

# MESSAGE TRANSCRIPT //

## THE FOREGINERS | TRAVEL PLANS

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Alright. Hey, what's up, Traders Point family. Good to see you today. Want to welcome everybody gathered across all of our locations and online. So glad that you are here.

And if you are joining us today, you came on a really good day because today we're kicking off a brand-new series of messages in the book of 1 Peter. So if you have a Bible or a Bible app, go ahead and find 1 Peter, chapter 1. That's where we are going to be today.

One of the highlights for me as a dad, one of my favorite things to do over the years, has been anytime I have a work trip, a trip that's requiring me to travel, especially if it's outside of our country, is to be able to take one of my kids with me.

So when they got about right around the age of six years old or so, that's a pretty good age where they are old enough to be somewhat self-sufficient and I can pack enough things in a little backpack for them, and they were able to go with me wherever I'm traveling.

So I had the opportunity to take my son with me to South America one time. That was a highlight. And when my oldest daughter was 12, she went with me to Cape Town, South Africa. We were there visiting some missionaries, friends of ours. Cape Town is absolutely beautiful, and it is an extremely long plane ride so it was so much fun to have my daughter there with me.

And while we were there one day, we were doing some community work in one of the local slums around Cape Town. We did some service projects, some door-to-door stuff. Had a long, long day.

At the end of the day we all gathered in the church that met in that community and we were going to have a meal before we went back to the hotel.

We're in there and we're waiting and waiting and waiting for the food. And one hour goes by. Two hours go by. We're just waiting and waiting. I didn't know what the hold up was. But I could tell that there was something wrong.

Finally somebody came up to me and pulled me aside and said, "Hey, we need to talk to you for a quick minute. We had hired a woman in the community, we didn't know who she was, but we hired her out to prepare the food. We have since learned that she is a practicing witch."

I don't know how you find that out, but apparently that is what she was. When she found out that there was a pastor in the group, she tried to poison the food. So, that doesn't happen every day.

As a pastor I've had plenty of people upset with me for things that I've said and done, but nobody has ever tried to poison my potluck. That just never happened.

They said, "Don't worry about it. We hired out another lady in the community and she's making the food. It's almost ready." And I'm like, "What's your background check process like? How do you know?"

Now there were enough things in that culture that were disorienting to me, let alone having a witch try to poison my food.

I don't know if any of you have ever traveled outside of the country in which you grew up into another culture, into another environment. But if you have, chances are you've experienced the feelings of disorientation and confusion that really can be described as something called culture shock.

Now let me just give you one definition of culture shock:

**Culture shock: the feelings of surprise, disorientation, uncertainty, and confusion that are felt, resulting in anxiety, when people have to operate within a different culture.**

I'm just kind of curious. In this room and across all of our locations, have you ever experienced culture shock? Raise up your hand really quick. Yeah, a fair amount in the room have experienced it. And I would say that if you haven't experienced culture shock, you should sometime, because it's very informative. It shows us what we lean on. It shows us what our securities are.

I think it is so informative to find yourself in an environment where the language that you natively speak isn't spoken, the food is different, the customs and the traditions and the fragrances that you are smelling—all of that stuff is different. It teaches you a lot about yourself.

Maybe you've been in an environment where you've experienced some culture shock, and if so then you find yourself in really, really good company with the original recipients of the letter of 1 Peter.

That's what 1 Peter is. It's technically called an epistle in the New Testament. And all that an epistle is is just a letter. And it's a letter written by a guy named Peter to a group of scattered Christ followers who are located all over Asia Minor to let them know that the feelings of confusion and disorientation they were experiencing were real.

They had become foreigners in this world, primarily due to their association and devotion to Jesus. And Rome had determined to rid the empire of "the Christ ones," that's how they were referred to.

And this was a group of people who refused to bow down to Caesar and Rome saw them as a threat. As a result, their entire world had been turned upside down.

Now, one important rule of accurate Bible interpretation is that before you can discern the meaning and the application of a text to your life here today, you have to first understand what the application and the message was to the original audience.

This is a little tip for you. If you ever find yourself in a Bible study and you read a passage and then the group leader says, "Well, let's just go around the room and you say what the passage means to you." Big red flag. Alright?

It's not that we can't get there eventually, that's just not the first stop. The first stop is: what was the meaning for the original audience? And then we can discern the meaning for us today.

So Peter is writing to this group of scattered Christ followers and obviously there is a message in the timeless Word of God that applies to our lives today.

And I would say that for those of us today listening to this, I'm just going to go out on a limb and say that there are likely some things in your life that you're walking through right now that feel a little disorienting and discouraging. You don't really know how to respond to them. Challenges, crises, anxiety, and emotion.

If I'm just being really, really honest, I have to battle discouragement on a daily basis because there are so many things that can be discouraging. And I don't have the answers to them.

I would venture to say that all of us have felt our entire world sort of flip upside down over the events of the last two or three years. Would you not agree with that? And we all just kind of feel like, in many ways, that we're living in a new world. And it feels a little disorienting.

It's not all bad but it's not necessarily all good. And it's not just all challenges. There are some opportunities. But it kind of feels like a weird sort of aftershock of just all of the crisis and tension that we've been through over the last couple of years.

God's Word isn't just a book that tells us what happened a long time ago, it is a book that tells us what always happens. It's the timeless Word of God. And God has something fresh that I think He wants to speak to us in and through the book of 1 Peter.

We're going to spend several weeks walking through this together. And if you're new to our church, let me tell you how we roll. What I'm going to do is I'm going to start in chapter 1. I'm going to read and explain, read and explain, read and explain. And then I'll apply and then we'll be done. Alright?

So let's start in verse 1. Are you guys ready? Alright. I was wondering. I was wondering, but you proved me wrong.

*"This letter is from Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ."* 1 Peter 1:1 (NLT)

So we've got to stop right there because there is so much packed into that one sentence. Writing a hand-written letter is sort of a lost art nowadays. I'm a child of the 80s. I remember walking down the hallway between classes and a girl that I liked would slip me a letter. Any of you remember that? Of course you don't. You weren't alive then. I just remember, "Oh, man."

Yeah, we don't write letters like that anymore. What do we get? We get text messages and DMs. Not entirely bad, not entirely good.

And if you've ever received a text message from somebody whose number was not in your phone, you knew who they were, but you didn't have their number. So they send you a paragraph text message and you're reading it and you're lost because you don't know who it's from.

And you're like, "Uh," So you respond back and you're like, "Misplaced your number. Who is this?" And then they are like, "Oh, it's Rick." All of a sudden, "Oh, Rick." Now the message makes sense, because of who's writing it. Understanding who they are informs the meaning of the message.

That is why if you read all of these epistles and these New Testament letters they will start off by saying who it is from. And so Peter says, "Hey, this is from me."

Now, what do we know about Peter? Well Peter and another guy named Paul write the bulk of the New Testament. And they have some similarities, but in many ways they are so different.

Paul was like this well-educated, buttoned up, prim and proper kind of a guy. When I envision Paul I think Vineyard Vines, loafers. Alright? That is what I think.

Peter, on the other hand, is like he dropped out of high school, and he's sort of like this guy's guy, and he wears Crocs and Under Armour. That's the kind of guy that Peter is.

Paul can explain to you the depths of theological doctrine. Peter can tell you the difference between a croppie and a bass. That's who this guy is.

Peter is one of the very first followers of Jesus.

One of the things you need to know is that Jesus had 12 disciples, but He had three that He loved to hang with: Peter, James, and John.

One of the things that he has done that is so remarkable is that Peter at one time walked on the water. Pretty astounding. How many of you have ever done that? Didn't think so. So Peter's done that.

However, that's not what he is most known for. Peter is the most known for, unfortunately, one of his biggest failures. When it mattered most, he denied that he ever knew Jesus after promising Jesus that he would never do that.

And you can imagine the amount of shame that he would have felt at that campfire that night, outside of Jesus' illegal trial, when he couldn't even admit that he knew Him.

Peter's carrying that. Peter knew what it felt like to be an insider and then, overnight, to be an outsider. And now he is writing to a group of believers who are feeling those same things. And he says, going on in verse 1:

*"I am writing to God's chosen people..."* hang on to that, we'll come back to that, *"who are living as foreigners..."* there is the word. That's why we are calling this series what we're calling it.

Another word for foreigners is *exiles*. If that sounds familiar to you, and I hope it does, it's because we just got done with our series in Daniel where we talked a lot about that.

And then he says that they are scattered *"in the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia."* 1 Peter 1:1 (NLT)

All are places that are kind of around the Roman Empire outside of the city of Rome.

What I want to draw your attention to is that Peter uses two very descriptive and distinctive words to describe who they were. He says, "You are *chosen*, and you are *foreigners*."

So these are believers who have been scattered all over the world due to religious and political persecution, and right now they were facing a brand-new world in which their circumstances were uncertain. All of their support systems had been decimated.

So Peter is writing to say, "I want you to look at your circumstances through a certain lens." And that's why he writes out the word *foreigners*.

Pastor J. D. Greear made these observations about this that I really resonate with. He said, "If you're living in a country that you're not from you can be one of three things to it." You can be:

### **An Immigrant**

An immigrant is somebody who desires to make a country that they are not a resident of a permanent home.

And oftentimes as Christ followers we can do this with the temporary world in which we now live. Because of Jesus we are citizens of heaven. And so this world, while we are here temporarily, is not our permanent home. But we can keep our eyes focused so much on the circumstances of what is going on around here, that we treat it like it is.

So we become preoccupied with events in this world. We become preoccupied with making a comfortable life here, and making a name for ourselves here, and enjoying ourselves here. There is nothing wrong with any of those things unless they become the primary lens by which we view life. And so we become so focused on earth that we're not living with a mindset toward heaven.

The second way that we can view it is as:

### **A Tourist**

And a tourist is not there to take up residence in a new country. A tourist is just passing through. A tourist isn't going to unpack any boxes. A tourist isn't going to set up any utilities, not going to make any connections or build relationships. A tourist is not going to bother to learn the language.

A tourist is not going to learn to love the local food. A tourist is just going to find a local McDonald's. Not concerned about the community's problems or politics. Why? Because a tourist is going to catch a flight and will be out of there soon.

I've actually rubbed shoulders with a lot of Christians and that is their attitude toward this world, "Hey, man. We're not going to get involved here. Not going to build any relationships. Our hearts are not going to break for those outside of Christ. There will be no connection, no passion, "I'm just waiting to get raptured off of this train wreck of a planet. Me and Kirk Cameron, baby." Right? I love that some of you got that.

Here's the third thing. We can view this world as:

### **An Exile**

As a foreigner. And this is what Peter is talking about. An exile is a people whose home is somewhere else but for an unspecified amount of time they have set up home in a new environment.

This Daniel and his friends working for the peace and prosperity of Babylon. We're here right now so we're going to invest in the community, form relationships, learn the culture as well as the language, grow to love the food.

But we know full well this is not our final destination. There will be a day when we will go home, and we look forward to it with joy and anticipation. We are not overly focused or obsessed with amassing stuff here because we know that we can't take it with us.

It's kind of like whenever you are traveling, and you go through an airport where you have a connection to somewhere. And as you are walking through the airport you see those shops that pop up that have water and snacks and some minor necessities that are jacked up to ridiculous prices. Why do they do that? They know that you're not going to get it anywhere else. They've got you trapped. So you go and you buy a handful of items to carry you through the next flight.

Do you know what you never see in airport shops? Costco-sized shopping carts. Because nobody goes to the airport to stock their pantry.

In a very similar way we are like travelers passing through. Not that having material possessions is bad, we're just not trying to amass stuff because this is not our final destination. We serve a different kingdom. And we have a different set of lenses and values and priorities.

Because of that, you can think about it this way, we are living our lives through a different rhythm or sound track that the rest of the world, outside of Christ, can't necessarily hear. So, of course, you're going to seem a little strange.

How many of you have ever had your AirPods in walking the dog down the sidewalk rapping out to Beastie Boys and you're singing at the top of your lungs and nobody else can hear the tune? You look like a lunatic. Right? You're walking around "Wat'cha, wat'cha, wat'cha want...." Some of you are surprised I even know that. That's my best Beastie Boys impersonation.

You are going to seem a little strange because they can't hear the tune. And in the same way, as a Christ follower, it's this tension between not totally blending in but standing out in the best way, in the best way, because our lives are set to the rhythm of the Word of God, so we see the world through a different set of lenses.

Now, I say different. Please don't hear me say weird. We do not need any more weird Christians. We have enough of them. We don't need any mean-spirited, judgmental Christians. We have enough of them. But distinct—distinct because we're living our lives through a different set of lenses. This is what Peter is driving at.

All through this letter he is urgent and intense. There are more than 30 imperative verbs in this letter. That is one command in every three verses. However, it is also filled with hope. And we need that now more than ever in this life, don't you think?

If we are battling discouragement right now or disorientation over a whole host of things, this letter is so relevant for us. Because what Peter is going to is he's going to draw our eyes up. He's saying, "Pick up your eyes and look at Jesus." Verse 2, he says:

*"God the Father knew you and chose you long ago, and his Spirit has made you holy. 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."*

That's such a great sentence. One of the things that we see here is that Peter is being really clear, but that doesn't mean that he's being simple. So in one short paragraph he is cramming as much Christian doctrine as you can possibly cram.

And before Peter can encourage us to look at our world and circumstances differently, what he needs to do is he needs to ground our identity in who God says that we are.

Have you noticed that we live in a culture right now where everybody is desperately trying to identify themselves as something? We're trying to find our identity. Where do you think that came from? That came from our Creator.

God has made that within us—to search for, so desperately, an identity that is outside of ourselves. So instead of finding our identity in our sexuality or our gender or our talents and abilities, or our bank account, God says, “You need to find your identity in who I say that you are and who Jesus died for you to be.”

Right out of the gate Peter says this, “God knows you.” And I just want you to let that truth wash over you right now. The God of the universe knows you; He created you intentionally. Regardless of the details of your birth, how you came into this world, God ordained you to be alive, right now, in this moment in history. That is a wild thought.

Think about.... You are no accident. Think about all of the moments in history when you and I could have been alive. We could have been alive during the Stone Age. Aren't you thankful we're not? We could have been alive during the Wild, Wild West. We could have been alive around the Great Depression or World War II—all of these really trying moments in human history.

But instead God said, “I'm ordaining you to live during this period of time with all of the crises and challenges they entail for a reason. Not just to ride out the storm, but to be part of the answer or the solution to it.”

And so Peter uses this incredible but controversial word *chosen*. And before I dive into the controversy about that word, let me just say this. Doesn't it feel good to be chosen? When you walk into a room where you don't expect anybody to know your name, doesn't it feel good when somebody walks up and they just call you by name?

Doesn't it feel good when you get picked for the team, you get picked for the promotion, the person you have a crush on asks you out on a date? There is just something about being chosen and the reason why is because God put that in you. There is this thing that longs for you to be picked, for you to be seen, for you to be chosen.

And Peter comes and says, “Man, God knows you and He has chosen you.” And it's unfortunate that many Christian circles throughout church history have managed to turn this incredible thing into a source of confusion, division, and heated tension.

Here's what I mean. Some of you already know where I am going and you're leaning forward going, “Oh, good.” As a pastor, I oftentimes will be standing in the lobby greeting people before or after the service and I'll have somebody walk up to me, maybe a new person, maybe it's his first time, he will come up and will ask me a form of this question. He will say, “Hey, are you Calvinist or Arminian?”

“Oh, goodie. That's where we're going to go.”



Or he will say this. “Hey, what do you think about election?” Or, “What do you think about predestination? Where do you stand on that?”

Some of you are like, “I have no idea what you are talking about.” Here’s really what we boil this question down to. When it comes to salvation, here’s what he is asking:

### **Do I choose God, or does God choose me?**

Now, I do think that for many complex issues, we set ourselves up for failure, disappointment, and further confusion by the way that we ask a question. Hang with me a minute.

Oftentimes the way that we frame really challenging, difficult theological questions that are necessary and good—the way we phrase the question is not necessarily the way the Bible speaks to the question.

So let me give you a couple of examples. “Do I have to be baptized to be saved?” The Bible never phrases it that way. “Does God send people to hell?” “Will the Pacers ever be good again?” Just impossible questions. We just can’t answer them.

Let me give you another example. Do you have something about your body that you don’t like? Or is it just me? Probably when you look in the mirror you see something that you don’t like that nobody else notices.

For me, it’s my legs. Don’t look at them. This is why I hide behind this podium. You can ask my wife; I’ve never liked them. And thankfully she does.

So, if I were to walk up to you and if I were to say, “Hey, do you like my legs?” Weird question. And here’s what is even weirder. If you say to me, “Yes, I do.” I’ve just set you up for failure because, number one, I’m not going to believe you and, number two, I’m going to think that it is really creepy that you are looking at my legs.

Or, if you say, “No, I don’t like your legs, they are ugly.” I’m going to be highly offended. We’re no longer friends. See what I’m saying? The way we phrase the question sets us up for failure.

And when it comes to the issue of election, predestination, and all of that—really, really worthy discussions, the way that we phrase the question oftentimes sets up for failure.

So, some suggest that what it means to be chosen is that God chooses some to be saved and others to be lost. And I would say that is not what the doctrine of election means. To be chosen means that God takes the initiative to move toward us. Right? God sent Jesus into this world to die for our sins long before any of us were here.

So, who chose first? God initiated. Romans, chapter 5, verse 8.

Let me ask this. Did God just do that for a select few? Well, the Bible says, "For God so loved the world...." Last time I checked, the world includes everybody. So He sent Jesus into the world, but He draws us to Him by His Spirit.

It is His Spirit that awakens that desire within us. Ephesians says that we were dead in sin and dead things don't respond. So the Holy Spirit causes us to respond: John 6:44.

Is this confusing? Yeah. Is there a mystery to it? Yeah. Do I trust God in it? Yeah.

I had a professor who used to say it this way, "God is so sovereign," (and sovereign just means in control), "that He has built free will into His foreknowledge." So foreknowledge and election are different. Just because God knows something is going happen doesn't mean that He forces it to happen.

In the words of Norman Gypers we are chosen yet we are free.

Just think about the parable of the prodigal son that Jesus told in Luke 15 (and some of you know this parable). This young man goes to his father and essentially tells his father to drop dead. That wasn't the word that he used but that's what he meant because he said, "Give me my share of the inheritance and leave me alone." He's wishing that his father would die.

So he takes his share of the inheritance, leaves, goes off to a foreign country, squanders it all on wild living, he had nothing left, and he's feeding pigs slop as a part-time job.

He's so hungry that he wants to eat the slop that the pigs are eating. And he says, "What am I doing? My father's hired hands live better than I do so I'm just going to go back and beg, grovel, and plead that my dad will hire me as part-time help because I don't deserve to be his son again."

So the young man goes back home. But Jesus says the father was outside looking out on the horizon waiting for his son and when he saw his son he ran to him.

So here's the question. Did the son choose the father or did the father choose the son? Yes! That's the answer.

So, does God choose me? Or do I choose God? Yes!

I don't know how it works but I'm so thankful that it does. And for those of you (you know who you are) who've already got the email written, you're really fired up, because you are either this or that, black or white, so this murky kind of confusion is very unsettling to you.

That's why we have an Arminianism camp and a Calvinistic approach because there are Scriptures that speak to both, And you take the Bible as a whole, both are going on.

Pastor and author, Tim Keller, says it this way:

We will never find God unless He first seeks us, but we should remember that He can do so in very different ways. Sometimes God jumps on us dramatically, and we have a sharp sense of His love. Sometimes He quietly and patiently argues with us, even though we continue to turn away.

How can you tell if He is working on you now? If you begin to sense your lostness and find yourself wanting to escape it, you should realize that that desire is not something you could have generated on your own. Such a process requires help, and if it is happening, it is a good indication that He is, even now, at your side.

Same kind of deal. When I have somebody come up to me, a Christ follower, and he says, "I'm really, really worried that I've lost my salvation. How do I know that I'm saved?" I would simply say, "The fact that it bothers you shows me that you are saved because conviction doesn't come from you, conviction comes from the Holy Spirit."

So God pursues us and I'm so glad that He does because without that we don't stand a chance. This is such an encouragement when I'm discouraged.

So he announces all of that and he's going to take great effort to say, "Here's who you are. Here's who God is. Here's who Jesus is. Here's what He's done for you." Now, verse 6 is a verse of application:

"So..." some translations say *therefore* so he's turning a corner, so, because of what you've just learned, "*be truly glad. There is wonderful joy ahead...*"

For those of you doom and gloom conspiracy theory people, he says, "*There is wonderful joy ahead even though you must endure many trials for a little while.*"

I just want you to notice all of the things that appear to be in tension in these verses. Wonderful joy, endure the trials.

Verse 7:

*"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.*

*"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."* Those two things are in tension. "*Though you do not see him now, you trust him;*" that's a tension, "*and you rejoice with a glorious, inexpressible joy.*" 1 Peter 1:6-8 (NLT)

The tension is where the transformation lies. And some of you have heard me use this illustration before if you've been here for a while. This is a rubber band. When you look at a regular rubber band when it's just dangling like this it's not much use. What makes a rubber band useful is when you apply tension.

This is what we see all throughout Scripture. There are things that are in tension. So grace and truth. God's justice and His mercy. And here Peter just unpacks a lot of this.

He says, "Have gladness and joy even though we have to endure many trials. There is this wonderful joy that is set out before us, but many trials. We don't yet see Him, but we love Him, and we trust Him."

And I would say that all of this gets unpacked in these two little words—right now, chances are that you are looking at your life circumstances through the lens of either *fear* or *faith*.

### **Fear vs. Faith**

Actually, if we're being honest, both of those things are going on at the same time. And Peter goes on and he says in verse 13:

*"So prepare your minds for,"* what's the word? That was pathetic. So anti-climatic.

*"Prepare your minds for..."* what? Action. There you are. There you are.

He doesn't say prepare your minds for contemplation. Contemplation is not bad; oftentimes that's where action comes from. But he goes: "Prepare your minds to take action." Meaning living your life for Christ is not something that is just a spectator sport. God wants you involved. And he says:

*"... exercise self-control. Put all your hope in the gracious salvation that will come to you when Jesus Christ is revealed to the world. So you must live as God's obedient children.*

*"Don't slip back into your old ways of living to satisfy your own desires. You didn't know any better then. But now you must be holy in everything you do, just as God who chose you is holy." 1 Peter 1:13-15 (NLT)*

This whole prepare your minds for action—the literal Greek phrase is *gird up the loins of your mind*. Aren't you glad they changed it? Who's walking around, "Hey, gird up the loins of your mind"?

In the first century they wore these long garments, and they would pull up the garments so that way they could run. And this is the idea that he's giving these Christ followers.

He said, "You're not just here to hunker down and weather the storm and be a spectator of what God is doing, God has designed you, knowing who you are and what Jesus did for you, to run. Run in to be a person of action and self-control."

Now, let me just finish out the passage and I want to make a couple of observations. Verse 17:

*"And remember that the heavenly Father to whom you pray has no favorites. He will judge or reward you according to what you do."*

That is a sentence of reward, not salvation. Salvation is done on your behalf by Jesus. I don't have time to get into it today, but there is this idea of rewards in heaven. God is going to judge you according to what you do, the things that you practice:

*"So you must live in reverent fear of him during your time here as 'temporary residents.' For you know that God paid a ransom to save you from the empty life you inherited from your ancestors."*

The sin nature that we got from Adam and Eve.

*"And it was not paid with mere gold or silver, which lose their value. It was the precious blood of Christ, the sinless, spotless Lamb of God. God chose him as your ransom long before the world began, but now in these last days he has been revealed for your sake."*

*"Through Christ you have come to trust in God. And you have placed your faith and hope in God because he raised Christ from the dead and gave him great glory. You were cleansed from your sins when you obeyed the truth,"*

That was evidence of your Savior:

*"... so now you must show sincere love to each other as brothers and sisters. Love each other deeply with all your heart."*

That's a different soundtrack.

Verse 23:

*"For you have been born again, but not to a life that will quickly end. Your new life will last forever because it comes from the eternal, living word of God." 1 Peter 1:17-23 (NLT)*

So much packed into that. And one of the things I just want to point out is that Peter is simply saying, "If you just focus on the here and now, you're missing out on so much more."

Here's what I mean. Use your imagination with me, those of you who are in the room, it will be a little easier to do this. If I was holding the end of a string right now with my fingers, and the string was attached all the way to the back corner spread out across this whole, massive room and right here [close to Aaron's fingers] there was this little ribbon—the ribbon represents our 80 or 90 years on this earth, the string represents all of eternity.

And Peter says, "You need to live for the string not for the ribbon."

And some of us have gotten so preoccupied with the here and now that we are failing to see the lens of eternity. Let me say it this way. As a Christ follower when you face discouragement and disorientation over something that is happening in your world or the world, you can choose to look, quite possibly, through the lens of fear. Many of us do.

Honestly, I do all of the time. That's one of my initial responses when I get bad news, when I hear of a hurricane that's coming, when I see the economy tinkering on a recession, when I get criticized, when a relationship falls apart, when I'm grieving the loss of somebody I love, when I'm worried about other crises that may be coming—it's easy to get wrapped up in the here and now and to just see these things through the lens of fear.

Here's what fear does. Fear says, "I'm just going to hunker down and I'm just going to try to get through this and I'm going to try to be a self-preservationist and I'm afraid. I'm just going to try to weather the storm that I'm in and pray that I never have to experience another one.

Or we can choose to live through the lens of faith. And fear and faith—both of these things are in us at the same time. Remember the tension.

But faith says, "I'm scared too. But I'm going to choose to be intentional about who I'm looking for. So it's not all up to me. I don't have all of the answers but I'm not just going to hunker down and weather the storm, I'm going to march right through it and I'm going to prepare my life for action and self-control.

"And I'm going to ask God, 'God, what is it? You've created me. You know me. These are the days that You've ordained for me to live. Meaning that there is something intentional and You want me to contribute to this world. So, God. What is it?'"

I'm going to choose to look through the lens of faith.

Do you know that cattle and bison handle storms in very different ways? A herd of cattle, when they sense a storm is coming, they instinctively turn and run away and scatter.

Now here's the thing about a storm, and here's the thing about cows. Cows are not very fast, and storms will eventually catch them. So these cows, poor cows, they turn, and they run, and they scatter thinking they are going to outrun the storm and by the time the storm catches up to them they are all alone, leaving them even more vulnerable.

That's what fear does. We've seen this over the last several years. A crisis comes. A storm comes. We instinctively turn and we run. We hunker down. We isolate.

The storm eventually catches us, but now we are all alone. If Satan wants to defeat you, he'll just get you alone.

Bison handle storms very differently. I don't know if you know this or not, but when bison sense that a storm is coming, they huddle together because there is safety in numbers. They instinctively know this.

The front of their bodies—this is why they look so hefty on the front—the fur on the front of their bodies is thicker than the fur on the back, which means that they'll be more insulated from the elements.

And here's what I love about this. They square off and face the storm and they start marching toward it. I love that. And the reason why they do it is because they know that the storm is moving toward them and if they are moving toward it—they know that they've got to go through the storm either way—they're just going to spend the minimum amount of time going through it.

So if you're running in the same direction as the storm, you're just going to be in the storm a lot longer. But they are going to march straight through.

Now, I say all of that to simply say this. As a church, here's the deal. Storms are inevitable. There are just going to be more on the horizon. So, are we going to turn, run, and scatter or are we going to be a little bit more like bison, rally together as the body of Christ, a church family, a community of faith and square off with the storm and march our way straight through it saying, "God has ordained us to live during this time and this place. So, God. How do You want to use us to make a difference in this world for all of eternity?"

A few weeks ago in our all-staff meeting I shared this with our staff. I stood up and I said... I don't know if any of you can relate to me in this, but I just want to share from my heart right now.

I stood up and I said, "We're living in these weird days. It's just sort of like aftershocks of the pandemic and the crisis and all of this kind of stuff. We know our world has changed and now we're trying to feel our way through to figure out what has changed. Now we're reorienting ourselves to this changed world. And there is a lot that stimulates fear and there is a lot that leads us to faith. And those two things are intricately linked together."

So I said to our staff... I don't know if you can relate to me. Anytime somebody comes up to me and they go, "Hey, Aaron. How's it going?" I stumble and fumble for a response. Any of you with me in that? Here's what's going through my mind. If somebody asks me that question, a bunch of things race through my head. The good and the bad. The challenges and the opportunities that those challenges have brought. The blessings and the curses.

And so right in that moment I get paralyzed. I don't know really know how to respond. Like if I say, "Oh, things are great." I don't feel like I'm being entirely honest. And if I say, "Well, things are really hard." Then I feel like a Debbie Downer. In that moment I'm like, "Ah, I don't know."

Any of you relate to me in that? A few of you. Thanks. Stop looking at my legs, alright?

So right now I think we all live in these really, really disorienting times. And I've shared with you guys before, in the past, about my experience with 2020. I don't have to rehash all of that.

But, as your pastor, we've emerged into this new world where I'm still... I feel like I'm leading in the dark. And it used to be that I could see out a way where we are headed as a church. And right now I'm trying to figure out what vision to cast and so I feel like I'm kind of doing this [feeling his way through the dark].

And honestly, I'm glad because I'm really more reliant upon God than I've ever been because I'm like, "God, I can't come up with a vision for us. Can you just show me the next thing?"

And honestly, I'm in this season right now where as I look at our church and I'm so grateful for you. Some of you, I know, are brand-new to our church. Next month will be my 15<sup>th</sup> year.

I've just been thinking about the 15 years I've been here. I was a 31-year-old untested punk of a kid and you guys took a chance on me. In many ways I feel like I've grown up here. Now I'm like a 46-year-old punk of a middle-aged man and I don't even know if I can convey how deeply I love this church.

You know Lindsay and my first full-time ministry was in southern Illinois and we felt called by God there. But immediately we looked at each other and we said, "We feel called by God now, but not forever."

And then we went out to California, and we planted a church, and we were like, "We feel God called us to do this, but we're not here forever."

When we came to Indiana 15 years ago, we were like, "We feel that God has called us here. And we think this is forever." And I'm 46 and I'm thinking 20 years out. And I'm not declaring that I'll be your pastor for that amount of time, because it's really not up to me. But I want to be.

I recently said to our elders, I'm like, "Hey, looking at the next 20 years in four-or five-year increments, what does the next five years look like, and the next five years, and the next? I can't even think out that far. I don't know what kind of world we'll be living in. and I feel like I'm leading in the dark.

Here's the thing. I refuse to think that our best days are behind us. And, in fact, right now my prayer, and I want you to join me in this, I'm being somewhat confessional to you....

This last week I was in Orlando on Monday. I got out right before the hurricane hit. I was with a group of pastors, and they came up to me and they were like, "Hey, how's it going in church?" That's the question every pastor is asking each other.

And once again I was like, "Uh, it's good. It's bad. It's challenging. It's exciting."



There is still a part of me that is just honestly kind of grieving what we lost. Thirty percent of our church left. Now a whole bunch of new people came and I so grateful for them.

When I say 30 percent of our church left, many of those people were people I baptized, people I married. Those are people who I did funerals for their loved ones. Those are people who I thought were here forever. And they are gone. And I'm grieving that.

That's not all bad. Many of them have landed in other great churches but I think what is painful is that they left because they got mad. You know, we stayed closed longer than they wanted, or we opened too soon. Or we asked you to wear a mask, or we didn't tell you to wear a mask long enough. Or whatever.

And I think, as a pastor, I'm just grieving that. And I told our staff a couple of weeks ago, "I'm tired of grieving COVID. I'm tired of looking at through the lens of fear. And I'm choosing to look through the lens of faith. To say, 'Okay, God. This is a brand-new day.'"

And here's what God is doing in me. Here's a couple of ways that we can look at this. Right now, 2022, hurricanes, recessions, a political vote coming up (sorry to remind you) all of that stuff—we can look at them through the lens of fear and go, "Oh, no. These are horrible times to live. Our world is falling part." Or we can look at them through the lens of faith and go, "Oh, yeah. This is the greatest time to be alive as a Christian in the history of the world."

Now, here's what I mean by that. Here's what I mean. If you are a spectator Christian and it's all about what you get it's probably not that exciting. If you are a take action kind of a Christian, girding up the loins of your mind, "Let's go. Let's take action," you should be very excited.

Here's why. Did you know that there are more people living in the world today who do not know Jesus than in the history of the entire world? There are roughly 8 billion people who live in the world today. And fifty years ago there were roughly 3.8 billion.

### **People in the World:**

8 billion people in the world

3.8 billion fifty years ago

Think about that. In all of history, in the last 50 years the world's population has doubled.

The number of Christians has stayed flat. There are roughly 2.4 billion Christians. There are over 5 billion non-Christians in the world.

### **Christians Today:**

2.4 billion Christians

More than 5 billion non-Christians

Once again you can look at that through the lens of fear and go, “Oh, man. We’re being outnumbered. It’s a non-Christian culture.” Or you can look at this through the lens of faith and say, “Oh, man. There are so many people, more people than ever, who need to know Jesus.”

What does every fisherman want in a fishing hole? A fully stocked pond. And God has given that to us. So the idea now is: are we going to be on mission?

I just want you to know that when it comes to the events of 2020 and after, they took a lot of us by surprise, knocked the world upside down, they did not take God by surprise at all.

March of 2020, God was not sitting up in heaven with Jesus and the Holy Spirit watching CNN or Fox News, depending upon your persuasion. God wasn’t like, “What! A brand-new virus? We’ve never seen this before. What are we going to do? The world is falling apart. Jesus, You better get Your bags packed, You’ve got to go back. Get Kirk Cameron.”

That’s not what was happening. He wasn’t all freaked out. God knew. God’s been through this before and He uses world crises—Peter says trials—to reset, to prune, and to get His people ready for action.

Here’s what I mean. In 33 AD Rome crucified Jesus on a cross. Three hundred years later in 313 Constantine declared Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire. What in the world happen in those 300 years that would cause the same empire to crucify Jesus and then declare Christianity the official religion of Rome?

Well, lots of things took place in those 300 years including two pandemics: the Antonine and the Cyprian. The first one lasted 15 years, imagine that. Aren’t you glad you lived through this one? And the second one lasted about 12 years. And they wiped out much of the Roman Empire. They made COVID look like nothing.

**33 AD:** Roman crucifixion of Jesus

**165 AD:** Antonine Plague

**249 AD:** Cyprian Plague

**313-323 AD:** Constantine declares Christianity official religion of Roman Empire

God uses trials, crises, world events to prune His people to prepare their minds for action. I’ve got to believe that God has been rearranging the furniture during the last couple of years for us to make an impact.

I say all that to simply say this. Would you join me as your imperfect, sinful pastor to square off in the storms that are coming? Let’s walk straight through them and watch

how God might use our church to impact thousands of lives for all of eternity in the next 20 years.

What I mean by that.... Could I just urge you, wherever you're at right now spiritually, emotionally to just take a step? If you have just been spectating, take a step toward getting involved.

If you've just gotten out of rhythm and it's just been easy to watch from home, and I'm not saying everybody watching from is necessarily always bad, but if you could join us physically, if you could get involved in the lives of others but you haven't, just take a step and reengage. Let's not be detached.

Let's be all in. Let's be at the ready. Ready for action because I've got to believe that God has set us up to make a big impact. Let's not squander the crisis we've been through the last couple of years. Let's make a huge impact together as foreigners in this world with our eyes fixed on Him.

Father, I love these people. It's been the honor of my life to serve here. So I just ask today that Your Holy Spirit would be at work. That You would encourage us. That You would rally us together to live our lives through the lens of faith when everything within us wants to live through the lens of fear. Pull our eyes up. Keep us fixed upon You.

And, God, here we are. Would You use our church as a city on a hill, a light in a dark world to impact as many people as possible, because this world is not our home. We ask this in Jesus' name. And everybody says: Amen.