



HOPE PROJECT

A 40-DAY JOURNEY

WEEK 2

STUDY PLAN

DAY 8 - Jun 22, 2020

I Peter 1:17-20 (ESV)

“And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one’s deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you...”

Welcome to week two. I hope you’ve had a victorious first week. Part of me feels like I need to encourage you to get back in here again. I guess part of that is because I’m imagining all the people in our church who haven’t read this much since college. I’m proud of you. Way to go. I’m working hard to bring my best each day, and I’m praying for you. I’m asking the Holy Spirit to come close and speak the Father’s love to you in a personal way—a way that changes how you think, feel, and act.

In this part of the letter, Peter gives us two images of God that almost seem to oppose one another. He starts off by saying, “*if you call on him as Father.*” Let’s be honest, sometimes it’s hard to think of God as a father. If you had an abusive or absent human father, you certainly don’t want that kind of a relationship with God.

It’s very difficult to understand God as Father without looking at the life of Jesus. Jesus said one time, “*if you have seen me, you*

have seen the Father.” John 14:9 (CEV). Jesus was the perfect representation of the joy, kindness, love, mercy, grace, and truth that comes from the heart of the Heavenly Father.

Yet, at the same time, God the Father is not to be taken lightly or irreverently. Think about the book of Exodus when God reveals Himself to Moses. God tells Moses to take off his shoes because he’s standing on holy ground. Then in the next verse, God says, *“I have indeed seen the misery of my people...So I have come down to rescue them...”* Exodus 3:7,8 (NIV).

God is great, and God is good!

Peter wants us to hold these two things in tension. At the end of this life, we will all stand before God. We will give an account for our lives and how we lived, and at the same time, He will respond to us based on His mercy and grace. If we’ve received Jesus as our Savior and put our trust in Him, all of Jesus’ perfection will be applied to us.

I love the invitation that Peter is making to a new lineage. The word He uses is “ransom” or “redeemed” by the precious blood of Jesus. For his readers, this phrase would have carried substantial weight. The word “exile” takes the reader back to Egypt about 1500 BC. The people of God lived in complete misery and despair. They had been enslaved by Pharaoh, the most powerful king in the world. Day after day they lived with the yoke of slavery.

By using a burning bush, God directed Moses through the wilderness into Egypt to lead Israel out of slavery. He redeemed Israel by having all the Israelites paint over their doorposts with the blood of a lamb. This eventually became known as The Passover.

Each year, the people of God celebrated this moment because God reached down to bring them all out of Egypt. Millions

of people were freed. And the blood of the lamb symbolized redemption for thousands of years. But then Jesus came as the pure, spotless lamb who redeems those who put their trust in Him and cleanses them of their sins. All this talk of blood and sacrifices can seem a little confusing if you're new to this; actually, I guess it can be confusing even if you're not new to this.

Here's what's important to recognize. We all have a tendency to find ourselves in slavery—not because of somebody else's choices, but because of our own. We make hundreds and thousands of what-seem-to-be-small choices, and over time those choices drape chains over our lives. Sometimes those chains become the stories we tell and the way of life we pass from generation to generation.

Jesus came to break those chains so you can be a part of a new lineage. He wants you to leave a legacy for your children, your children's children, and your children's children's children. Sounds like a song we sing called “The Blessing.”

Your story now can be one of redemption. Your grandpa got angry and lived an abusive life, your dad the same thing, but you're going to be different. You're going to begin a new lineage. Your mom left her kids, but you're hanging in there, tucking them in by singing to them each night before they go to bed, loving them with everything you have. You're fifteen years old, and you are setting the pace for future generations by the grace of God and the precious blood of Jesus that has been declared over your life.

I'd like to ask you to take a few minutes right now to write a prayer of thanksgiving to the Father. Thank Him for His love for you and His plan that He put in place before time began. Also thank Jesus for His death that frees you from the pain and destruction in your past. If you're feeling particularly brave, I challenge you to also ask Him to show you the things that still hold you captive.

Finally, would you take just a few minutes and ask these questions: “What do I want to pass on to my kids?” “How do I want future generations after me to be different than the generations before me?”



PRAYER

Jesus, thank you for freeing us from our old ways. We cannot thank you enough for paying the ultimate price with your precious blood. Your sacrifice changes everything. We give you honor and praise today. You are good. You are great!

In Jesus name I pray, Amen.

DAY 9 - Jun 23, 2020

I Peter 1:21-22 (NIV)

“Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God. Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart.”

We are almost one-fourth of the way through The Hope Project. I'm believing God for a greater sense of hope in your life. Hope that is not based upon your circumstances. HOPE that is anchored in your faith that Jesus was crucified, placed into a grave, resurrected and ascended, and that He's coming again for you!

I know it's kind of hard to see it when you're in the middle of living your life, but I really wish you could see God's face towards you today. I wish you could see His affection and kindness and the depth of His love for you.

Last week, I had a call with several key leaders from our church. I got to hear stories of how people are responding to the COVID-19 pandemic our nation is facing. I heard stories of faith—young couples who have been married for a few years trying to help couples who just got married, others trying to love on their kids faithfully in the midst of challenge, others wrestling through how to be more generous with their time and resources. I hung up, walked up to Stacie, and said, “Babe, we have some amazing people in our church!” And we do!!! And, as your pastor, I want to tell you that God loves you and He is pleased with you.

He is pleased with our church. He loves the way we are still serving the needy in our community, the way we are trying to reach those who have never experienced His love, and the way we are trying to bring hope. I wish I could give you a fist bump or hug right now, whichever you'd prefer. Since I can't, I'll keep pouring out my heart through my keyboard.

Hey, does Peter's description of Jesus in this letter blow you away like it does me? It's as though Peter can't get enough of Jesus. He keeps talking about Him. He keeps referring back to that Garden Tomb that Jesus rendered uselessly. Peter couldn't go back! He had been so changed by Jesus that he couldn't stop talking about Him.

That's why Peter had so much hope. His was not an economic hope, a physical hope, or a misty hope like, "I hope you have a good day." It was HOPE that Jesus who conquered the grave was coming back. His faith was fixed on Jesus and His return.

He was reverse engineering before the concept showed up in management books. His recollection of the truth from the past and his constant awareness of eternity gave him hope no matter what he faced in this life.

Friend, if you place your hope in anything other than Jesus, it's going to be hard for you to live this life with peace and joy. There are so many things you could give yourself to that in the end will leave you devastated and empty.

Jesus never will. He is the best friend you could ever want. An ever-present help in trouble.

Even though we understand this, we still will face grief. But, our grief turns to hope as we process and keep stepping. As Peter reminds us here, that hope turns into love—because we've been changed. We start to want to be like Jesus because He's been so

good. We start to want to love others because He's loved us. Our goals and ambitions begin to change because of His love.

When I have hope, it makes me want to help those around me.

Hopeful people are some of the most helpful people around. Freedom to love others comes out of the freedom we experience in the love of Jesus and our faith in Him.

Today, I wonder how much your friendship with Jesus has grown over the last week. Would you be willing to ask Him to help you respond to His friendship? Would you be willing to take time to ask Him to use the hope He's given you to make you a better friend to those around you, to make you more loving and kind?

Hopeful people help people. Hope is not a condition of my circumstance; it's based on my faith in Jesus and His power over sin and death.



PRAYER

Father, I look to you. I choose to put my hope in you. Make me into the kind of person who is helpful to others. Use me to spread your love. Thank you for the empty tomb. Lord, please fill us with your confidence.

In Jesus name I pray, Amen.

DAY 10 - Jun 24, 2020

1 Peter 1:23-25 (NLT)

“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. As the Scriptures say, “People are like grass; their beauty is like a flower in the field. The grass withers and the flower fades. But the word of the Lord remains forever.” And that word is the Good News that was preached to you.”

How do you like being compared to grass? I grew up just outside of Detroit, Michigan. I remember what it felt like when all of the grass started to turn green and the flowers started to bloom. I still love the smell of freshly cut grass; it just reminds you that longer days have arrived. The weather becomes warmer, and summer is here. When summer turned to fall, new colors filled the trees, and then winter brought the beauty of snow. But there was always a time for me in mid-February when I felt so much despair. It had been cold, dark, and gray for three months, and spring wouldn't arrive for another three months.

All of our joy on earth is temporary. You hold a baby in delight for a moment and then get to stay up half the night as the baby learns to sleep. You stare into your lover's eyes thinking nothing could be better than this, and then you get into a horrible fight the very next day. You have a great time with your friends from school and then find out they are gossiping about you. Right before COVID-19, Stacie and I went on a trip to Hawaii; and the day after we landed, things began to unravel. Temporary joy.

Peter reminds us that our earthly bodies are temporary. Eventually, you will let go of this tent and slip into the physical presence of Jesus for all eternity. Not sure if you like that thought, but it excites me.

Heaven is a physical place where Jesus dwells. God is at the center, and everything is about Him. A myriad of angels sings loudly all day about how great He is. People constantly talk about Him and praise His holiness. There is no sorrow. No grief. No fear. No worry or anxiety. No sick babies. No divorces. No cancer. No more loss.

In these verses, Peter challenges us to fix our eyes on eternity. Eternity is in session right now. You are learning to do life with Jesus at the center. You are discovering the joy of doing life the way He intends—filled with peace and love and goodness. This goodness will go on for eternity.

I love how Peter connects the voice of God to eternal living. Do you have anyone in your life that you just love to hear their voice? I love Stacie's voice. Sometimes when I am away from her, the thing I miss most is hearing her voice. Both the quality and tone of my wife's words connect with me at a heart level. Our relationship started in college. I learned to love her voice before I came to know her more fully after 17 years of marriage. I learned to love her voice before I fully knew her.

You are learning to love the voice of God and His word before you know Him fully. You are leaning into that kind, faithful, truthful, steady voice of God. His word found in the Bible will remain forever. His faithfulness will continue throughout all generations and into eternity.

Our church has adopted some basic tenets for our premarital counseling—namely that it's helpful to learn about your future spouse before marriage. Talk about how many kids you want to have, whether you're a morning person, whether or not you want to travel, and what you want life to look like after you say, "I do."

Now is the premarital session for all eternity. The Church is the bride of Christ. The wedding day will come, and we will know Him fully. If we learn to love life with Jesus at the center, we will love Heaven. If we kick, scream, shout, rebel, and fight against the voice of God, why would you want to spend eternity with Him? This life can be very hard, but it is always better with Jesus, and it is always better when we say yes to His ways.

Will you invite Him to speak to you today? Tell the Holy Spirit you want to hear the voice of God. Try to imagine Heaven right now with Jesus at the center. See if you can enter into the joy of that worship. Crown Him King! Tell Him you love Him. Invite Him to lead you today. Let the joy of His presence get you excited about being with Him for all eternity.



PRAYER

Come Holy Spirit. Open my eyes. Help see where you are at work in my life. Help me learn to love life with you.

In Jesus name I pray, Amen.

DAY 11 - Jun 25, 2020

1 Peter 2:1-3 (NLT)

“So get rid of all evil behavior. Be done with all deceit, hypocrisy, jealousy, and all unkind speech. Like newborn babies, you must crave pure spiritual milk so that you will grow into a full experience of salvation. Cry out for this nourishment, now that you have had a taste of the Lord’s kindness.”

Our three kids, Caedmon, Sammy, and Karis, each have unique and distinct personalities, which began showing up early. Karis, our youngest, came out of the womb making a lot of noise. In the hospital within hours of her birth, I had to put her down for a minute while I helped Stacie. Shortly after, I heard a strange noise that sounded like a constant, low-grade grunt. I asked Stacie, “Do you hear that?” I walked over to Karis, and she was grunting in frustration. I picked her up to see if it would stop, and sure enough, it did. She’s been making noises and talking since. You never had to guess if she was hungry or needed something because, even as a newborn, she would find a way to let us know.

In this passage, Peter gives us the image of craving spiritual milk like a newborn baby. He even says to “*cry out*” to be nourished like a baby cries out for the nourishment from her mother.

God works with our desires. The Psalmist wrote, “*Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart.*” Psalm 37:4 (ESV). God wants to know what you want for your life. Jesus frequently asked people, “*What do you want me to do for you?*”

I've found in my journey of faith that it's not easy to just *"get rid of"* evil behavior. It's pretty much been 25 years straight of walking with Jesus for this middle-aged man. All these years later, I thought I would have been done with a lot of my "behaviors." I still lose my temper, say things I have to apologize for, put my needs before others, and find myself pulled to distractions.

I wrote in my journal this morning, "I want to be done with anger." Peter says, *"BE DONE!"* I just honestly find it a lot easier to say, *"BE DONE!"* than to live done.

Let's get real for a moment. What is the thing to which you need to say, "I'M DONE"? Maybe it's gossip, maybe it's tearing others down, perhaps it's jealousy of everyone else who succeeds, or maybe you struggle with insecurity, greed, or an addiction. Go ahead and write it down right now... "I'm done with _____."

Alright, for those of you who don't like to be told what to do and you decided you wouldn't write it down. I know you Enneagram 8s... "You can't tell me what to do." You're right; I can't make you do it. So maybe I should say, "You might consider writing it down, I think it would help you." :-)

Sadly, so many of us have learned to rely on lesser things to keep us going—things like candy or Netflix. We munch on trash in the news, the gossip with our friends, stupid TikTok videos that pollute our minds, or allow harmful attitudes to take up residence in our minds.

The only way to get rid of that trash is to crave a better source of nutrition. The pure spiritual milk of God's word and the Holy Spirit's presence in our lives. Life from God, life about God, and life with God.

Today is the day to crave it, to seek it, to pursue the heart of God like never before!!

Like a little baby who cries out, I pray you would let your voice rise up to heaven like a fire from your bones that consumes you. Oh GOD, I WANT YOU! MORE OF YOU! YOUR POWER YOUR PRESENCE, and YOUR LIFE TO FILL ME! YOUR BREATH IN MY LUNGS!



PRAYER

Jesus, I want you more than fame, more than riches, more than attention from my friends, more than a better job, more than a nicer house. Lord, I want you more than I want COVID to be over. I want you.

Come, Holy Spirit, fill your people today with your presence. Lead us back to Jesus. Give us a hunger for the Word of God and make us HOLY! Help us rid ourselves of everything that defiles us and help us discover the life you've created us to live. Help us today to taste and see that you are good. To taste your kindness and let it be the nourishment of our souls.

In Jesus name I pray, Amen.

DAY 12 - Jun 26, 2020

1 Peter 2:4-7 (ESV)

“As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it stands in Scripture: “Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.” So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,” and “A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense.” They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.”

Wow! I'm really excited about our time together today. Time to get your thinking caps on because Peter does some magic with these few verses. I'm praying that, by the time we finish today, your eyes will be opened and your heart will be touched by the grace of the Holy Spirit.

Did you know that the Holy Spirit is present in a special way when we read the scriptures? Part of His job is to point us to Jesus. Another part of His role is to support us in our attempts to follow all of the good things Jesus taught us during His time on Earth. The truth is, we can't understand the Bible without His help. I'd like to invite you to take a moment to slip onto your knees and ask the Holy Spirit to speak to you today. Tell Him you are hungry for the Word and for His help to understand it more fully. Go ahead... I'll wait.

Back to Peter. I love this image because he does something really fun with these words. Remember how Jesus changed Peter's name? It used to be Simon, and then it became Peter. Peter means rock, as in the Rock upon which Jesus would build His church. Back when Jesus first changed Peter's name, Peter had a whole different set of priorities. Back then he was impulsive and fought for center stage. Now after many years of following Jesus, he's become more content with the camera being locked on King Jesus.

Peter calls Jesus the Cornerstone. The cornerstone was a huge marble stone laid down on the front end of a construction project. In particular, Peter brought their attention to the Temple. Every other stone laid on top found its support and strength from the cornerstone. The cornerstone was typically very expensive, high quality, true and straight along the edges. If a cornerstone was crooked, the whole project would be off. A master builder would carefully choose his cornerstone. A lot of other stones had to be rejected to find just the right cornerstone.

Peter says that the stone rejected by builders became the Cornerstone. Now He's taking us back to the Cross. Seems like Peter can't get over what Jesus did for him. He just keeps reminding us, doesn't he? Jesus was rejected by men so that we can be accepted by God. Jesus' humble obedience to death on a cross becomes the foundation for a new temple.

God is going to build something new! This time he's going to do it with living stones—not dead pieces of marble, but flesh and blood. Sons and daughters. Slaves set free from sin and death. I just love the image of all of us smooshed together. I guess Peter wasn't concerned with social distancing rules.

I can't help but think about Jesus' words when He says, *"Now I say to you that you are Peter (which means 'rock'), and upon this rock I will build my church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it."* Matthew 16:18 (NLT). For Peter, this wasn't just a

Bible verse to memorize. Jesus' words were personal and flowed from a life-defining conversation when Peter would be given the vision for the rest of his life.

Peter would give his whole life to working with Jesus to build this new church, this globally-scattered temple of God's people filled with the presence of the Holy Spirit.

These words really encourage me. We might be scattered across the Bay Area, but we have not lost our power. We have not lost the promise that God is building something that will outlast us all. If the gates of HELL won't stop it then COVID, quarantine, and closed buildings aren't going to stand in the Master Builder's way.

The question we have to wrestle through is not whether God will continue to build His church; the question is, "Will we be a part of it?"

In this passage, Peter is re quoting a few things Jesus said. *"Anyone who stumbles over that stone will be broken to pieces, and it will crush anyone it falls on."* Matthew 21:44 (NLT).

You have to choose whether you want to allow God to break you down into a piece that will fit beautifully into His new building, or whether would you rather be crushed under the weight of pride? I know that comment can seem pretty "in your face", but I have watched so many people refuse to humble themselves before God. Sometimes it expresses itself with an unwillingness to be corrected. Other times it's an "I'm always right" attitude. For others, it's the tendency to blame everyone else for their problems.

It's rather sad and painful to watch the crushing. Stones that would have played a beautiful part, crushed under the weight of pride. Unwilling to submit to the Cornerstone and His wonderful plan for their lives. I usually find that under that pride is a deep insecurity that God cannot be trusted to care, guide, direct, or lead one's life.

Friend, I love you and want God's best for your life! I think a good place to finish today would be back in the same place we started—on our knees before God, in humility. If you humble yourself before God, you won't need Him to humble you. You will experience some chiseling and pain, but in the end, it will be beautiful. We will be beautiful together. A house built for the Glory of God. He will fill us the way He filled the temple, and as living stones, we will declare the praises of the One who is worthy of all honor and glory: Christ alone, the Cornerstone!



PRAYER

Lord, we humble ourselves before you today. We cannot do this life without you. Please show us your favor and give us your help. Use our lives to display your glory. I choose to build my life on you today!

In Jesus name I pray, Amen.

DAY 13 - Jun 27, 2020

1 Peter 2:9-10 (ESV)

“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”

BUT! What a great way to start the day. Sometimes you have to get your BUT in gear. Sometimes you need to be reminded that God put a BUT in the story.

BUT YOU! Now it’s personal. Today we’re going to talk about you. There’s only one you. There’s not another person on the planet with your personality, your exact DNA, eye color, or fingerprint. You are uniquely loved and chosen by God. Do you believe that?

We all need to be reminded who we are, and not by all the voices from people who don’t believe in us. Not from jokers from our past who want to blame us for their failures. Not from the lies of the enemy. Not from a stupid choice you made in 7th grade you keep thinking about.

You need to hear the voice of God over your life today. You are chosen. Brought into a new family, a new nation with a new King. You are a special possession belonging to One who brought you out of your dark past into a new, bright reality where His light shines and makes every shadow of doubt, fear, and insecurity run for cover.

You are a ROYAL PRIESTHOOD! Two beautiful images. Divine royalty. Marked by God with direct access to the throne of God. You don't need a priest to enter the temple and make sacrifices on your behalf. You have One who already paid the price for your sin, and you have direct access to the God of the universe. You don't need me as a pastor to pray you into salvation. You don't need a YouTube preacher or superstar Christian icon to go to God for you.

You can sing in His presence, dance in your freedom, shout songs of victory, and lift up your heart to Jesus. He hears. Now let's face it. At one point you couldn't do it. You were separated. You were not a part of the family. You were not in the kingdom, but now, if your trust is in Jesus, you are HIS!!

Oh, I pray this fills you with HOPE today! Write these words on a card or the notes app on your phone. Put them on a screenshot, and share them online. Let them be your screensaver, a reminder to your heart all day today.

I am CHOSEN. I am royal. I belong to Jesus. I am a part of a priesthood. I am special to God. I am liberated from sin and death. Today. This is who I am.

Do you receive it? Maybe you have a bunch of doubts right now, and it's hard for you to see yourself the way God sees you. I want to encourage you right now to ask Him to give you His eyes on you, view yourself from His perspective. The wonderful reality is that His choosing us isn't based on our perfection or ability to perfectly follow His ways.

It's mercy. Now you have received mercy. Grace is God's unmerited favor where we get what we don't deserve, but mercy flows from God's kindness and spares us from what we deserve because of our sin and brokenness. This is all made possible by Jesus' one act of death on a cross.

Peter understood this because he had been changed by mercy. He knew what it was like to live “without mercy” and to live as a “product of mercy.” Now he invites us to let mercy be the theme of our song. It’s hard to hear these lyrics that Peter throws down without mercy erasing all of our doubts, fears, and insecurities.

Before we wrap up, I wonder if you would allow God’s kindness and mercy to step into the room for a moment. I know it’s really uncomfortable for some of us to be on the receiving end. Before we march into pouring out for the day, let mercy be poured in. Let Jesus’ eyes of perfect love cast out all fear. Let Him speak to you, son. Let Him hold you, daughter. Enough mercy to erase a lifetime of failures is present in the room today!



PRAYER

Come Holy Spirit, and help us know the heart of God! Open our eyes. Help me see me the way The Father sees me.

In Jesus name I pray, Amen.

DAY 14 - Jun 28, 2020

1 Peter 2:11-12 (NLT)

“Dear friends, I warn you as “temporary residents and foreigners” to keep away from worldly desires that wage war against your very souls. Be careful to live properly among your unbelieving neighbors. Then even if they accuse you of doing wrong, they will see your honorable behavior, and they will give honor to God when he judges the world.”

Dear friends, welcome back! I’m praying for you today. I am certain today that The Holy Spirit wants to use Peter’s words to call you and me to higher ground. Let’s go ahead before we start and invite Him to lead us and help us understand the Word of God.

Holy Spirit, I pray that you would open the eyes of our hearts today to see powerful truth tucked in these two verses. Help us be good soil so that the seed that is sown will produce a great harvest in our lives. We say yes to you! Please speak.

I love how Peter starts out this challenge, “*Dear friends.*” It’s almost like he is putting the novocaine in before he pushes them. You know he learned this strategy from Jesus, right? Jesus was the best teacher—always pushing and encouraging. Creating safe space, but calling people up to higher ground.

That’s what God wants to do with us today.

We all need friends like Peter, don’t we? I keep in close contact with a group of buddies; we are all lead pastors of churches across the

country—one in Chicago, one in Seattle, one in Michigan, and me here in California. Twenty plus years later, our friendships are still going strong. Back in the day, I'm sure our church's youth leaders were worried about our futures. For example, one Friday night when we were hanging out, we had to pick up my younger brother from some event at the church building. We decided it would be funny to strip naked in my parents' minivan so that when my brother loaded into the car he would see four naked high school guys.

Sorry if I'm putting images in your mind. Erase, erase, erase. When I look back at some of the stupid stuff I did early in my teenage years, it gives me more hope for my kids. At any rate, here I am, over twenty years later, writing to you as *"Dear friends."*

I guess it's good to know that Jesus can change people's lives and call them up to a kind of life that gains the respect and honor of people who don't know Jesus. Most of the stuff that battles against a life that honors God is our internal *"worldly desires."* We all have them, and they war at our ability to live the life God has called us to live.

I am feeling a little bold today in my confessions with you. I hope it's okay. I can't see your face, and you can't see mine, so I'm just going to share another one.

When I was in high school, I smoked sometimes. Now if you smoke, please know that I'm not judging you. I know that relatively speaking that behavior isn't super bad, but it's worse when you think of me as a Christian kid who smoked in secret. Not packs a day, just one or two. I remember one time in seventh grade, I stole my stepdad's Marlboros after he went to work. There were five in the pack. That was my first time smoking. They tasted gross, but then I started to think he might know how many were in the pack, so I proceeded to smoke the whole pack...by myself.

Why am I telling you this? Well, almost 30 years later, I still have a desire to smoke sometimes. Now, your issue may not be smoking, but I'm sure there's something from your old way of life that you still desire—sex, money, pornography, gossip, or just plain ol' laziness.

That's not who you are anymore, but it still taunts you every once in a while.

What do you do with that? You distance yourself from it. You say, "Stay away."

Because this life is short, because you are a temporary resident of planet earth, and because you have a mission, there are just certain places you don't go anymore. There are certain friends you distance yourself from, certain parties that you don't go to, certain apps you don't put on your phone, certain websites you don't visit.

Why? Because of vision, because of calling, and because of a new identity.

When you make the decision to follow Jesus, people immediately begin watching you. Your life becomes a billboard for God. Your words, your actions, the way you treat people, your engagement on Zoom calls, your response to emails, and your demeanor all testify about your character. They either point others toward Jesus or away from Him.

So now my life is different. My "dear friends" and I don't go streaking anymore, and I gave up my little secret smoking habit. Why? Because my purpose trumps my preferences! I have stronger desires to do life with God and point others to Him. When fulfilled, these new desires are far more satisfying than those fleshly desires which wage war against my life in Jesus.

What kind of billboard are you? What desires are waging war against your soul? Let's ask the Holy Spirit to purify us and make us more like Jesus.



PRAYER

Holy Spirit, thank you for your kindness towards us! Thank you for how you transform broken and unholy people into vessels set apart by you. Help us to be honest about our desires and allow you to change us from the inside out. Help us to have a heart to love our neighbor and use our lives to point to you!

In Jesus name I pray, Amen.

