



# HOPE PROJECT

## A 40-DAY JOURNEY

# WEEK 3

STUDY PLAN

## DAY 15 - Jun 28, 2020

### 1 Peter 2:13-17 (NLT)

“For the Lord’s sake, submit to all human authority—whether the king as head of state, or the officials he has appointed. For the king has sent them to punish those who do wrong and to honor those who do right. It is God’s will that your honorable lives should silence those ignorant people who make foolish accusations against you. For you are free, yet you are God’s slaves, so don’t use your freedom as an excuse to do evil. Respect everyone, and love the family of believers. Fear God, and respect the king.”

**H**oly Spirit, we invite you to come now and lead us to a right understanding of the Father’s heart. Lord Jesus, we thank you for the freedom we have because of the price you paid. Father, we honor you today as the ultimate authority over our lives, and we joyfully come into your presence with humility, willing and ready to receive what it is that you want to speak to us today!

If you have known me for a while, you know I was a wrestler in high school. One of the worst things in wrestling is to get pinned. When I first started wrestling, I was so bad, I can remember multiple times staring up at the fluorescent lights on the gym ceiling telling myself I would never let that happen again—until it did. Submission in wrestling or MMA is a really bad thing.

However, in MMA, if you refuse to submit, sometimes you will end up with a broken bone. One time I was sitting in a sauna in Tahoe City when Nate Diaz walked in. If you don’t know who he is, go look him up. I decided not to pick a fight with him.

In the life of a follower of Jesus, submission is one of the most important characteristics we can cultivate. It is a source of joy and ultimately a profound approach to living with HOPE in the midst of uncertainty.

Just like us, the churches of 1 Peter lived with a lot of uncertainty. Their government was not kind to Christians. They lived under the constant threat of persecution in many different forms. Their governors could be motivated by political agenda or have a bone to pick with Christians and fine them. Christians were labeled as bigots, cannibals, exclusive, and weird.

It seems like this difficulty would have been grounds for Christians to stand up and fight for their rights, but instead Peter calls them to “*SUBMIT*” for a reason: “*For the Lord’s sake.*”

Peter does not dodge the fact that submission can feel like slavery. In some ways, you are not in control of your destiny. I’ve felt like this many days during the COVID-19 crisis, as order after order came down from government entities. I even received multiple emails from Christians telling me I needed to rise up and defend our right to meet publicly.

Perhaps. But what if this is an opportunity to submit and allow the church to grow in character? The world is watching how we respond. Are we going to sign petitions and protest? Maybe a better approach is what Peter says, “*It is God’s will that your honorable lives should silence those ignorant people who make foolish accusations against you.*” Now, you are free. But don’t use your freedom as an excuse to be evil.

There are so many things happening right now that I don’t know and I don’t understand. I don’t know when our lives will head into a “new normal.” I don’t know how long it will take for us to have packed gatherings in buildings again. I don’t know what life will look like a year from now. But I do know humble, servant-hearted submission is still in style in God’s kingdom!

Jesus got on his knees once to wash the dirty feet of His disciples. These words struck me recently— *“Jesus knew that the Father had given him authority over everything and that he had come from God and would return to God, so he got up from the table, took off his robe, wrapped a towel around his waist, and poured water into a basin. Then he began to wash the disciples’ feet, drying them with the towel he had around him.”* John 13:3-5 (NLT).

For the Lord’s sake, Jesus humbled himself and became a servant. Security and confidence in God allows us to submit to His plans even when we don’t understand. Our freedom in Jesus allows and empowers us to willingly and graciously serve others.

Today, if you have been liberated by the grace of God, you are free to live a beautiful life of surrender that shocks and surprises the watching world. Friends, this may be the best billboard for our faith in Jesus.

How do you live with submission? If it’s hard for you, I understand. It is for me, too! It’s only possible for me as I learn to see the faithfulness of God. Every time I trust His ways, it turns out for my good and increases my influence in the lives of people who have never encountered Jesus.

Will you ask God to help you humble yourself and echo compassion to the world around you? Ask Him to help you submit for His sake!



## PRAYER

*Lord, thank you today for the kindness and love you displayed when you washed the disciples’ feet. Give us confidence in you today and a security that allows us to submit even when we don’t understand.*

*In Jesus name I pray, Amen.*

## DAY 16 - Jun 29, 2020

### 1 Peter 2:18-20 (NLT)

“You who are slaves must submit to your masters with all respect. Do what they tell you—not only if they are kind and reasonable, but even if they are cruel. For God is pleased when, conscious of his will, you patiently endure unjust treatment. Of course, you get no credit for being patient if you are beaten for doing wrong. But if you suffer for doing good and endure it patiently, God is pleased with you.”

I'm so glad you're back! Are you feeling motivated today? What's your emotion? Go ahead; take a minute to label it. Write it down in a journal. There's something about labeling our emotions that helps us live healthy lives. Emotions are wonderful gifts from God, and yet at the same time, they can be powerful and destructive. Awareness of what is happening on the inside is important.

When was the last time you were treated unjustly by someone? Maybe your boss dismissed your efforts, maybe a spouse was abusive, or maybe a parent mistreated you. I want you to know that neither Jesus nor the Bible ever condone slavery or any form of abuse. You can read the whole book of Exodus to see clearly that God hates slavery. Can I say it again? God hates slavery!

To mistreat or abuse another human made in the image of God is a disgrace! If you are currently in a situation where you feel like you are being abused, please let someone know. If you are a part of our community of faith, please reach out so that we can get you help.

Abuse has gone up during the COVID crisis. When all of this is finished, there are going to be a lot of heartbreaking stories. Foster The Bay is going to need a lot of families to step up and help host children in their homes.

It can be hard to process a passage like this when we don't fully understand the context. First off, let's take note that Peter is not writing to slave owners. In the book of Philemon, a slave owner becomes a believer, and the Apostle Paul begs the slave owner to free his believing servant, Onesimus. It's a great book; you should read it sometime.

In today's passage, Peter is writing to a group of people who ranged from peasant house workers to slaves who were completely abused because of their position in society. He calls them to radically respond to their unjust situation. He calls them to **"patiently endure unjust treatment."** He says that when we submit to earthly masters, we please God and ultimately that we receive a reward.

Today, I want to encourage those of you who feel like you are living in an unjust situation. Maybe you were passed over for a promotion because of your ethnicity, maybe you have a child who mistreats you, maybe you have a parent who is cruel, or maybe you put up with a boss who never notices your work.

Your Heavenly Father sees it all! He knows, and He cares.

We endure the injustices of this world not because our earthly situation is worthy of our heavenly response. We endure out of reverence for God. We show respect not because a cruel master deserves it, but because God is our redeemer.

There are some things in life you will walk through regardless of your attitude. There are trials in my life that I have asked God to

remove. There are things that I am walking through right now that I can't speak of, but at times they feel like an incredible injustice. In no way am I saying I can relate the pain of being a slave, but in every way, I am saying that this truth applies to each one of the injustices we face.

I know what it's like to have trials that last longer than a decade. I know what it's like to be in situations I can't control no matter how much power or skill I muster up. I know what it's like to feel chained to a situation, beg God to change it, to wait, and then realize it's still the same. To go to bed at night with the grief that I will face the same circumstance the next day.

How do we endure the situations in our lives that feel unjust?

*"But if you suffer for doing good and endure it patiently, God is pleased with you."*

Another version of the Bible says it like this, *"But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God."* 1 Pedro 2:20 (ESV). The actual word Peter uses is *karis*. Grace. Favor from God. Sounds like a great name for a kid, doesn't it?

So if you endure, you find grace and favor from God. God is the one who rewards me for my endurance. This is my hope. My hope is not in my situation changing or getting easier. My hope is not even in my ability to endure. My hope is found in my confidence that the just God of the universe is shaping something inside of me through my unjust circumstances.

Later, we are going to find out how Peter died, and we are going to know that he really meant these words. Tomorrow, we are going to look into the face of Jesus again and see how He was cruelly treated so that we can live free.



Today I'd like to ask you to label your emotion and the situation in your life that feels unjust. Ask God to give you the strength to persevere and the confidence in His ability to reward you for not giving up.



## PRAYER

*Lord, we thank you for your obedience and faithfulness to that Roman cross. Please help us today to persevere through the injustices of our lives. I pray that you would help liberate people in abusive situations and slavery today. Please help those who are tied to a trial. Please show your kindness and give the certainty of your redemption!*

*In Jesus name I pray, Amen.*

## DAY 17 - Jun 30, 2020

### 1 Peter 2:21-25 (NLT)

“For God called you to do good, even if it means suffering, just as Christ suffered for you. He is your example, and you must follow in his steps. He never sinned, nor ever deceived anyone. He did not retaliate when he was insulted, nor threaten revenge when he suffered. He left his case in the hands of God, who always judges fairly. He personally carried our sins in his body on the cross so that we can be dead to sin and live for what is right. By his wounds you are healed. Once you were like sheep who wandered away. But now you have turned to your Shepherd, the Guardian of your souls.”

Good day! Today we are going to have fun together. These heartfelt words from Peter are potent enough to change your life forever. The word of God is living and active. One of my prayers for you is that you would learn to love the Bible. I am not so much meaning in a scholarly way, but in a rich, spiritual way. Each time you open the Bible and seek the heart of God, He wants to speak into your life.

Holy Spirit, we invite you now to come and lead us into truth. Help us discover the happiness and joy that comes from friendship with you. Fill our hearts today with HOPE in you.

Peter is not going to let us get away from this whole subject of suffering. I kind of want to move on, but he keeps bringing it back

up. He is holding the line for us. God has called us not to merely be good, but to do good. Jesus cares about the fruit of our lives! One component of the fruit of the Spirit is goodness. The more we walk with Jesus, the more good we do.

Recently, I have been having something weird happen to me. I'll look at a picture of myself or look at myself in the mirror and think, "Do I really look that old?" Stacie sometimes will remind me that the mirror is not lying, but then she tells me she likes my salt and pepper and thinks I look better at 39 than I did at 19. I'll take it!

But I am getting older and actually I think I'm looking more like my dad—more like I remember my dad looking when I was in high school. There is something hardwired in the genetic disposition that is aging me and making me look different. So many people try to fight that progression, but I think it's better just to embrace reality. Yes, let's work out, eat healthy, and take care of ourselves, however...

Let's embrace the fact that we're changing! We're all getting older.

One thing I just keep coming back to as I read this letter is how Peter kept getting older but just couldn't get over Jesus. He is past salt and pepper. He's all salt now. It's 30 years later, and he's Grandpa Peter. It's like he just keeps making it all about Jesus.

In these few words, he gives us the goal of discipleship: to walk in the steps of Jesus. The original idea is to try and walk in someone's footsteps, kind of like a little boy tries to step in his dad's footprint on the beach.

When we start to follow Jesus, we just aren't sure where those feet are going to lead us. We start walking, and, at some point, we look up and realize that these steps are taking a lot more effort

than we thought they would. The sand is harder to walk in than it used to be. The breeze from the water has turned frigid. Perhaps we feel like we're walking the journey alone.

Peter brings us back to Jesus and reminds us of the things we don't have to carry anymore. As we walk this road, we no longer have the weight of our sin. Our sins were already carried and nailed to a cross. We once were wanderers, but now we're following in His steps, which keep us pointed in the direction of HOPE.

I am struck by this last label Peter gives Jesus: *"Your Shepherd, the Guardian of your souls."*

Peter would have grown up quoting Psalm 23! *"The Lord is my shepherd. I have all I need. He makes me lay down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me along paths of righteousness for His name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil. For you are with me."* Psalm 23:1-4 (NKJV).

For you are with me! The Good Shepherd, the Guardian of your soul is with you, perhaps carrying you a whole lot more than you realize. He suffered for you, and because of that He is more than enough to sustain you.

Dear friend, He suffered for you! If Jesus had had to endure the cross for only one person, He would have. He would have done it for you. He loves you today, and He is wanting you to enter into His guardianship like never before. He's such a good friend. He's so kind. He's not a distant God. He is an ever-present help in times of trouble.

Because the Good Shepherd has you in His care, you can do GOOD today!

Right now, would you ask Him to show you how to live in His steps? Ask Him to show you where you are going astray and invite Him to sustain you in the midst of whatever trial you're facing right now.



## PRAYER

*Lord Jesus, oh how we love you. You are a good friend! Thank you for carrying my sin to the cross. Today I entrust my life to your care. Help me grow in goodness. Help me become more like you and follow in your footsteps.*

*In Jesus name I pray, Amen.*

## DAY 18 - Jul 1, 2020

### 1 Peter 3:1-2 (NLT)

“In the same way, you wives must accept the authority of your husbands. Then, even if some refuse to obey the Good News, your godly lives will speak to them without any words. They will be won over by observing your pure and reverent lives.”

Well, here we are—almost halfway through the journey. You made it back for another day. I’m going to tread carefully over these next few days. These verses could be controversial, and I’m going to do my best to unpack them in a way that helps both men and women. My goal, like Peter’s, is to help you live with HOPE. In this passage, we turn to HOPE at home.

Before I jump into Peter’s words, I want to first off say a couple of things to the women. One of the happiest days of my life was our gender reveal party for our third child. I remember opening the box and seeing pink balloons come out. I still get tears in my eyes when I remember our family jumping up and down at the news we were having a daughter. I am also grateful to be a dad of two sons whom I love dearly.

However, I have a special place in my heart for my daughter. There is no one on the planet I relate to like Karis. I am more protective and tender with her than anyone else (aside from Stacie, of course). I’m not sure if Peter had a daughter, but I kind of imagine he might have. Let’s just suppose for a moment that he did. When he wrote these words, his daughter would have been approaching marriage age. I can imagine Peter having his daughters of the faith in mind as he writes these words.

Let's remember a few things we know for sure about Peter. He's writing as a pastor. Like I mentioned earlier, we know he is a husband. On top of this, he has been profoundly impacted by the way Jesus interacted with women. At some point in the next week or two, go read the gospel accounts to see how Jesus broke some of the social norms of his day in order to show respect, honor, dignity, and concern for women.

Unfortunately, women were treated like slaves in Roman society. They were considered to be a man's property—either their father's or their husband's. Just like we discussed with slavery, Peter does not condone this approach; rather, he is pastoring followers of Jesus through their situation. If you read ahead, you will notice Peter gives six times the amount of attention to women as men. My interpretation of this one is super practical. Husbands are typically harder to deal with than wives, and the women in Roman society really needed help.

Spiritually speaking, women tend to be more responsive to God and more willing to change. Because of this, many women find themselves trying to lead their families spiritually without support and strength from their husbands. This is a problem. Peter is trying to help.

In the midst of this, Peter helps us see that God has created families to operate with order. The marriage relationship consists of two people equal before God but designed by God with different roles and responsibilities. We need to look no further than the Trinity to realize that mutual submission is a part of the natural flow of how relationships work. Yet, even within the Trinity, God the Father is the ultimate authority. Jesus lovingly submitted to His Father all the way to a cross.

Not once does the Father abuse His authority. Not once does Jesus rebel against the Father's leadership. We see this also happening as the Spirit submits to Jesus. It's a beautiful relationship that has existed for all eternity.

It's in the timeless picture of God's design and the timely nature of women's struggles in the first century that Peter gives words of encouragement for wives. Peter's instruction is not for women to submit or follow "men." This is important. He is not being a chauvinist. Peter is talking to wives and how they are to relate to their husbands.

Let me illustrate. One of my big surprises in 20 years of ministry has centered around how much easier it is to reach women than it is to reach men. I do think men want purpose—they want their lives to count. I just think sometimes men's heads, including mine, are a little harder. In many instances, a wife will decide to follow Jesus and then be in a situation where her husband is just obstinate to the faith.

What does she do? Does she run? Does she preach at him? Does she give him books about being a better man? Does she tell him about the men she's meeting at church who are more godly? How should a woman respond?

This situation has happened a million times over in the history of the church. A woman becomes a follower of Jesus, but she is in a marriage where the husband will not submit his life to Jesus. Peter's words transcend generations and cultures. The best way to win a man over is through a pure and reverent life!

The more you preach at a man, usually the more that man is going to hide in his shell. The more you model how much Jesus has changed your life with your deeds, the more likely he is going to be drawn to ask questions and seek answers. It may take a really long period of time, and it may never happen the way you hoped it would.

Stacie and I have dear friends who have gone through boxes of tissues with tears for their marriage. Asking God to change a



hard-hearted husband is a common struggle in the church. You are not alone. Your heavenly Father sees you. He knows your struggle. His heart breaks as your heart breaks. He sees and He cares about every tear you shed. Your Father wants to strengthen you today as you seek to live the Good News without any words. Whatever pain you are bearing today because of marital disappointment, I pray that you would sense God's Fatherly love toward you. Your Father is pleased with you. He is your reward.

May you live a life that is so different that your husband cannot help but notice the change. Perhaps there are some old ways of life that you need to let go of. May your respect, honor, and submission to his leadership soften his heart. May you be willing today to make difficult decisions to live a more God-honoring life.

Perhaps certain friends are pulling you down, and you need to cut ties. Will you make the choice today to let your life be marked by the grace of God and an unrelenting commitment to follow Him no matter the cost?



## PRAYER

*Father, I pray for the women in our community today. I pray for those who are single and looking for a husband. Give them wisdom to choose the right man. I pray for those who are hurting because of a marriage to a man who is less than godly. Please give these women a heart to know you more and live a life marked with purity and reverence.*

*In Jesus name I pray, Amen.*

## DAY 19 - Jul 2, 2020

### 1 Peter 3:3-6 (NLT)

“Don’t be concerned about the outward beauty of fancy hairstyles, expensive jewelry, or beautiful clothes. You should clothe yourselves instead with the beauty that comes from within, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is so precious to God. This is how the holy women of old made themselves beautiful. They put their trust in God and accepted the authority of their husbands. For instance, Sarah obeyed her husband, Abraham, and called him her master. You are her daughters when you do what is right without fear of what your husbands might do.”

**A**s I write this today, we are still sheltered in place. In a few weeks, some restrictions will be lifted, and by the time you read this entry, things will be a bit different than they are today. But restrictions are tight right now. It’s been almost two and a half months since I’ve gone on a date with Stacie. For context, we try to go on a date once a week. Just the two of us, over a nice meal with no kids! It’s been too long!

When we go out on a date, Stacie usually gets dressed up. I almost always tell her that people are going to be shocked when they see the two of us together. How did this chump get that girl to marry him? I’m still asking myself that question. People have told me I could sell ice to an Eskimo. I think that’s a compliment. I guess my sales pitch worked on Stacie. I can share it later if you’d like to hear it.

To be honest, I can’t remember any one outfit she’s worn on a date in the past year. I do love getting dressed up and going out,

but it's not the clothes I notice. It's not make-up or her hairstyle I see when I look at her.

I see character. I see her faithfulness. I see a woman who, over the last 38 years, has been formed and shaped by the character of Jesus. I see someone who exemplifies a gentle and quiet spirit. She has a beauty that comes from deep within her that makes you want to be with her. It makes you want to listen to her.

We often joke that she is the calming, non-anxious presence in our home. She's way better with the kids than I am, and she has way longer stamina than I do. No doubt, I out-punted my coverage.

In our home, we try to live out what we interpret to be biblical order and authority. Tomorrow I'm going to talk to the men more, but for now, I just want you to see what a beautiful picture of God's grace a home can become. Now please understand that Stacie and I are far from perfect in our marriage. We have a long way to go, but we have learned some things over the last 17 years.

Authority is never given in God's kingdom for ease of life. Authority is always given to serve and bless. Submission is not a cuss word in God's family; it's the pathway to strength. There are limits to submission. A man should never ask you to do something contrary to God's will. A man should never harm you emotionally or physically.

Over time, your submission to God and your submission to his leadership has the power to transform him and win him over. I'm a different man today than I was 17 years ago, and one of the biggest change agents in my life is the "Stacie Spirit." She has nudged me, challenged me, encouraged me, and many times told me that there is more in me.

Stacie hitched her wagon to a disorganized, flighty, ADHD, slightly-overweight college kid. I heard a story one time about First

Lady Laura Bush. Not sure if it's true, but it's funny. One time back in Texas she saw an ex-boyfriend who was now pumping gas for a living. When she saw him, she waved and said hi. George W asked, "Who is that?" She said, "An ex-boyfriend." W said back to her, "Just think, if you had married him, you would be married to a gas attendant." She said, "No, if I had married him, he'd be President of the United States, and you'd be pumping gas."

Please don't write me any letters! I'm definitely not making a political statement. I can assure you George W. Bush is a much smarter man than I could ever hope to be and is to be honored for his service to our country.

But I can relate to this story. My life would be very different if Stacie hadn't said yes. Over time her beauty from within has changed me.

Now, let's shift to you. You may be living with inner beauty, and it's not really changing anything. You might be loving your husband in an effort to win him to Christ—to no avail. Peter gives us a phrase here that is so important. He says, "This is precious in the sight of God."

Gentleness is precious to God. He loves when you show yourself humble. Loud, abrasive women—and men alike—can ruin a lot of things. There is something so beautiful about a woman who is not trying to flaunt herself or capture the attention of men, but rather she is modestly loving, serving, caring, and building up those around her. She walks in obedience and actively seeks to please God.

Your life is a walking billboard. I pray that today you would live with strength and dignity. May you be crowned with the Father's affirmation. May this confidence give you His strength to pursue inner beauty that shines. Over time, this kind of beauty grows like the path of the righteous, shining ever brighter as your life continues. When you are gray and old, you will be an example of beauty that blesses and shines for many generations to come.



## PRAYER

*Father, I pray that today you would help the daughters of Echo and other churches find their validation in you. I pray that each woman would pursue your validation and affirmation. I pray that you would crown them with a beauty that grows over time and wins the favor of their husbands. In Jesus' name, amen!*

*In Jesus name I pray, Amen.*

## DAY 20 - Jul 3, 2020

### 1 Peter 3:7 (NIV)

“Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.”

It's day 20. I'm so glad you keep coming back. You are one of the elite. You keep showing up. You're committed to learning, growing, being stretched, and encountering the Holy Spirit in a way that leads to life change.

Now, I must admit, the last two devos were hard for me to write. I felt stretched. I wanted to communicate my heart on this topic and be faithful to Peter's intent with his encouragement to the wives.

Today it's our turn, men. Here comes Peter, full force with a challenge that completely flies in the face of first-century Roman culture. First, I want to address his label *“heirs with you to the gracious gift of life.”* Peter is letting the husbands know that husbands and wives are equal. We get this in the 21st century—to think otherwise would be archaic and immoral.

But it was not that way in the first century. I think we need to give Peter and the early followers of Jesus some credit for how they stood in the face of culture to bring dignity to the identity of women. Before Peter discusses physical differences, he hits on spiritual similarities: co-heirs of God's grace. We are equal before God! Amen.

While we are the same spiritually, I think we can all agree that there are differences between men and women physically. God has designed our bodies differently. Women tend to be smaller physically, and men tend to have a whole lot more testosterone.

My wife is superior to me in a lot of ways. She has more stamina, she is more patient with kids, she is more caring and more emotionally in-tune with people's needs. But when it comes to squats, pull-ups, push-ups, and the bench press, I have her beat.

My guess is that this is true in the majority of marriages. What do we do with this? We are different, but we are also the same.

I remember having a disagreement with Stacie one time. I was getting pretty direct with her, which I often do in conflict. I was telling her why I thought she was wrong and what I would like her to do the next time we were in a similar situation. She graciously said to me, "I'd like to remind you that I'm not one of your male co-workers." Ouch!!

That's what Peter is talking about. I've heard it said before that the weaker vessel could bring up the image of a crystal goblet. We have some crystal goblets. We've had them since getting married. We let the kids drink out of them about three times a year, but we never let the kids wash or dry them. Why? Because the kids aren't careful enough to handle a goblet that is worth more than their Playstation or Xbox.

A wife should be shown honor and cared for as an incredible gift from God. Solomon said, *"He who finds a wife finds what is good and receives favor from the LORD."* Proverbs 18:22 (NIV).

Sometimes we husbands can forget what a gift we have received from God in our wives. Many men I know have limited their

spiritual influence because they have not connected the dots between their prayers and their care and concern for their wives. When we love, care for, protect, serve, and bless our wives, we are pleasing God.

My wife loves when I wash the dishes. I love to wash dishes now because I love my wife. If that act of service blesses her, it blesses me—and that honors God.

Husbands, your words, your attitude, and your actions are either building up your wife or tearing her down! There is no greater evidence of your spiritual formation than how you love, serve, and care for your wife. I have not implemented these truths my whole marriage. I experienced the pain of taking her for granted the first five years of marriage. I can honestly tell you now that by God's grace I'm working hard every day to love her this way.

I say this to give you hope! You can grow. You can change. You can become a better husband. There is no day that's better than today to make that choice. Will you find one way that you can love her and serve her today?

And, if you are single, it's not too early. The way you treat your mom is the way you treat your wife. Women, if you want to know how a man will treat his wife someday, watch his relationship with his mom. Does he open the door for her? Does he say thank you and show her honor? Men, your actions today are going to determine the kind of woman you marry tomorrow!

I pray that Peter's words would stir all of us today to place value on the home and the order God has created within it. We may not get it right, but by God's grace, we can keep getting better.





## PRAYER

*Holy Spirit, I pray that you would stir within each of us a passion for our homes. Help us husbands to love our wives. I pray for all the single people in our churches, that they will walk with purity and choose to live lives that honor you. Help our homes to reflect your kindness and love to the world around us!*

*In Jesus name I pray, Amen.*

## DAY 21 - Jul 4, 2020

### 1 Peter 3:8-9 (NLT)

“Finally, all of you should be of one mind. Sympathize with each other. Love each other as brothers and sisters. Be tenderhearted, and keep a humble attitude. Don’t repay evil for evil. Don’t retaliate with insults when people insult you. Instead, pay them back with a blessing. That is what God has called you to do, and he will grant you his blessing.”

I want to take you into the war room with our executive staff at Echo Church. We had two significant days that will forever mark our church. This first of these days was Thursday, March 12, 2020. COVID-19 had begun to spread exponentially in our country. Our leadership team had several important decisions to make. Would we move services completely online? At this point, the local government had not given the order to shelter in place. We debated back and forth, prayed, and then made the call. It seemed like such a big decision.

The next Monday, we knew the shelter-in-place order would come soon. We saw the wave hit China, Italy, and several other countries. We gathered together around noon, prayed, and asked God for wisdom. We spent the next seven hours restructuring the whole church. We gave every paid staff member a new team, and we created new meeting rhythms and new strategies for accomplishing our mission. I could feel the palpable presence of the Holy Spirit in that room that day. I will remember that day with those special people for the rest of my life.

I share all of that for a reason. When we prayed, God gave us a very clear direction regarding a few things. We were to focus on generosity and do everything we could to serve both our community and everyone connected to our church. We created two new wings of the church called Echo Care and Echo Compassion. Echo Care would call and check on our people. Echo Compassion would love and serve those out in the community. In addition to these initiatives, we reached out to other churches in our area to see how we could help them.

In my 20 years of vocational ministry, I have not sensed a stronger urge from God than I did in that week to unleash insane amounts of compassion, love and kindness. It was clear the Holy Spirit wanted us to radically serve our community, our people, and other churches in the Bay Area. If you are a part of another church in the Bay, you are a part of that vision, too.

Where does this urge come from? It comes from the work of the Holy Spirit in His church as He places the heart of God inside of His people. We are different in crisis. We don't hide in a hole during times of tension and trouble. We rise up, we love, we serve, we pour out our lives to bless those around us. We bless those who curse us. We give away our resources. We check on brothers and sisters. We drive groceries to elderly people who can't get out.

I told Stacie yesterday, "I'm going to miss Peter after this time." I feel like I've gotten to know him a lot better just reading and studying his letter. I am struck again by the change in his words during the later part of his life. I imagine him arguing with the other disciples as they fought over being in first place with Jesus (Mark 9:33-34). I'm reminded of the time Jesus said to Peter, "*Get behind me, Satan.*" Matthew 16:12 (NIV). What also strikes me is that Peter made sure Mark included these incidents in the gospel stories.

Later in his life, his priorities had shifted. Peter was more gentle. He was more humble. He was concerned with blessing others, not just taking care of himself. He wasn't cutting off ears anymore (Mark 14:47). Instead, he encouraged the churches to return evil with good and to bless those who curse you.

What about you? Has the way you treat people changed since you began to follow Jesus? Every one of Jesus' followers is marked with love and kindness. If you experience God's grace in your life, over time you will become more gracious. Students, how are your relationships with your younger siblings? What about that coworker who is a nag? What about the person who makes dumb comments on your social media feed?

When we go overboard to bless others, God takes care of us. When others go low, we go high. Those of you who are students should know that ten years from now you will only keep in touch with a handful of your classmates. What you will still have is the memory of how you treated the people around you.

So, let's care for one another. Let's show compassion to those around us who are hurting. Let's find creative ways to bless people in our church. One family at Echo Church sticks out to me. Their last name is Parks. The Parks family is all over the place. If there is an opportunity to bless or serve others, they are out there. Their picture is in just about every social media post of people serving. I'm blown away by people like the Parks who live the love of Jesus everywhere they go.

What can you do today to bless those around you? Start with your home, and work your way out from there. Find one thing, and watch God bless as you bless others.



## PRAYER

*Holy Spirit, I pray that you would stir within each of us a passion for our homes. Help us husbands to love our wives. I pray for all the single people in our churches, that they will walk with purity and choose to live lives that honor you. Help our homes to reflect your kindness and love to the world around us!*

*In Jesus name I pray, Amen.*

