

MESSAGE TRANSCRIPT //

THE FOREGINERS | HOW TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

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I'm kind of curious. How many of you have ever found yourself in a situation in which you became an easy target? What I mean by that is I remember when I was in the 8th grade, I went to a sleepover with a group of friends, a bunch of smelly 8th grade boys. And I easily became a target simply by being the first one to fall asleep.

I remember I fell asleep, and I woke up the next morning to this really wretched smell and this funny feeling in my ear. And I realized that they had filled my ear with mustard while I was asleep. That's an awful feeling by the way. It takes forever to clean it out. They took an Icy Hot and dumped my underwear in it. And then they threw my shoes out in the street. They were great friends. I just became an easy target because I fell asleep first.

If you're just now joining us, we've been walking our way through this letter in the New Testament called 1 Peter and it's a letter in which a guy by the name of Peter writes to a group of Christians who have become easy targets within the Roman Empire. Meaning that they were slandered. They were falsely accused. They had all kinds of lies spread about them. They were walking down the hallway of the Roman Empire, slapped with a "kick me" sign on their backs.

And if we're ever in a position where we became an easy target like that, our natural response, as human beings, is to guard ourselves, get a little bit defensive, maybe lash back out, maybe lawyer up, live our lives in this kind of paranoid state of bitterness.

This is why Peter writes the letter. He writes to them, and he says, "I understand that you're in this situation in which the Roman Empire is coming down on you, but I don't want you to live your lives in a defensive way. And he helps us to frame the way that we see the world.

In chapter 1 he addresses them as *foreigners*, or the Greek word is *exiles*. The same word that is used of Daniel and his friends. We studied that book just a few weeks ago.

So what Peter is doing is he is saying, "Hey, listen. I don't want you to be defensive. I want you to make a difference in this world."

It's kind of ironic that Peter would be the guy who would write this letter. And I love that about him. If you know anything at all about Peter's story, subtle was not his middle name. Peter was the guy who, when Jesus is walking on the water, he's the first one to jump out of the boat and walk on water toward Jesus.

The night before Jesus' arrest and crucifixion the Roman soldiers come to arrest Jesus and what does Peter do? He draws his sword and cuts off a soldier's ear. And Jesus doesn't turn and chest bump him and say, "Alright. Way to go." Jesus reaches down, grabs the ear of this Roman soldier, a guy by the name of Malchus (for some reason the authors of Scripture wanted us to know his name) and Jesus slaps it back on his head like a Lego block. And then he turns to Peter, and He says, "Don't do that, man."

Now, when Peter writes 1 Peter, this is not him being hypocritical, this is him speaking from experience. Peter is saying, "Hey, listen. I've done that before. I understand what it feels like to be defensive." Here's what he's trying to do. If I can summarize the letter of 1 Peter I would simply say: Peter wants us to exchange making a statement for making a difference. He wants us to make a difference in this world in which we live.

So he's walking us through some rather difficult material. Last week we read some really tricky passages that we had to walk through where Peter is talking about submission. And I'm so thankful that today I've got a much easier task. And if you read ahead, you know that's a joke. Today, in this passage, we're going to walk through a bunch of verses together and he's actually going to talk about how we are to conduct ourselves in the face of suffering.

So what Peter is trying to do is he is just trying to say, "Hey, I want you to live your life in such a way that you would recognize this as one of the greatest opportunities to be alive in the history of the world. There is a lot of suffering. There is a lot of pain. There is a lot of injustice. But as Christ followers, the way that we live our lives should be distinct and different to where people sit up and take notice."

And right now Christians, in general, don't have the greatest reputation in the world and, honestly, much of the time we just have our own selves to blame. Maybe we blend in. Maybe we stand out in the worst ways.

And what Peter is saying is: "I want you to live your life in such a poised, wise, gracious way that in the face of all of the suffering in the world, the rest of the world would look at you and go 'Man, what is your secret? Where do you find that strength? How do you do that?'"

We just got back late last night from fall break. I took my family to Branson, Missouri. That's where we go every year for fall break. And one of my greatest joys is to take my family out for a nice meal. So we went out one evening to this Italian restaurant and just had a great experience. The food was amazing. The atmosphere was awesome. We had a view of the water.

And our waitress was just great. She was friendly. She was funny. She was recommending what we should order. And then as the night went on she was telling us more about her life and where she is from and how she just got back from a trip with her sister to New York. So we're just getting along really well with her.

And right at the end, as I'm paying the bill, she hands my credit card back to me and she goes, "So, what do you do for a living?" And you just know, I've shared this with you before if you've been around here for a while, that's always a loaded question for me. Not because I'm ashamed of it or because I'm afraid of it, but I just never know how people are going to respond to it.

So I just looked right at her, and I go, "Well, I'm a pastor." And she does this double take. She was like, "You're a pastor?" And I was like, "Yeah." And she goes, "I never would have thought."

And I didn't know how to take that. So I just looked at her and I was like, "I guess I'll take that as a compliment." And she kind of laughed and walked away. And I looked at my wife and I was like, "I don't know what that means."

But what if people's perspectives of what they think of Christians, maybe what they see on TV, or social media, or maybe what they grew up with in a very legalistic environment, what if they were to look at you and go, "Man, you are not what I was expecting," in the best way?

This is what Peter is going to drive at in these verses. And if you're taking notes, and I would actually encourage you, you don't need to take notes like you are studying for a test, I would just encourage you to write down a few things.

Here's what we're going to do. I'm going to walk through some passages, I'm going to read and explain, read and explain, and then I'm just going to point out eight qualities or characteristics that we find right in the text. Peter says, "This is who exiles should be. This is how we make a difference in the world."

I want to pick it up in chapter 3, verse 13. Peter writes:

"For the Scriptures say," and what he is doing is he is quoting from the Old Testament book of Psalm 34. This is why this is in quotes. *"If you want to enjoy life and see many happy days...."*

Now, I've just got to say, "Who doesn't want that?" This is what every person selling a book or promoting a podcast claims to know, "Hey, man. If you want to have a great life, happy days, then...."

What is it, Peter? Is it some additional self-care? Is it going vegan? Is it adopting a rescue pet? Is it taking care of our finances in such a way that we can retire early? And Peter is like, "Hey, not bad things in and of themselves." But here's how you do it. Verse 10:

"Keep your tongue from speaking evil and your lips from telling lies. Turn away from evil and do good. Search for peace, and work to maintain it." 1 Peter 3:10-11 (NLT)

That, he says, is the secret to having a happy life and enjoying your days. So here's characteristic number one of how exiles stand out and how to make a difference in the world:

Exiles search for peace and work to maintain it.

What I want you to see from these verses is that this is all rooted in relationships. Search for peace in your relationships. Work to maintain it.

Now, don't you think that it is true that when your life seems to be going pretty well, chances are that that is a direct correlation to your relationships?

Our relationships matter so much. Now, there might be some external circumstances, maybe financial, health—all that kind of thing—but for the most part, when life is rough, it's because we've got a relationship that isn't going so well. And when life is going pretty well, it's when our relationships are in sync.

And Peter says here the gravitational pull of our relationships is not toward peace. It's toward division and misunderstanding and conflict.

This is all kind of connected to our words. When my relationship with my spouse or my friends or my co-workers begins to go south, it's usually because of something that I say to them or something they say to me. Maybe the tone of our speech. Maybe something that should be said goes unsaid.

Now, here's the thing. It's relatively easy to say the right things and be in harmony with one another just as long as we're not under pressure. Here's what was challenging for these Christians in the first century. They were living under intense scrutiny and pressure from the Roman Empire.

And when you are stressed out, would you not agree that when you are stressed out that's when you say things that you regret saying come out the most? It's honestly like... Character doesn't get revealed in the easy moments of your life. Character gets revealed in the difficult ones.

My ten-year-old daughter and I have been watching a bunch of reruns of this show on Hulu called *MasterChef*. I don't know if any of you have ever seen it, but it makes us hungry every night. I don't know why.

But, we were watching the show *MasterChef Junior Edition*. And if you've never seen the show, Gordon Ramsay, this really loud, kind of boisterous chef has all of these people come in and they are making all of these dishes, all of this food. And when they are not stressed, they are getting along with each other, they are taking their time making these amazing dishes.

But here's the brilliance of the show, he puts a time limit on the meal and then, in some challenges, he has them work together as a team. And that's when you see their

character. And that's when they start saying harsh things to each other, divisive things to each other.

This is what Peter is saying. He's saying, "Man, in this world peace does not mean the absence of conflict, peace means being able to respond in a way that doesn't breed more of it."

And this is just some of those things that we all just need to file away because the next crisis is coming. The next presidential election is coming. The next thing that could potentially divide all of us is coming. And as Christ followers, it's the most important moment to stay poised and watch what comes out of us in those times.

Peter goes on in verse 13 and he says:

"Now, who will want to harm you if you are eager to do good? But even if you suffer for doing what is right, God will reward you for it. So don't worry or be afraid of their threats. Instead," this is what you do, *"you must worship Christ as Lord of your life."* 1 Peter 3:13-15 (NLT)

So characteristic number two:

Exiles worship as a response to worry

In these verses right here what Peter writes is a reference from Isaiah, chapter 8 where God is saying these words to the prophet because he's about to deliver a hard message to hardened culture. And in the face of suffering and threats, Peter says, "Our response as Christ followers is to take all of that worry, concern, and anxiety and channel it into worship."

The reason why we do this every seven days, the reason why we gather every seven days... I don't know about you but over the last six days I've picked up some additional baggage in my life and on my heart that I need to clean out and offload when I come in here to worship.

See, worship is not this idea that we just kind of get all together and we come in here as clappy, happy people. Worship is a cry for help. It's a response to all that God has done in our past and all that He promises He will do. So we don't worship because we've got it all figured out. We worship precisely because we don't.

By the way, you don't worship when you feel like it. Honestly, most of the time when I come in here, at least initially (I'm just being honest) when the first song starts up, I don't necessarily feel like doing it, but I don't wait until I feel like it, I worship so that I feel like it.

Forgetfulness is the greatest enemy of faith. I'm talking to Christians here. It's when you forget what God has done that you stop believing what God will do. And if you aren't

moved to worship, all that means is that you simply forgot who you are. You've forgotten who you would be without Him and what He did for you.

So when I worship what I'm doing when I throw my hands in the air and I'm singing, I'm simply saying, "God, I refuse to forget who You are and what You've done." And at some point, at some point every single one of us came into the presence of God as messy, jacked-up sinners. Now we've been forgiven in Christ. We've got a hope and a future and our eternity is secure. That's why we sing. That's why we lift up our voices. That's why we say, "God, we need You."

This posture right here is not look at me, this posture right here is, "God, I need You." It's a dependent stance. "God, there isn't anything else I can lean my life up against."

And the prophet Habakkuk writes these words in chapter 3, verse 19. He says:

"The Sovereign Lord is my," what is He? *"strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to tread on the heights."* Habakkuk 3:19 (NIV)

That verse always confused me. I was like, "I never once prayed to have the feet of a deer. Never once." It's like those nature shows when you watch those mountain goats that are like on these treacherous heights, and they look so stable. This is what Habakkuk is getting at.

Most of the time when I pray, I ask God, "God, would you please flatten the ground under my feet?" And God says, "I'd rather strengthen your feet. I'd rather strengthen your feet for the terrain ahead."

When you cannot work or worry your way out of a difficult season, you worship your way through it. And that leads right to what Peter says next in verse 15. He goes:

"And if someone asks about your hope as a believer, always be ready," always be ready, *"to,"* what? *"explain it. But,"* this is a big but right here, *"do this in a gentle and respectful way."* Many of us forgot about that over the last couple of years. *"Keep your conscience clear."* 1 Peter 3:15-16 (NLT)

Here's characteristic number three:

Exiles are always ready to share their story.

These Christians that Peter has been writing to, they've been living their lives so counter-culturally and so backward from the way that everybody else was in the Roman Empire that they stood out like bright pink neon signs. And somebody was bound to ask the question, "What is with you guys? What's your secret? How can you be so hopeful? Don't you know, don't you realize that the whole Roman Empire hates you? What do you have that we don't?"

And Peter says, “In that moment when you’ve been living your life in such a way that provokes a question, be ready. Don’t miss that opportunity. Be ready to explain it.”

Now somewhere along the line there is a word for sharing our faith or sharing what Christ has done, it’s called evangelism. Chances are it’s probably not your favorite word. This has gotten twisted to just mean it’s some sort of presentation that we make or some sort of a pamphlet or some sort of an argument by which we argue somebody into the faith. And we never once saw Jesus doing any one of those things.

Here Peter says, “No, man. Just live your life in such a distinct way and if somebody asks you a question about it, in the moment you don’t miss the opportunity and you’re ready to explain.”

Statistically, right now, most of us aren’t doing this. About half of Christians, this is what the statistics say, half of Christians say that it’s important to share their faith, 78 percent say that they haven’t done it in the past year.

And all of the reasons that are listed are what you might imagine. It’s like, “Well, I don’t feel like I know enough.” Or, “I’m kind of uncomfortable to do that. What if they think less of me?” Or, “It could cost me something.” Or, my favorite one, “Aaron, I’ll invite them to church and let you do it.”

Forty-seven percent of millennials actually feel it’s morally wrong, these are Christians and they say that it’s morally wrong to share your beliefs with somebody with a different faith.

Now, all I want to do is simply point this out. You are already an evangelist for something in your life. You’re already doing it. Very natural. And we’re actually really, really good at it. Usually we don’t think about it this way, but we’re constantly sharing those things that have made a deep impact on us or that have moved us in some way.

It seems like not a week goes by where somebody tries to evangelize me toward some show on Netflix. Like, “Oh, man. You’ve got to see this show. It’s so great.” People will try to evangelize me toward their favorite restaurant. And I’m not offended by that. I don’t mind. They don’t seem uncomfortable. It’s because it’s something that they are passionate about, it’s something that has moved them.

I’m simply saying this. That should be what our faith is to us. That it’s something so natural that really our posture is simply, “Hey, man. I just want you to come and see a man. I want you to come and see who Jesus Christ is. Let me share my story with you, what He has done.” And you’re living your life in such a distinct way that people sit up and take notice and they are curious about it.

I remember reading a book a few years ago about a famous atheist. He was really well known. He’s since passed away. Maybe some of you recognize his name. His name is

Christopher Hitchens. The guy was brilliant. I've read several of his books. He really made me think.

During the last few of his life he toured around university campuses with a Christian scholar by the name of Larry Taunton.

And Larry wrote a book after Christopher Hitchens death in which he describes their relationship. They got to know each other pretty well because they were traveling around to different university campuses. And he described how it wasn't any of his intellectual rebuttals that seemed to make much of a difference in Christopher's viewpoint on life and the way that he was living.

But he did say that the one thing that caused Christopher to begin to ask Larry some questions was when Larry and his wife were in the process of adopting a little girl from Russia who had special needs and a lot of problems. And he said that was what caused Hitchens to lean in, "He asked me all kinds of questions about why we would do this and what our motivation was." And he said, "That thing that we did made more of a difference in Christopher Hitchens' life than any intellectual argument that I ever made."

See, sharing your faith, and I don't mean to demean any of this because maybe some of you came to know Christ through one of these pathways, but sharing your faith does not mean mastering a presentation. It's not *The Bridge*. It's not *The Four Spiritual Laws*. It's not the EvangeCube or Testamints. Alright?

Well, that went over everybody's head. Some of you have Testamints in your pocket right now. You're like, "Oops, just tuck those away."

It comes from living your life in such a way that it provokes a question. Notice what Peter said. He goes, "Be ready to give...." Some translations say, "Be ready to give a defense, not be defensive. And do this with gentleness and respect."

Very few people, if anybody, get converted because we said mean, cutting things to them on Facebook. Very few times, when you see a back and forth on social media, does anybody ever say, "Well, you make a very valid point. I think I've changed my mind." We just get entrenched into our viewpoints.

Peter says, "Be ready to explain it and do this with gentleness and respect." Here's characteristic number four:

Exiles are all in.

Look at verse 18. He writes:

"Christ suffered for our sins once for all time. He never sinned, but he died for sinners to bring you safely home to God." That is a great sentence that really just crystalizes what the gospel message is. "He suffered physical death, but he was raised to life in the Spirit. So he went and preached to the spirits in prison — those who disobeyed God long ago

when God waited patiently while Noah was building his boat. Only eight people were saved from drowning in that terrible flood.” 1 Peter 3:18-20 (NLT)

Now, I want to take just a quick second and I want to kind of double click on verses 19 and 20 here because He went and preached to the spirits in prison. These verses bring up a lot of questions. In fact, most commentators will say that verse 19 and the beginning of verse 20 are some of the most confusing, if not the most confusing verses in the entire New Testament.

The great theologian, Martin Luther, actually had this to say about it. I’m just going to quote him. He said, referring to the verses we just read, “A wonderful text is this. And a more obscure passage perhaps than any other in the New Testament. So much so that I do not know for certain just what Peter means.”

Now, I’ve got to tell you, being a preacher knowing that I’ve got to cover these verses, that wasn’t very comforting to me. If Martin Luther didn’t know this, how am I going to know what it means?

This kind of brings up a question. What did Peter mean when he said that Jesus preached to the spirits in prison? Well I did a lot of study on it this week and I’ve kind of narrowed it down to one of two possibilities. And I just want to take a quick theological diversion for those of you spiritual nerds right now. You are my people. Alright? So let me just offer one of two explanations.

It either means that after Jesus’ death He went and proclaimed His victory to a group of disobedient demons, the principalities and powers who had been at work during the days of Noah. They are bound up waiting judgment and Christ proclaimed to them His ultimate victory—a foretaste of what will happen at the final judgment. That’s one explanation.

Here’s the second. This is one that I would lean toward. The other option is that Peter is saying that Christ, through His Spirit, was preaching a message through Noah’s obedience. Noah was running against the grain of the culture in which he lived and Christ has called us to run against the grain of the culture that we now live in. He’s speaking through us. We are the mouthpiece. We’ve got God’s Word and now His Spirit is living in us. God wants to speak through our lives as well.

Noah preached to his generation for 120 years and very few people if anybody listened. Now Peter is saying, “Don’t be discouraged if we sometimes get the same reaction, you stay faithful to God. God will keep His word through us as well.”

And then in verse 21....

Hey, I think I just explained what Martin Luther didn’t understand. I’ll put that on my resume. I’m joking by the way. Please don’t send me an email. Alright?

Verse 21:

“And that water is a picture of baptism, which now saves you, not by removing dirt from your body, but as a response to God,” that’s what baptism is, it’s a response to God, *“from a clean conscience. It is effective because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”* 1 Peter 3:18-21 (NLT)

So what Peter is doing here is he is taking us back to that Old Testament narrative of Noah and the ark. And he says here that Noah.... There were eight people who ran against the grain of culture. Everybody thought they were crazy for building this big boat out in a field. And he said that God saved them through water and now this water is symbolized in baptism.

So here’s what baptism is. For those of you who may have had questions about it, maybe those of you who have not yet been baptized, I simply want to explain to you that baptism, the water going over you by immersion is not what saves you. Literally it’s the response of faith expressed through it is that does.

I don’t know why God asked us to do this necessarily, but He asked us to do this as an act of obedience. You give your life to Jesus and then you are immersed into water as a symbol of what Jesus has done for you. You are identifying with His suffering and His death.

There are a lot of people who get really nervous about getting baptized and I think that is how God wanted it. It’s kind of an intimidating thing to do to stand in front of a group of people and to be dunked under water. Nobody looks great when you come up out of the water. You’ve got snot running out of your nose. Your make-up is running and all of that. Your hair is in a funky position.

And I think that is part of the experience. God says, “I want you to die to yourself. You’re identifying with Christ. This isn’t something you do to save yourself; it is something in which you are saying, “Man, I’m all in.”

Now, for those of you... I know of many people who grew up Catholic, or grew up in certain denominations that didn’t dunk under water. Maybe you were sprinkled as an infant. And there is nothing wrong with that. I would just simply urge you to be water immersed for a couple of reasons. I believe this is what is happening in the New Testament. I believe that this is what God has commanded and I want you to have the memory of it. You’re not actually forsaking your mom and dad or your grandma or whoever had you sprinkled, you’re just building on the foundation that they gave to you.

See, Peter, I love this—he did this in last week’s passage when he’s talking about submission, he says, “You submit as unto the Lord.” This week when it comes to subjecting ourselves to suffering and ridicule, he says, “You just keep your eyes fixed on Jesus.”

The main point of these potentially confusing verses is Jesus prevails. Jesus prevails. So what I want to do is I want to encourage our church to stay on message. Jesus prevails. That's our announcement. That's what the gospel message is. That's our message. That's our mission. That is the one agenda that is guaranteed to prevail.

So, listen. I don't know where this world is going. I don't know what is going to happen tomorrow. I don't know what is around the corner, but I do know that Jesus prevails.

So, let's do this. Let's talk about politics. By the way we only talk about politics if the Bible addresses them. And I'll only tell you what the Bible says through the lens of that. I will never, ever use this platform to give you my political opinion. Not ever.

Both Democrats and Republicans need Jesus. And our ultimate salvation that we are looking for does not come riding in on the wings of Air Force One, but cradled in a manger. Whether you have a little bit of a leaning toward the donkey or an elephant, it is not nearly as important as your allegiance to the Lamb.

And, yes. Let's go ahead and talk about the economy. But just remember our main message is that both the rich and the poor need Jesus.

And, yes. Let's talk about cultural diversity. Our main message is that the Bible declares people of every culture, tribe, and tongue need Jesus and Jesus came to make us one equal family of brothers and sisters and heaven will be made up of the nations.

And, yes. Let's talk about pandemics. Hopefully, we don't have another one for a really, really long time. But let's talk about that. Let's make it really clear. Whether you want to wear a mask or not, or get a vaccine or not, we're all going to die, and we all need Jesus.

So, these next few qualities... I'm going to move much faster. Alright? Character number five:

Exiles are ready to endure.

Look at verse 22:

"Now Christ has gone to heaven. He is seated in the place of honor next to God, and all the angels and authorities and powers accept his authority." 1 Peter 3:22 (NLT)

I want to jump into chapter 4, verse 1:

"So then, since Christ suffered physical pain, you must arm yourselves with the same attitude he had, and be ready to suffer, too." I don't know about you, but that runs against all of my instincts. *"For if you have suffered physically for Christ, you have finished with sin. You won't spend the rest of your lives chasing your own desires, but you will be anxious to do the will of God."* 1 Peter 4:1-2 [NLT)

This runs against and counter to so many sermons I hear and oftentimes even my own prayer requests to God, because my prayers are usually like, "God, get me out of this

thing that causes me suffering.” And I’m not saying we shouldn’t pray that. But here Peter says, “Hey, what if God has something to teach you through it?”

And I know that’s not a very popular message. I know that’s not something that we aspire to but is something that is very, very real. Jesus, Himself, subjected Himself to physical pain for a purpose. And if Jesus was willing to go through physical pain, God may allow us to go through physical pain, at least for a while.

What I want us to do is to simply change our prayers to say, “God, is there any way out of this? If not, would You give me the strength to endure it and would you help me to see what it is You are trying to develop within me?”

Here, over the last year, I don’t know if it’s been a mid-life crisis—probably is. It’s probably a mid-life crisis. I’ve started strapping a 30-pound backpack on my back and just hiking and running for miles.

I’ll do these events. I did one just two weeks ago. We strapped on a 30-pound pack, and we hiked 26.2 miles. Back in the spring I did another one where we put on a backpack and we also, additionally, put on a 60-pound sand bag, so about 90 pounds on my back and I did 20 miles.

And the most common reaction that I get on social media when I tell people about it is this: Why? I’ve got to be honest. Halfway through these events.... They always seem like a good idea, and I get about halfway through the event and I’m like, “Wow! Why am I doing this? This is crazy.”

Here’s why I’ve chosen to do this. I just want to get used to doing hard things. I just want to develop the mentality of saying, “You know what? I’m not going to run from pain. I’m going to dive into it.”

And honestly, since I’ve been doing these things, there are very few.... When I have to have a difficult conversation or a challenging meeting or make a tough decision, I always just go, “Well, it could be worse. I could have a sand bag on my back.”

This is what Peter is driving at. He’s saying, “Let’s just not run from suffering. God wants to use this to form and shape your character.” Quality number six:

Exiles are earnest in prayer, quick to love, and are cheerfully generous.

Look at verse 7:

“The end of the world is coming soon.” Keep in mind that he wrote this 2,000 years ago. So, the end of the world could happen this afternoon, it could happen in another 2,000 years. Not really up to us to speculate. He just says, “Be ready.” *“Therefore, be earnest and disciplined in your prayers. Most important of all, continue to show deep love for each other, for love covers a multitude of sins. Cheerfully share your home with those who need a meal or a place to stay.”* 1 Peter 4:7-9 (NLT)

I just simply want to point out right here that these are marks of what I desire for our church to be.

A little preview here. Two weeks from today.... Next weekend we're going to finish up 1 Peter. Two weeks from today we're going to start up a brand-new series for four weeks called *We Are Traders Point*. And here's what we're going to do in that series. We're just going to talk about where we came from and what God has called us to and this kind of new day that is in front of us. What is our mission? What are we trying to accomplish? How can we play a role in it? So we're going to be talking about that and these marks right here: being earnest in prayer, quick to love, cheerfully generous are a part of that.

Two more characteristics. Here's number seven:

Exiles use their gifts for the good of others and the glory of God.

Look at verse 10. It says:

"God has given each of you a gift from his great variety of spiritual gifts." By the way, he's saying that of you. If you are a follower of Jesus, God has given you a gift and has spiritually equipped you for it. And then he says, "Use them well to promote yourselves." No, he doesn't say that. He says, "Use them well to serve one another."

That's why you use your gifts. You serve to bless other people. And then he goes:

"Do you have the gift of speaking? Then speak as though God himself were speaking through you." That's a lot to say to us. "Do you have the gift of helping others? Do it with all the strength and energy that God supplies. Then everything you do will bring glory to God through Jesus Christ." 1 Peter 4:10-11 (NLT)

The application to this is really simple. Find out what your gift is, He promises to give you one, and then use it. Use it, not to promote yourself, use it to serve others and to glorify God.

I just want to say, right now, I don't know who I'm speaking to. Somebody right now is kind of sitting on the sidelines and you just put on the jersey, but you don't get on the field and use the gift that God has given you. And maybe there is a reason why you are on the sidelines. Maybe you're hurt. Maybe you got burned. Maybe you just didn't know what your gift was.

Maybe the events of the last two or three years.... You used to be involved, but you walked over to the sidelines and you're sitting there. And God is beckoning to you, "Hey, get back in the game because I've given you something specific and unique that only you can do, and I want you to do it for the kingdom of God."

And spiritual gifts, that's what they are, spiritual gifts could be something.... I don't even know why we say, "What are you naturally good at?" If you're naturally good at it, that's because God gave it to you. I think there are those gifts. Some of us just came out of

the womb being able to sing or being able to play a sport or being able to play an instrument, whatever it is.

Others of us, I do believe didn't get a gift naturally, it's supernatural. By the way, that's how I feel about public speaking. For those of you who have heard my story, I grew up a really shy kid. Hated speaking in public. I got Cs and Ds in all of my high school speech classes. And when I started to feel called by God to go into ministry, I primarily said, "No." because I didn't want to do what I'm doing right now. I didn't want to do this. And I thought there was no way that I could go into ministry and not like public speaking.

I remember this very specific thing. I was 19 years old. I was in my dorm room my freshman year of Bible college where I really felt like I tentatively walked up to my desk—it's kind of like when you go bowling and somebody checks out shoes to you—it was as if God checked out the gift of speaking to me. And I tentatively took it.

Here's why I say that. God tangibly gave it to me. I believe He'll take it back. I believe God gave it to me for a specific time. People come up to me all of the time and they are like, "Do you still get nervous when you preach?" I'm like, "Every single time." I wish that I didn't, but I always do. And I really know that the more nervous I am, maybe the more urgent the message is. Oftentimes I feel like I'm just being carried along by the Holy Spirit. God has given me a gift. It's kind of like walking a hundred-pound Great Dane down the street. I'm just being pulled along.

I just simply want to say to you, "What gift has God checked out to give to you?" Eventually you're going to hand it back to Him and He's going to say, "How did you use it? How did you use it?"

The last thing that I just want to point out, characteristic number eight:

Exiles never give up!

He says in verse 12:

"Dear friends, don't be surprised at the fiery trials you are going through, as if something strange were happening to you. Instead, be very glad— for these trials make you partners with Christ in his suffering, so that you will have the wonderful joy of seeing his glory when it is revealed to all the world." 1 Peter 4:12-13 (NLT)

"So if you are suffering in a manner that pleases God, keep on doing what is right, and trust your lives to the God who created you, for he will never fail you." 1 Peter 4:14-19 (NLT)

Man, you hold on to that last sentence like a life preserver. In this crazy, crazy world, He will never fail you.

I remember reading a few years ago about a hand doctor by the name of Paul Brand. He went to visit this leper colony in India. And he just kind of went to observe. But when

they found out that he was a doctor they were really excited to have him there. So they insisted that he stand up and address the room full of lepers who were there.

So he stood up not really having any idea what to say. Doctor Brand was a hand surgeon so he just couldn't help but notice the lepers' hands. Many of them were kind of drawn into a deformed claw. Some of them were fingers. Some of them were just stubs. Most of them were hiding their hands. They were sitting on their hands, trying to find a way to keep them out of sight because they were embarrassed about the way that they looked.

Doctor Brand looked out at this group of lepers and here's what he said:

You know. I'm a hand surgeon so I always notice people's hands. A palm reader says that he can tell you your future by looking at your hands. I can tell you something about a person's past by looking at their hands, whether they are calloused or scarred. I can tell what kind of work you do by looking at your hands. I love hands.

And at this point he could see the lepers in the room were growing even more self-conscious because he was actually pointing out that thing they were trying to hide. But then he pivoted, and he said:

I want to talk to you about the hands of Jesus. I would have loved to have met Jesus and just been able to shake His hands and feel them in mine. However, knowing the kind of person that He is, I think I know something about the hands of Jesus.

Then he went on to describe Jesus' hands as a baby, as tiny fingers in the manger holding on to His earthly dad, Joseph. And the awkward hand of a little boy maybe trying to hold a stylus to form the letters of the alphabet. The hands of Jesus as a young man when He was a carpenter, strong and worn and bruised working with the wood.

Then he talked about the hands of Jesus the physician, sensitive and compassionate, powerful hands touching people who were blind and helping them be able to see. People with withered hands, making them whole again. Blessing little children.

Then there are the crucified hands of Jesus. He said:

Think about that for a minute. It hurts me to think about Jesus's hands being crucified because it's almost impossible to drive a nail through a hand without paralyzing it. Jesus' hands became paralyzed and clawed when He died for you and me on a cross.

One observer said that the atmosphere in that leper colony immediately changed when he said that because for the first time ever somebody was telling them that Jesus had become a leper, so to speak. Nobody ever told them that Jesus became paralyzed when He was nailed to a cross. They had never thought that way before. It was kind of a revolutionary thought, "Jesus had clawed hands like me."

And Doctor Brand went on and he said:

The most fascinating thing to me is Jesus' resurrected hands. Usually we think about the resurrected body as being completely whole and perfect. But when Jesus rose from the dead and returned to show His disciples, He said to them, "Come see My hands." And He specifically said this to Thomas who had his doubts, "Put your finger in My hand."

Why would Jesus carry with Him the scars in His hands for all of eternity when He could have made them completely whole again? Why would He do that? Why wouldn't His hands be completely regenerated and restored?

And Doctor Brand suggests:

Could it be that He want to have a visual reminder that He knows what it feels like to suffer. He's identifying with us. The surgery of life always hurts but it helps me to know that the Surgeon, Himself, the wounded Surgeon, has felt every stab of pain and sorrow that we have in this life, as Hebrews, chapter 4 puts it.

Doctor Brand finished out his thoughts and he said,

Something amazing happened. People leaving the worship came out and all of these lepers stood up this room and their clawed, deformed hands, they started raising them toward Jesus surrendering themselves to Him. He said it was one of the most beautiful pictures ever.

Now, you may not have a literally deformed hand. But my guess is that you have some scars. My guess is that you've got a wounded heart. And right now, in these remaining few moments of our time, whatever it is that you might be going through would you be able to stand before God as you are and ask the Great Physician to bring some healing to your life?

Maybe we've veered off track over the last few years. Maybe we've taken our eyes off of Him. Maybe our focus hasn't been where it needs to be. Maybe we've gotten off message. Maybe today we just come before our suffering Savior and lay our suffering before Him and ask Him to meet us right in the middle and to give us strength to endure and transformation.

The world is watching. This is our greatest opportunity to represent our Father.

Lord God, we come to You today and life is not easy, and I suspect that it never fully will be on this side of eternity. So today could we find the courage to lean in to begin to incorporate what Peter lays out in these amazing verses, these eight qualities, these eight characteristics about how exiles make a difference in this world?

It's not easy. But, God, I just pray that You give us the faith to do it. The other ways aren't working. So, God, help us to stay on message. Help us to stay on mission. Help us to keep our eyes fixed on You, our Lord and Savior, who was willing to go through

suffering Himself, willing to have His hands deformed so that we might be made whole in Your sight.

So, God, today in these moments together, whatever it is that is weighing us down, could we lay it at Your feet and worship as a response to the teaching of what we just heard? We ask this in Jesus' name: Amen.