

MESSAGE TRANSCRIPT //

THE FOREIGNERS | FINISH STRONG

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Traders Point, how are we doing? Hey, it is so good to be with you. Excited to dive into the message today.

But before we get to that we've got to take a moment to pause and to celebrate what just happened here in this room on Friday night. We had our Men's Night. Come on. From the best we can tell there were 1,780 on campus here. It was a powerful, powerful night with worship and teaching.

But then there was this moment at the end, this call to respond. A call to come forward and ask for prayer, to pray this bold prayer that God would begin to transform us, to rebuild us into the men that He always intended us to be. So for all of the men in the room at all of the campuses, I hope you are wearing your wristband and you remember what God has called you to. Right? One more time for Men's Night.

Today we're finishing up our series *The Foreigners*. And what we've been doing in this series is really working through the book of 1 Peter. And what 1 Peter is, it's a letter written to a group of churches that were scattered all throughout the Roman Empire.

One thing that they all had in common was that they were living in this tension. Right? They had come to know Jesus. They had this new identity. They were God's elect, God's chosen. But at the same time they were living in a culture where they were standing out. They didn't belong. They were exiles. And they were foreigners.

So what Peter is doing here is he is talking to them about how to live in that tension of you are chosen, you are God's people, but you are also, for a short time, living here in this foreign land.

And what we've said is, "Hey, the tension that was there for them is the same tension that Christ followers are living in today." So how do we do that well?

Today we're going to be in chapter 5. If you have a Bible you can go ahead and flip or scroll there. What's going to help us set this thing up is in chapter 4, verse 17. It kind of sets up all that we're going to be talking about here in chapter 5. So take a look at this. It says:

"For the time has come for judgment, and it must begin with God's household."

Anybody glad you woke up early to get here this morning? What is he saying? He's saying, "Hey, the time has come. Judgment is here and it's starting with God's

household, which is the church.” That’s us. It’s not looking out into the world. It’s starting here and saying, “We’ve got to clean house. We’ve got to have our structure and everything under our roof set right.”

So a big part of the first part of chapter 5 is all about church leadership. Okay? And now, I just want to put this out here. Even if you don’t believe in Jesus, even if you are not a follower of His, when we read through these principles, if you apply them to your life, in your leaderships, you will grow in leadership. It’s that good.

At the same time, they can never truly be lived out without the Spirit of God. Right? The ways of God can never be lived out without the Spirit of God to do it.

We’re going to read these things here like, “That sounds good but that sounds impossible.” And you’re exactly right. The whole point of this is that we would be dependent and humble ourselves so that God can do what only God can do. Right?

We ready? Alright. I like this. Chapter 5, verse 1. Take a look at this. It says:

“And now, a word to you who are elders in the churches.” Elders were part of the structure that was put in place to oversee the church, they were the over shepherds. “I, too, am an elder and a witness to the sufferings of Christ. And I, too, will share in his glory when he is revealed to the whole world.”

So I want to pause right here just for a second. When Peter says, “I am an elder,” that is true. But he’s really humbling himself here. This would be like Michael Jordan meeting with a group of six-year-olds at the YMCA and be like, “Hey, guys. You know what? I play basketball too.” Yeah, but it’s not the same, is it?

Peter was an elder, but he was also an OG. This guy was one of the original twelve to follow Jesus. And even more than that, he was a part of the inner three. So he got the front row seat to all of it. He got to see the miracles, the teachings—he was chosen. An amazing life Peter lived.

But one thing about Peter was that he had a little bit (some would say) of a problem with his pride. He thought a lot of himself. And sometimes it was great and sometimes it wasn’t so great.

One of these moments was toward the end of Jesus’ life and he tells God that he’s wrong. I don’t know much, but I know that’s probably not the stance that you want to take. Jesus tells him, “Peter, you’re going to deny Me.” And Peter gets all ruffled up. He’s like, “No, no, no. You’re wrong. I hear You, but I would never deny You. I would die with You before I would ever deny You.”

And that sounds so good. But just a few hours later he actually would deny Jesus over and over and over again. And I just want to put this out there as a hope for anyone who has failed, who has fallen, who has said *no* to God and walked away. There is this

beautiful picture that happens with Peter. Jesus, right after this, ends up getting arrested, crucified. He's murdered. But then we know that He resurrects, He comes back to not only a few people but even 1,000 people this guy comes back to.

And one of them that He finds is Peter. And He brings Peter in close, and He has this really intimate conversation. Remember, this is a guy that has denied that he even knew who Jesus was.

And over and over again, Jesus restores Peter. He says, "Peter, do you love Me?" And he says, "Yes, yes, yes, I do." And then over and over again, "Do you love Me? Do you love Me?" Three times He does it for the three denials. And every response, when Peter says, "Yes, I do love you, my Lord," He responds with some version of this. He says:

"Then take care of my sheep." John 21:16 (NLT)

"Then take care of My sheep. Take care of My sheep." Meaning, "I know you've fallen. But listen, because of My grace, because of who I've called you to be, I'm going to give you this leadership—this highest priority. I'm entrusting you to care for My church, My household."

So what Peter is doing here is truly a mark of humility. For him to say, "I am an elder," of course it's true, but he's humbling himself. He's meeting them right where they are, showing that his life truly has been changed.

And this language of a shepherd and a flock or sheep, this is language that is used throughout the Bible. Shepherds were assigned as leaders of the flock or the sheep, the people.

So with that context, what he is going to do now is say, "Hey, elders, this is what I'm calling you to. This is how you are going to oversee the church. This is how you are going to serve them and serve them well. Take a look at this. He says:

"As a fellow elder, I appeal to you: Care for the flock that God has entrusted to you. Watch over it willingly, not grudgingly—not for what you will get out of it, but because you are eager to serve God. Don't lord it over the people assigned to your care, but lead them by your own good example." 1 Peter 5:1-3 (NLT)

This is good. I mean, that alone, is better than 100 percent of the leadership books that you will buy this year. Everything is in there.

And what I want us to see is these words are specifically for the elders of the church. But when you read this list, there is nothing here that all Christ followers are not asked to live out as well. This is leadership for all of us, all followers of Jesus.

Christian Leadership

So what we're going to do is look at this. What did he call them to do? How are they going to live this out? Let's take a look. He said the first thing was to:

Care for the flock God has entrusted to you.

And then he goes back and forth with this. Not like this but instead do it like this. He says:

Not grudgingly—Lead Willingly

Not for what you will get out of it—Lead because you are eager to serve God

Don't lord it over people—Lead them by your own good example

What I want to do is just kind of work through each one of these one by one and talk about what that could look like as a part of our leadership. We all have leadership. You've all been entrusted to lead some flock. Okay? We all have influence.

So the first thing is that we are called to care for the flock that God has entrusted to us. That word *care* doesn't find its way into a lot of leadership books and practices because it's not exactly efficient. It's not something that you can do quickly. You can't care for people at a distance. You can manage them at a distance, but you can only love them up close.

I'm telling you, if you want to just take steps in your leadership this week, to change the climate and the atmosphere of your team, tell them that you care about them. Now, here's the big part of that. You have to really mean it and you have to show them that you actually care. It's two-fold. You can't just say, "Guys, I just want to let you know I care about you," and then operate like you couldn't care less about who they are.

This level of leadership demands that we care for them. Here's why that's important. "Do you care about me?" is a question that authority alone will never answer. And you and I should be at the front of the line with every reason as to why we care about those who God has entrusted us to lead. "I care about you. I care about your life. I care about your family. I care about more than what you can produce."

And then the second thing that he said is, "When you lead, when you care about these people, don't do it begrudgingly. Lead willingly not begrudgingly, not coerced. Not like you're just there because you have to be there."

I don't know about you, but it really bothers me when I show up somewhere and I know that they don't want to be there, even though it's their job. And they act like I'm the problem for showing up. It really burns my biscuits. I'm going to be honest with you.

And I really see it because of how long I worked in food. When I show up at a restaurant and you can tell that they do not care that I'm there.

I remember I showed up once to a drive through. I pulled up. I rolled down my window and I wait for a second. Finally a voice comes through the intercom and all he said was, “Yeah?” He just responded to me like we were in an argument, and I called and bothered him. “Yeah, what do you need?”

No, “Hey, would you like a Number 1?” No, “Hey, welcome to Good Burger, home of the good burger. Can I take your order?” Nothing. He just said, “Yeah?”

But for us, he paints this picture of, “No, no, no. I want you to show up willingly.” And the only way that we can show up willingly to our jobs, to the people that we have been entrusted to care for, is with gratitude.

It is spending time realizing that the position that we have been given and the honor that we have received, that someone would place us over another—and that could be with parenting, that could be with a leadership team—we come (and here’s the big picture that he’s painting here) whole-heartedly.

It’s, “I’m not here because I have to be. I’m here because I want to be. I care about you and I’m willing to go above and beyond.” You go the extra mile willingly. He said, “Yeah, lead just like that.” And then he says, “Not for what you will get out of it, lead because you are eager to serve God.”

Man, I don’t know about you, I don’t know if you’ve experienced the kind of leader where it was clear they were all about themselves. You were a pawn. They were climbing this ladder. And a lot of times their leadership, it felt like it was his foot on your face as he pushed off to get to the next level.

But you’ve also probably experienced a different kind of a leader. He wasn’t necessarily focused on himself, but he saw you, he cared for you. And instead of pushing you down to push himself up, he was constantly serving. He was constantly bending down and giving you a boost. He wanted to be a better leader for sure, but he wanted you to be a better leader as well.

This is the kind of leadership that he’s talking about. He says, “Don’t get in it for what you will get out of it.” And what he’s talking about here (and maybe we can come to know something about this) is a lot of times it was like people would take leadership positions for the money. And when they would do it for the money, it became really easy to become corrupt. It became really easy for it to be about them.

And here’s one of those things when the Bible talks about the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. If your leadership is about money, if that is your motivation, pride and greed will allow you to do things to people and to treat them in a way that serving God never will.

So when I come into this place, it is not because I’m here and I deserve a paycheck and I’m going to use you and abuse you to get what I need. No. I’m coming in because I’m

eager to serve God. And to serve God, that means that I have to love Him and love you well. I can't mistreat you. I have to treat you like the image bearer of God that you are.

When I'm here I'm not just doing a job. I'm not even working for you. I'm working for the Lord. It reminds me of the verse in Colossians 3 where he says:

"Work willingly at whatever you do, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people." Colossians 3:23 (NLT)

Listen. When we go into a place of business when we show up to work tomorrow, they do not set the tone for how we love and how we serve and how we lead. We've already been given our marching orders.

I'm here to lead in this way because I love you. It's going to be so transformational and so powerful that it actually has the ability to draw you closer to Jesus. This will be the best place that you have ever worked because you will be cared about and loved. I'm eager to show up every single day and I promise you it's not going to be about me. I'm here to serve you. That's the kind of leadership that all of us followers of Jesus are called to live out day in and day out.

And then he closes it out with this:

Don't lord it over people

Lead them by your own good example

Once again, we probably know a leader, or maybe you've been a leader like this, you lead by title alone. It is very clear that you are the boss. And you make sure that everyone knows it. But here's the problem. You can't lead by title alone because if there is a disconnect between how you lead, what you say, and how you live and what you model, there will be a disconnect between you and those you lead.

Jesus talked about this. He said, "Hey the rulers of your time, those in authority, they flaunt it over you. But with you it's going to be different. You are not going to use your leadership to push others down and to prop yourself up. You are going to use your leadership to get down low and to become a servant to all."

Do you remember that? Do remember what Jesus said? He said:

"For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many." Mark 10:45 (NLT)

Here's the thing that He is saying. You will be a prime example. You will be a living example because of your leadership. It's not that you just teach about caring. It's not that you teach about humility. It's not that you teach about good character. You live it out.

This is leadership and God says, “Hey, everyone who is a follower of Me, this is the way that I want you to live and operate.” So just to give us a recap of all that Peter is talking about here. He said:

Care for the flock God has entrusted to you. Do it willingly. Lead because you are eager to serve God. Lead them by your own good example.

I want to ask you... as you read through that list, maybe you got convicted from one, so:

What adjustments do you need to make to align to this model of leadership?

What leadership adjustments do you need to make? Maybe you’re looking at your leadership and you are like, “Man, I started out and I really cared for my team. I was really there for them. But I’ve kind of moved away from that.”

Maybe you used to show up every day and you were 10 minutes early, you were willing and ready, but now it just feels like another job and you’re just painstakingly making your way through it.

Maybe it has become all about the money and the position, and the power and you’ve forgotten your true motivation, that you are there to serve.

Maybe you need to get back out there and lead, not just teach, not just say good things, but to serve them right where they are. This is leadership.

And I want to take a second here too because, like I said, this applies to all of us, for sure. But it was written for elders, these over-shepherds of the church. They have always been a part of church structure, back then, 2,000 years ago, and today.

We have elders of this church. A group of men who lead unbelievably well. This is who Aaron, our lead pastor, reports to. I’ve had the honor of knowing them for the past 12 years.

And as I was studying this week and was reading through these one by one—I was like, “That is true of them. They lead willingly. They lead because they are eager to serve, not because of what they can get out of it. They don’t even get paid for the positions that they hold. They lead by a good example.”

Chances are you’ve served shoulder to shoulder with them in the parking lot, on safety, in Kid’s Ministry and you had no idea that they were an elder of this church. But they are leading and serving well.

So what I want to do right now is just take a moment to honor all of our elders. Can we celebrate them?

And this next verse, it’s for you—to all of the elders. Take a look at this:

“And when the Great Shepherd appears, you will receive a crown of never-ending glory and honor.” 1 Peter 5:4 (NLT)

And I just want to say to the elders, I can't wait to see you in your crowns. Right? One more time.

So, he's talking all about leadership, what he's calling elders to and now he's going to talk to everyone else, all of us. Look what he has for us. He says:

“In the same way, you who are younger must accept the authority of the elders. And all of you, dress yourselves in humility as you relate to one another, for God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” 1 Peter 5:5 (NLT)

So what he's saying is, “I led with this, I'm telling you what I'm calling them to, this high bar that I'm calling them to, that they are looking out for you even more than themselves. They are not in it for anything other than seeing you come to know Jesus more and better.”

But at the same time we know it doesn't matter what we are submitting to, the idea of submitting is hard because of our pride. Oh man, it's hard. So then he kind of throws this knock-out blow right after that, just in case you were worried about this, like, “I don't know if I'm going to.” Look at what he says. He says:

“God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” 1 Peter 5:5 (NLT)

And this picture that he paints here is really powerful because, being from the west side I'm not too afraid of opposing a lot of people. You know? Don't let my stature fool you. But the idea of opposing God is not what I want to do ever in life.

When he says the proud, it means you are in complete opposition to God. He's moving this way and you're moving that way. And once again, I'm not a smart man, but I'm pretty sure that you're going to get run over. I'm pretty sure that isn't the life that you want. That you are constantly stumbling, hitting a hard, solid wall.

But he says, “In return, you could humble yourself.” And then he says, “He gives grace,” it's almost like instead of going against it, we begin to turn, and we begin to move in the same direction as God. We go with His will and by His Spirit. There's this other side of life when we walk in humility rather than being too proud to submit.

What we've seen over and over again through this letter is when we submit, of course we submit to authority in all different kinds of forms, but at the end of the day there is another level that we are submitting to, an ultimate authority.

We do this because we are first and foremost submitting to God our Father. And that's what he's going to say next. Take a look at this. This is who we are really submitting to:

“So humble yourselves under the mighty power of God, and at the right time he will lift you up in honor. Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you.” 1 Peter 5:6-7 (NLT)

So he says, “Humble yourselves under the mighty power of God.” I love that phrase. And really where it’s coming from is actually the mighty hand of God. That’s probably a better translation. A mighty hand of God.

This is the language that was used in the Exodus when God rescued His people from Egypt, and He brought them out and He made them His own people. He formed them. And He said, “Hey, I brought you out under My mighty hand and if you stay under My hand you will have protection, you will be My people.” This is what you are submitting to. But unless you are humble, you will not place yourself under God’s mighty hand.

And I love the reason that he gives after that. He says, “Place yourself under the mighty hand of God.” Why? “Because when you are there, I want you to cast all of your cares, all of your worries, on Him.”

And did you notice why? “Come underneath My hand and cast all of your worries onto me.” Why? “Because I’m all powerful? Because when you cast them upon Me, I will answer them like a genie in a bottle? Because when you throw them to Me, I will remove them? Because you won’t have to experience any kind of pain or worry ever again?”

No.

God cares about you.

He says, “Cast them onto God because God cares about you.” This may be the most profound thing that needs to be heard today. God cares about you. The reason He shows up, the reason He loves you is not because of how well you’re doing, it’s because He cares about you.

I want that to just sit there for a second and for you to wrestle with it. Do you believe that? God cares about you. Your life, your decisions, your family, your friends, your work—God cares about you.

And He says, “Because I care so much, what I want you to do is bring Me,” He’s a Father, “I want you to bring Me all of your worries. I want you to bring Me all of your cares because I care for you.”

So, I just want to ask you:

Who are you currently giving your worries and cares to?

Maybe it’s other people, which would not be too bad in and of itself, but it could be gossip from time to time. Are you giving your cares and your worries to social media? You’re like, “Nobody in my life cares, but I bet the masses do.” They don’t.

Let's get serious here for a minute. Maybe you're giving your cares and worries to an addiction. Maybe you wouldn't frame it like that. But that's what you are doing.

You get to the end of a hard day at work, with family, and you just know, "If I can get to this bottle, and I can cast my worries on it and it will fill up my cup, and then I have peace and I have numbness and I have a way to escape from all of that. I'm casting all my worries onto that." Whether it's a bottle, a screen, you name it. I'm substituting God. I'm casting my cares onto this.

Maybe you don't cast them or give them to anyone. You just stuff them down deeper and deeper and deeper and you're walking around with all of that.

What God's calling you to here is to cast them onto Him because He cares about you. And then He says, "At the right time, I will bring you up. At the right time, I will handle this."

And here's why that's important. We need to know what God really cares about. God cares about you for sure. But what does He care most about? Well, He cares about you being in a relationship with Him. He cares about you finding fortress and a refuge under His hand. And He cares about forming you into the image of His Son, Jesus. What He cares about is your holiness. What He cares about is your sanctification. That's what He cares about.

Here's why that's a big deal. If you believe that God cares most about your financial security, your happiness, or generally your life here, it will be hard for you to believe that God truly cares about you when you don't get any of those things.

But if I believe that under His hand, which is a powerful place to be—that when I humble myself under His hand, He is shaping me, and molding me, and forming me. I am no longer just my own. I am His subject, and I am submitting to Him and allowing Him to shape me and trusting in Him, even when it doesn't feel right.

I think someone needs to hear this today, "Just because I didn't get what I thought would be best for me doesn't mean I didn't get what was best for me. God has a plan for my life. And if I can see that, that means that I can see a purpose for suffering. I can see a purpose for pain. I can see a purpose for the fire because He's refining me and shaping me. And nothing is wasted. He's going to use every bit of this to form me into His image."

It's not because He creates it. He doesn't create reasons for us to suffer. But He's able to use them for me and you for our betterment, even for a blessing to other people.

And he's going to point out here in verse 8 of where all of this suffering is coming from—a big part of it anyway—it's because there is a real enemy that we need to be aware of. Take a look at this, verse 8. He says:

“Stay alert! Watch out for your great enemy, the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour. Stand firm against him, and be strong in your faith. Remember that your family of believers all over the world is going through the same kind of suffering you are.” 1 Peter 5:8-9 (NLT)

I think it’s important that we wrestle with this, this enemy that we have, the devil. I think a lot of us find ourselves in two different camps. Either we don’t believe in the devil at all, he’s not a real thing, he has no power, he’s not up to anything (which isn’t true, he is a real enemy) or we swing it to the other side, and we live in complete fear, believing that we are constantly being defeated by the devil.

When it comes to the devil: See him, take him seriously, but stand firm against him.

When it comes to the devil, here’s the stance we need to take. We need to see him. We have to see him. Now, hear me when I say this, we see him, but we don’t see him in everything. You ever talk to some people, and they act like the devil is against them 24/7?

“Man, the devil is just really attacking me.”

“Really? What’s going on?”

“I failed another test.”

“Did you study for it?”

“No.”

We can’t blame the devil for all of our bad decisions. I’m just going to say that. You know what I mean? It’s like, “I got fired. The devil is really after me.”

“Why did you get fired?”

“No call. No show.”

“Did the devil kidnap you? I don’t understand.”

See him. Take him seriously. But here’s this. Stand firm against him. We do not fear the devil. We do not fear suffering. We don’t go looking for it, but we’re not afraid of it when it comes because we know whose hand we are under.

And it says the devil walks around roaring, prowling. Why is he doing this? He is a counterfeit lion. And I think that is what Peter is getting to here. He’s connecting the roar to suffering in this sense. What happens when a lion roars? If we heard a lion roar right now, everybody would be running. Right?

No one would be like, “What was that?” Except for Instagram and unfortunately a lot of white people. This is why I stick to my notes. That was not in there. I apologize to white people. I’m one of you.

When a lion roars, people scatter. Right? So he's saying that's what the devil is up to. Trying to make us suffer in a way that we will leave the hand of God.

There's nothing that he can do to remove us from the hand of God. Right? Greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world. Nobody is coming in to remove us from the hand of God.

His only hope is if you leave the hand of God. This is what suffering can do, "I'm experiencing something. I'm feeling something." And you begin to lose faith, "Is God really who He said He is? Because I'm feeling a certain way."

This is the thing with suffering. It will never bring you to a standstill. It is either going to draw you closer to the hand of God or it is going to move you outside the hand of God. And that is when you will begin to truly experience pain. And it is so much worse. But in our minds, in the moment, we feel like that is the best bet. And that is the best work of the devil.

Here me. The devil is a cat in a costume in comparison to the true Lion, the Lion of Judah—to Jesus Christ. The reason we don't fear is because we're rolling with a bigger cat. I'm not worried about this one, I've got this One.

But at the same time, for anyone.... Maybe you feel like you've fallen away, you've lost faith because of some suffering, some pain that you've endured. I want this next verse to just minister to you. And I pray that God would just hit you right in the heart. Take a look at this. It says:

"In his kindness God called you to share in his eternal glory by means of Christ Jesus. So after you have suffered a little while, he will restore, support, and strengthen you, and he will place you on a firm foundation. All power to him forever! Amen." 1 Peter 5:10-11 (NLT)

That's a promise. He says, "After you have suffered for a little while...." Now, I wish I could say to you that that means if you are experiencing some suffering right now, you just give it 24 hours, you give it a season, you give it a year. Unfortunately, I think what he is talking about is for our whole lives. The only reason it's a short time is because it's in comparison to all of eternity.

He said, "You're going to live here as exiles, you're going to live here in this broken world. And there's this enemy, there's this wild cat pretending to be a lion, biting, doing everything he can because he knows he's already lost.

"And you're going to experience some horrible pain. I know that. But what I want you to know is that it won't last forever. There will come a day where I truly will restore and support and strengthen you. And there will come a day when this is done and there will be a new heaven and a new earth, where all is restored. And you and I will be together for all of eternity. Hang on."

That is what we need faith for. This is what he is saying, "I want you to hang in there." Why? Why can we trust? Why can we stay underneath the mighty hand of God, even when on the inside we say that we should take things upon ourselves, we should move, like, "I don't know if God really cares"?

I hope today has shown you that God does care, and He proved it. He is the Great Shepherd. Jesus called Himself the Good Shepherd. Peter said, "No, no." And this is the only time Peter can go against Him. He says, "You are the Great Shepherd." It's the only time this phrase is used in all of Scripture.

Why is He the Great Shepherd? Because He cares about those who have been entrusted to Him. And He has proven how much He cares. He willingly came here. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, willingly came down to earth, willingly wrapped Himself in flesh and bones. Willingly taught. Willingly did miracles. Willingly went to a cross for me and you.

And on that cross, the spot where the devil had thought he had won, where the suffering had brought Him to this ultimate place, He showed that even through this God was orchestrating all of it.

He went to this cross, He was murdered, and He died putting death to death. Dying for our sin. Dying for everything that separated us from God. And then He resurrected, bringing an opportunity for us to have a relationship with Him.

Why did He do that? He didn't do that for Himself. No. He willingly went, for the joy that was set before Him. That is why He went to the cross, not what He would get out of it, but what you and I got out of it. And that is a relationship with Him.

And this is a relationship that you can have, starting today. If that life of leadership, that life of being part of a chosen people, the family of God, if that is stirring in your heart, we just want you to know that that is available to you.

I want to close here with the closing of this letter. He actually does a summary of why he wrote this in the first place. And I think that this is something really powerful that all of us need to hear. He says:

"I have written and sent this short letter to you with the help of Silas, whom I commend to you as a faithful brother. My purpose in writing is to encourage you and assure you that what you are experiencing is truly part of God's grace for you. Stand firm in this grace." 1 Peter 5:12 (NLT)

And I know for some of you that is hard to hear. What you have experienced, what you are experiencing, is somehow connected to God's grace. This is where it takes faith to believe, to believe that He has a plan, to believe that nothing is wasted. He's using everything.

I talk to people all of the time going through the hardest seasons of their life and they always say, "I just don't know if God cares about me."

Because of Jesus, He does. I may not be able to tell you why exactly all of the painful things have happened. But I can tell you, with confidence, it's not because God doesn't care for you. Jesus proved that He cares so much for you. So he says to stand firm in that grace and believe that God is with you.

What I want to ask you to do at all of our campuses is to stand. And when you stand to your feet, know that you are standing in His grace. Know that God has brought you from a million different places to this moment right here.

Maybe your pain, your past, is so painful. And maybe your future is going to be really painful. But here in the present, today, and tomorrow—we've been singing about this all day—He is the same God yesterday, today, and tomorrow and for all of eternity. And it is His plan for our lives.

So what I want us to do right now before we worship is just to go to Him in prayer. Praying for endurance. Praying for power. Praying for humility. To stand up and to have the faith to believe that God's not done.

Would you pray with us?

God, we thank You so much for today. God, we thank You for Your Word and the hope that is constantly found in it. God, we thank You for the Great Shepherd, the One who willingly laid down His life. The One who wanted so much more for us that He was willing to do whatever it took.

God, thank You for Your mighty hand. And, God, I pray that Your Spirit would produce the kind of humility in us that would keep us there, God, that we wouldn't run from You. We wouldn't believe the lies of the devil. That we wouldn't leave Your hand.

God, I pray that we would be a church anchored in You, built upon Your name, built upon Your blood and Your body and Your sacrifice.

God, we pray right now that we would see You and hold on to the hope that has led so many men and women through the years to do unthinkable, impossible things. To withstand and to endure and to make a difference. To truly be a part of Your kingdom mission of bringing heaven to earth.

This is not for the faint of heart. And it's not even, from a human standard, possible. But by Your Spirit it is. So, Jesus, we cling to You.

In Your grace we stand firm believing that the storms will come, the wind will blow, the rain will fall, the enemy will attack. But greater is He that is in us than he that is in the world. Greater is the Lion of Judah. Greater is the Lion of Jesus than the devil.

God, we stand here in this moment, and we give all glory and honor and power to You.
It's in Your perfect name we pray. Amen.