances to take my eyes off of You?

Father, would you please strengthen me. I surrender my life to You fully today. I choose to place my trust in You and no longer in temporary circumstances. So, would You take the rightful place in my heart? I submit myself to You because my hope is found in who You are and what You've done, not in circumstances.



So, from this day forward I choose, even though I don't feel it, I choose it—to stand firm in the sovereignty of who You are. I ask this in the powerful name of King Jesus: Amen and Amen and Amen.

Hey, if you would right now, across all of our locations would you stand to your feet together? With one voice we're going to sing that anthem once again: Who alone is worthy?

