



HOPE PROJECT

A 40-DAY JOURNEY

WEEK 5

STUDY PLAN

DAY 29 - July 13, 2020

1 Peter 4:7-9 (NLT)

“The end of the world is coming soon. Therefore, be earnest and disciplined in your prayers. Most important of all, continue to show deep love for each other, for love covers a multitude of sins. Cheerfully share your home with those who need a meal or a place to stay.”

Do you ever wonder what the end of the world is going to be like? Sometimes a really wild sunset or clouds hovering over our city makes me think about that day. I wonder if the sky will light up when Jesus returns or if He will show up in only one place, and people will be streaming it live from their phones.

Of course, there is no way to know. People who have claimed to know have only ended up looking like fools. Even Peter didn't know when Jesus would return, but he did believe it would be soon. I guess soon is relative. Many of the early followers of Jesus lived believing that Jesus would return during their lifetime. They woke up every day wondering if today would be the day.

To be honest, we don't live with that kind of awareness of the end times. True, there are some who spend their whole lives studying the book of Revelation and watching YouTube videos trying to figure out how it's all going to play out. For the rest of us, it's easy to get pulled into the busyness of taking kids' to their sports' practice, studying for finals, getting to work on time, saving for kids college, and paying our bills.

COVID-19 reminded us that we are not in control and that death is coming for each one of us. As I write this, 500,000 people have lost their lives to the virus. That's a whole lot of people who 12 months ago weren't thinking their life would be over by the summer of 2020.

At some point we all will die. At some point this world as we know it will end.

These three verses would have been helpful to memorize on the front end of shelter in place. The end of the world is one of those huge things completely outside of our control.

Every day, regardless of my circumstances, I can pray and ask God to move in and through my life. When things are uncertain, I can still choose to show deep love for those around me. I've been blown away watching our church and other Bay Area churches love on each other during this time. I've been a part of several "Drive-By Birthday Parades" during Shelter in Place.

For several of them, Stacie stocked up on confetti poppers and silly string. As I drive up we have one Wood kid standing through the sunroof, another peeking out of the trunk, and the other two of the fab five hanging out of the side, spraying confetti and silly string all over our dear friends.

Stacie and I have both journaled during this time. Many prayers asking God to move and change lives. Asking God to provide supernaturally for our church and the people we love. So many other prayers. Many He's answered; some are still in progress.

One aspect of this verse makes me realize something I miss greatly. I miss being able to cheerfully share our home with others. By the time you read this, it's possible that we will be having cookouts and enjoying the company of others—perhaps with continued social distancing.

Regardless, we can live today in light of His return and the end of this world.

If you want to show your deep love for others, you might need to pull some of them close and love on them. Others you might need to pray for. To accomplish these acts of love, we may need to drown out some of the noise in our life—with discipline and an earnest pursuit of God's heart. Let's be the kind of people who don't allow the uncertainty of our future to make us flounder in confusion or boredom. We are people of purpose. We are men and women, teenagers, students, people who have been called by God in exile to live faithful and holy lives.



PRAYER

Before you wrap up your time today, will you take time to pray? Slip to your knees. Express your needs to God. Ask the Holy Spirit to fill your heart with the Father's love. Ask Him to show you what He wants you to pray for. Pull out a pad of paper, and write down the names of some people you can love this week. Fix your eyes on His return, and let it fuel your faithful life.

DAY 30 - July 14, 2020

1 Peter 4:10-11 (NLT)

“God has given each of you a gift from his great variety of spiritual gifts. Use them well to serve one another. Do you have the gift of speaking? Then speak as though God himself were speaking through you. Do you have the gift of helping others? Do it with all the strength and energy that God supplies. Then everything you do will bring glory to God through Jesus Christ. All glory and power to him forever and ever! Amen.”

Today, the Holy Spirit wants to deposit HOPE into your heart and mind. Remember when we first got started how Peter told us that we have Living Hope in Jesus? Sometimes you have to revive hope. You have to remind your soul that your hope is found in Jesus and in Jesus alone.

I love the word of the Psalms, *“O Lord, you alone are my hope. I’ve trusted you, O LORD, from childhood”* Psalm 71:5 (NLT). Isn’t it incredible to think that we are joining millions of people throughout human history who have found a Living Hope in Jesus and the empty tomb? I wanted to remind us this day that the tomb is still empty. Peter saw Jesus’ resurrection body and never got over it. He started preaching the Good News and never looked back.

I’ve been reading through the book of Acts recently. I’m seeing Peter in a way I’ve never seen him before. For example, in Acts 2, when the Holy Spirit comes, Peter gets filled up with boldness and starts telling people to turn to Jesus for the forgiveness of

their sins. At the end of their worship, the disciples give people an opportunity to come forward and get baptized. I've stood on those steps where Peter would have preached and seen the cleansing pools where the baptisms happened. At the end of it all, 3,000 people came forward. It would have been an amazing day for the early followers of Jesus. I can imagine hugs, tears, high fives, perhaps even some loud cheers. People changed by Jesus. It was new on that day, and it hasn't gotten old yet!

I wonder if Peter finished up the day and said to his friends, "What just happened? Did 3,000 people really just get baptized?" Thomas who loved accuracy might have spoken up and said, "Yeah, Bart and I counted every one of them!" Just let this sink in (no pun intended) for a minute.

Peter, who had previously denied Jesus, is now boldly and effectively reaching thousands.

What happened? He got filled with the Holy Spirit and in the process he got a spiritual gift! Peter previously spoke with his own words, and now he has experienced what it means to, *"speak as though God himself were speaking through you."* 1 Peter 4:11 (NLT).

What does it do for you when you hear stories of God using other people? Sometimes it can discourage us. I have to be careful how much I look at the Instagram accounts of other pastors. We often see someone else's story with an extreme filter added.

It can be discouraging when you compare your gifts to another person. You can always find something they do better than you. I've found gift comparison to be one of the greatest enemies of living in my gift with bold faith.

Peter tells us that the Holy Spirit gives each of Jesus' followers a gift, selected from a variety of gifts. So you have a gift from God, given for the purpose of making a difference. You were hard-wired

by God to live a fruitful life. There are certain things that only you can contribute to the body of Christ. God has planned for you to love certain people that no one else can love quite like you can.

The Holy Spirit gives us these gifts for the purpose of serving, loving, and blessing others. Some of us like to be on a stage, others love to be behind a computer, some love numbers, others hate numbers. There is somebody who loves the things you hate and hates the things you love. This was intentional on God's part—to build up a body that exists to bless and serve the world.

Spiritual gifts have to be discovered, but they also need to be developed. The only way to develop the gift is to put it to use. Some of you have dormant gifts because the lies you believe have sidelined you. Your best art is still inside of you waiting to be brought out to bless the world around you.

Who is going to bring it out of you? Good news, you have an Advocate—the Holy Spirit who is whispering into your ear right now. As you start exercising the gift in faith from a good heart, He will begin to fill the sail with wind. He will pour fuel on the fire and use you.

I wonder what that thing is inside of you? Maybe there's a book that needs to get written, a song that needs to come out, meals that need to be made for others, flowers that need to be delivered, encouraging conversations that need to be had with teenagers, meetings that need to be organized, events that need to be designed, planned, and executed. Wow, what a list! We're powerful when we trust the Spirit to release our gifts!

When we step out by faith and with a righteous heart, Heaven applauds. Glory rises, and praise ascends to the throne room of God. The church unleashed with fire! An unstoppable force that Hell cannot contain. We get to play a part! We get to be used by ALMIGHTY GOD to bring HEAVEN down. God's kingdom, on earth as it is in heaven.



PRAYER

Holy Spirit, thank you for gifting us to serve the mission of our heavenly Father. Help us discover and develop those gifts. Help us bring glory to God as we exercise our gifts. Please remove the lies that have sidelined people today!

In Jesus name I pray, Amen.

DAY 31 - July 15, 2020

1 Peter 4:12-13 (NLT)

“Dear friends, don’t be surprised at the fiery trials you are going through as if something strange were happening to you. Instead, be very glad—for these trials make you partners with Christ in his suffering, so that you will have the wonderful joy of seeing his glory when it is revealed to all the world.”

A few years ago, I started doing Crossfit. It took me a while to get the hang of it. I was a little slow with some of the moves requiring technique... but put me on an assault bike, and I will grind until I die. One day I pushed my legs past what they could handle and one of my calves locked up so much I couldn’t walk for a while. I love pushing myself in competition with others. I have a competitive edge that borders sick... But at the end of class, there was always something special about stretching out on the gym floor—gasping for breath, with muscles burning—alongside someone else who had endured the fiery furnace of class that day.

There is a fellowship that is gained through suffering with others. You have a bond that can’t be forged sipping mai tais on the beach. This is one of the beautiful things about a godly marriage. Seventeen years later, Stacie and I have been through the fire together, and we are still partners in this hope journey. I feel the same way about a good number of our staff families at Echo Church. You just love someone differently when you suffer for the same cause.

In the book of Acts, things start with a bang, but along the way—around chapter eight—friends started getting martyred. First Stephen, then a huge wave of Jesus’ followers, and eventually James, the brother of John, is killed with a sword (Acts 12). It looks like Peter is next when he is thrown in prison one night. He was literally chained between two soldiers. Somehow in the middle of the suffering, he was able to sleep. Seems like watching Jesus sleep during storms had finally reduced his anxiety levels.

In the middle of the night, an Angel of the Lord came and struck Peter on the side and woke him. Peter was liberated; he walked out unchained.

This was not the last moment of suffering Peter would face. He had much more pain in store. It’s one thing to walk through pain that you choose like a Crossfit class, but it’s another level of pain when you keep trying to do the right thing, yet you suffer—not in spite of obedience, but because you are living for God.

My kids have been trying to scare me recently. They like to jump out at me from around the corner when I’m least expecting it and yell in my face. One of my kids is almost as big as I am now. When an overgrown 13-year-old screams in your face unexpectedly, it doesn’t usually go well. As a result, several of these moments have ended with tears and apologies, I’ll let you guess who was crying and who was apologizing.

Sometimes our trials catch us by surprise, too, don’t they?

Peter told us we shouldn’t be surprised. The suffering we face is not strange. Just look at the book of Acts, just look at church history, just fix your eyes on Jesus. Almost every person God uses greatly is wounded deeply. It feels so unjust. Here I am trying to live for you, God, and you can’t make it easy on me?

Nope. It won't be easy. But there is a friendship waiting for you at the end of the rope of suffering. Jesus is the one who walked all the way up to Golgotha to display the love of God to the world. When you suffer for Him, you can be thankful and filled with joy because you get a new label—PARTNER with Jesus. You get an upgrade, and God gets another partner in this glorious mission of redeeming the world with the Good News.

I know that this journey of hope is hard. I have whined my way through my fair share of difficulties. Peter's words have recently been a great source of hope. After more than 25 years of actively following Jesus, I still need a daily reminder: Don't be surprised when it gets hard.

He meets us in the fire. The faithfulness of God will meet you in the fire. You might feel the heat, but you don't have to get singed. Keep your eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of your faith. Remind your soul that you will endure by the grace of God. Your redeemer is coming, and He has a reward in His hands. What a wonderful joy that will be when He is revealed for the whole world to see!



PRAYER

Jesus, thank you for your obedience. Please help us to not be surprised by our trials! Help us experience the goodness of doing this with you.

In Jesus name I pray, Amen.

DAY 32 - July 16, 2020

1 Peter 4:14-16 (NLT)

“If you are insulted because you bear the name of Christ, you will be blessed, for the glorious Spirit of God rests upon you. If you suffer, however, it must not be for murder, stealing, making trouble or prying into other people’s affairs. But it is no shame to suffer for being a Christian. Praise God for the privilege of being called by his name!”

Over the last several months, most Americans have been spending way more time on their electronic devices than ever before. Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, and Facebook have gotten a lot of attention. I never cease to be amazed at how people will leverage insults online. I guess it’s a lot easier to talk trash about them when we can’t see someone’s face. Perhaps you have dealt with your share of insults in your life. It never feels good, does it?

When a coworker falsely spreads rumors about you, one of your friends from school slanders you, or your sister-in-law decides she is going to try and get your mother-in-law to hate you. Not fun! What do you want to do when people mistreat you? If you are like me, you want to fight back. You want to make sure everyone else knows the truth and understands that slanderer is lying to the world.

Some people undergo a level of suffering and insult as a result of their own decisions and behavior. You make a dumb choice at a party, you decide to steal from your company, you punch a friend in the face, you meddle in someone else’s business. These

choices could result in being fired, losing your marriage, getting your butt kicked, or just ending up a miserable person. That's suffering.

Peter is telling us that we don't really get to choose if life will be hard. We get to choose why it's hard. For some people "the why" of their difficulty is their own stupidity. When you're suffering through your own bad choices, it's easy to assign blame or avoid the problem. We've all done it.

My two sons are 13 and 11. Watching them develop is a real experiment in psychology. All of us can relate to the notion that at some point our brains just aren't fully formed. One night after we had put the kids to bed, one of my sons hollered down to us that his brother was jumping out of the second-story window. What? He's jumping out of the window? From the second story?

I hurried to his room, where he informed me that he had done the math. Once he hung from his window sill, his feet would be only about 10 feet above the ground. He'd be fine. But he had not calculated into his analysis the bricks in the patio, the AC unit, and the huge recycling can. Thankfully we were able to intervene on something that would have resulted in suffering for us all.

We are all suffering. Again, the question is, why are we suffering?

The pain from bad choices is far worse than the pain that comes from walking with God. Peter says that good pain results in a special blessing—the Spirit of God rests upon you! I can't help but think of the moment when the Spirit of God rested upon Jesus. The voice of the Father split the heavens and said, *"This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."* Matthew 3:17 (NIV). What has always surprised me about this passage is how the Father speaks these words before Jesus begins His public ministry. The Father's affirmation provides the foundation of Jesus' life and ministry.

Your heavenly Father is for you today. He's 100% on your side. He wants to speak over your life and give you the strength you need to suffer for His sake. He wants to rest upon you so that you can endure and have hope in the middle of this messy life.

If you mess it up, he will help you pick up the pieces, but wouldn't you rather avoid some of the unnecessary pain that awaits people who live foolish lives? Wouldn't it be better to go through hardship knowing it's for a reason? Wouldn't it be better to look back and know that you were doing everything you could to honor God? This kind of life doesn't bring shame with it. You don't have to look back with regrets.

Today, will you ask Him to help you live a life without major regrets? Will you ask Him to reveal to you areas of your life where you are suffering because of your choices? Ask Him to encourage you in the places you need to be encouraged. In the midst of this, let's thank Him that we can come just as we are—and kneel at the feet of Jesus and find His mercy and grace to help us in our time of need. Today and every day.



PRAYER

Father, I thank you today for your relentless love. Thank you for calling us sons and daughters. Please help us live in obedience to your Word. Help us walk by faith and not by sight. I pray today for my brothers and sisters that you would help each of them suffer well for doing what's right. Help each person hear your voice of love and affirmation.

In Jesus name I pray, Amen.

DAY 33 - July 17, 2020

1 Peter 4:17-19 (NLT)

“For the time has come for judgment, and it must begin with God’s household. And if judgment begins with us, what terrible fate awaits those who have never obeyed God’s Good News? And also, ‘if the righteous are barely saved, what will happen to godless sinners?’ So if you are suffering in a manner that pleases God, keep on doing what is right and trust your lives to the God who created you, for he will never fail you.”

Can you believe we are already on Day 33 of our journey? Just one week to go. I’m praying for you today. We’ve come a long way together. I find joy today in thinking about the Holy Spirit filling your room with His presence.

Sometimes I wake up in the morning with my mind racing. In the midst of that, it feels so good to slow down to breathe, to ask God to fill me up in a fresh way. Before we jump in today, will you pause and ask Him to lead your thoughts and to still your mind?

Come, Holy Spirit. Give us clear minds today to understand and obey your word.

I want to focus on failure for a moment. Peter gives us hope when He says, “God will never fail you.” This is really hard for me to understand because of how often I fail. Sometimes failures can make you feel so low that it’s hard to understand love that never fails.

A couple of years ago I had a tremendous failure as a parent. For context, I had just returned from a four-day trip. I had intentionally planned my trip home with margin. I decided to fly into town about three hours before the end of the school day. This would give me time to wrap up any last details before the end of the work week and then be ready to engage with my kids.

My son Caedmon had a wrestling match that afternoon at 4:00. I love wrestling, and I love Caedmon even more. All week I had been looking forward to being home on time for his match. When I walked in the front door at the end of my trip, I entered to see one of my kids in a fit of rage. His face was filled with anger and a deep sense of shame. He couldn't complete his homework on the computer so he decided to delete all of his work, the work that Stacie had stayed up helping him work on the night before. This created a collision between him and Stacie that resulted in some major fireworks.

After 20 minutes in his bedroom and some careful, quiet conversation, he had calmed down enough to come back downstairs and own his aggression and anger. Needless to say, this episode delayed our departure. I thought, No problem. We'll still get there by 4:10. We parked on the campus of Valley Christian, and I looked out over Silicon Valley as I held my youngest. I thanked God that I was home and that He gave me grace to work with Sammy and still get to this match.

As we walked up to the gym, I heard the whistle blow and thought nothing of it. Based on his weight class, Caedmon usually wrestles later, and today he was supposed to be wrestling varsity. The moment I walked into the door, I could see the sadness in his face. His body was red, and he was pounding down water. I knew this could mean only one thing.

I walked over to him to explain. Caedmon uttered four words. "You missed my match." Then my son stared down at the ground.

Failure. Shame. Sadness. Anger. My heart felt a jumble of emotions in less than two seconds. I actually had not shed tears over a mistake in a while, but this brought me to tears. I felt a deep sense of regret in the moment. I had let my son down. I had told him I would be there. And I had failed him. The irony of this moment is that I had the best of intentions, and I still failed. This memory bothers me still, almost two years later.

Earthly fathers fail their children. But, thankfully, your heavenly Father will never fail you. It's hard for me to wrap my mind around the fact that He will never fail me. Never.

Peter calls this Good News even in the context of God's judgment. God allows His kids to go through the fire in order that their character might be shaped. He wants your faith to get stronger. I said to Stacie the other day, "If God disciplines those He loves, He must love me a whole lot." All of my hardships are His to redeem. All of my pain has a purpose.

Some people can't endure the fire so they decide life with God is not worth it. In the end, based on their choices, they prove they aren't God's children. They throw in the towel. And when He is revealed in the end, it will not be a good day for them. Our urgency to reach people who are far from God should be increased. God does not want anyone to perish, but some people choose to run from His grace.

You are going to fail God, but He will never fail you. You are going to have many more days when you don't get it right, but He will be waiting for you when you turn back. The word "*trust*" here is like a man who puts money on deposit. Every day you live for Jesus you are storing up HOPE.

Keep doing what's right. Keep serving. Keep loving. Keep blessing. Don't give up, friend.

If you have a failure that's weighing heavy on you today, turn back to Him. Let His kindness meet you in your grief. Tell Him you're sorry. Ask for cleansing. Ask for freedom. Ask for help. Receive His mercy. Then get back up and get out there, and do good from a humbled heart.



PRAYER

Jesus, thank you for your kindness. Thank you for working with us in our weaknesses. Thank you for taking our messes and making beautiful things out of them. Help us to keep doing good even when we don't feel it. Please give us a sense of urgency to share your Good News with those who don't know you yet!

In Jesus name I pray, Amen.

DAY 34 - July 18, 2020

1 Peter 5:1 (NLT)

“And now, a word to you who are elders in the churches. 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.”

I'd like for us to start our day with a prayer from Scripture. Would you take a moment and pray this verse out loud? *“Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. Point out anything in me that offends you, and lead me along the path of everlasting life”* Psalm 139:23-24 (NLT).

Now, go back through the verse one more time and ask the Holy Spirit to reveal areas of sin in your life. Ask him to show you where you are thinking incorrectly. Ask Him to transform your heart today.

Over the next two days, we are going to zoom in on Peter's challenge to leaders. Peter gives specific encouragement to those who have received the position of leadership in the local church. The local elders served in similar capacity to pastors and ministry leaders today. Without a doubt, Peter would expect these principles to be applied to all types of leadership in the home, in the business world, and in the local church.

Perhaps you don't see yourself as a leader. You may not have a title or specific position of leadership, but I want to encourage you today that you can make a difference with your life. Leadership in God's kingdom is about loving people, adding value, and influencing others in the right direction.

When Jesus shows up in the first century, everywhere you looked, there were horrible examples of leadership. The Roman leaders used their authority to push people down. The religious leaders were also extremely oppressive with their religious demands. Naturally, the early followers of Jesus were confused about leadership, even after spending three years with Jesus.

One day as Jesus' disciples were pushing for positions of authority and prominence, Jesus called them all together and said, *"You know that the rulers in this world lord it over their people, and officials flaunt their authority over those under them. But among you it will be different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must become your slave. 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"* Matthew 20:25-28 (NIV).

Before Peter jumps into how you "do leadership," he starts with how you "view leadership." Because as one of my mentors says, "How you view things is how you do things."

Last night I had a weird nightmare. In my dream I was somewhere in another country sharing my faith with a group of people who were of a different religion. As a result of my sharing, a militant group found out, and they decided they would beat me. As I was in a car heading into a holding center to await my beating I realized that I would have to watch my wife, Stacie, and my daughter, Karis, be beaten first. In the dream I was trying to figure out a way to get Karis out of the car and have her avoid the suffering. I am not sure why I wasn't trying to get Stacie out, but it was such a horrible dream. I woke up in a sweat and thanked God the dream wasn't real.

This writing project has made me think about suffering more than I have at any other point in my life. Peter brings up Jesus' suffering again in this passage. The Christian framework for leadership is suffering. As you go up in kingdom leadership, you are called to

give up your rights. Leaders who are not willing to give up simply will not be able to go up in kingdom leadership.

It's almost like Peter is there thinking about how to appeal to the leaders. He needs to give them instructions, but first he needs us to think correctly about leadership. Our model and example to follow is Jesus. We can be instructed and inspired by examples in business and sports. I would be among the first to agree that we can learn from anyone, but we must take all of our leadership practices and ideas and put a frame around them.

The kingdom crown is a crown of thorns. Before we are able to lead, we must be willing to suffer.

How would it change things if every leader began to think this way? What if your CEO or the president of your organization began to put the goals and interests of others before his own? What if your boss recognized all her authority as a way to bless others?

What if every group leader and every pastor in your church put the cross at the center of their leadership viewfinder? I pray that God helps us learn how to become better leaders in our homes, our businesses, our churches, and our communities. I want to become more and more like Jesus and allow my view of His sufferings to be the lens for leadership.

Tomorrow, we are going to get into the practical aspects of Christian leadership that I think you will find very helpful.

Today, I hope you will take a few moments to think about Jesus, the greatest leader to ever walk the planet. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you have the proper view of leadership. Repent of any misplaced motives, and ask Him to give you a heart to bless others with your leadership.



PRAYER

*Jesus, thank you for your leadership in my life and in our church.
I submit to you as the head of The Church. Help me to follow
your example of service as you call me to lead others.*

In Jesus name I pray, Amen.

DAY 35 - July 19, 2020

1 Peter 5:2-4 (NLT)

“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. And when the Great Shepherd appears, you will receive a crown of never-ending glory and honor!”

Prior to COVID, I had one of the greatest experiences of my life as a leader. I had the privilege of flying to Dallas to participate in the passing of a leadership baton. My mentor for the last decade, Steve Stroope, transitioned his position of leadership to my good friend, Josh Howerton. In a day and time when very few leaders finish strong, Steve ran the good race all the way to the end. He would be the first to tell you that he is far from perfect, but no one could argue about his level of faithfulness. For 40 years he served with integrity at one church. He modeled consistent leadership in his home, his church, and the lives of countless younger leaders.

When given the opportunity to speak and pass the baton, instead of speaking about himself, he used his last moments as a senior pastor to thank the team. He said, “Quarterbacks get more attention, but it doesn’t mean they are more significant or more important.”

God gives leaders an entrustment. It might be a team at your business or a small group in your church. If you hold a position of leadership, you are commissioned by God to care. A good shepherd shows care and concern for the sheep. Like a good parent, a shepherd wakes up each day with his sheep in mind.

No one tells them to set the alarm. No one pushes them. That sense of leadership comes from within.

For those of you who are part of Echo Church, you are never far from my heart and mind. I often wake up in the middle of the night thinking about how to help you and our church flourish. Sometimes thoughts about a problem or future ministry opportunity swirl around in my mind. These thoughts usually turn to prayers, in which I ask God for the wisdom to lead well. COVID has been one of the most unique seasons of leadership I've experienced. I'm used to seeing people in the flesh. I love to hug and high five. I love to be with people. Video chats have been great, but I miss being with the flock God has called Stacie and I to lead.

Peter says that we should be eager and willing. No hidden agenda. The goal is to please God and care for people. Sometimes you get noticed by others; sometimes only Jesus sees. Sometimes the sheep even complain when you care for them, but the Great Shepherd sees.

The longer I lead, the more I see this whole thing as a sacred trust. I have had many moments in my life where I felt like my attitude and actions were not the best example. If I'm honest, I still have times when I feel like God could have easily chosen someone else who would have done a better job and been a better example. I am more confident in my eagerness than I am about being the model example of a Christ follower.

Like Peter, we are all in process—growing and changing. By the grace of God and through His process of sanctification, we're becoming more like Jesus as the years pass. These gray hairs that keep popping up remind me that I'm not getting any younger, but I hope that by grace I'm getting better.

For any of you who want to take the plunge with me, I am recommitting myself today to give the rest of my life to lead eagerly and humbly with passion and conviction. I'm in for another round of loving and caring for people. Let's acknowledge our weaknesses and keep pursuing Jesus. Let's work on our lives

with God's help in a way that we become examples in our homes and our businesses. May our churches become examples of great kingdom leadership.

Soon our churches will gather again physically. I look forward to hugs even if we have to wear masks. I look forward to seeing tears in peoples' eyes again as they sing praises to Jesus. We are coming through this season stronger. Recent challenges have strengthened you and made you better leaders. This season has tested your motivation and burned off some of that old self-promotion. We're learning that life is all about loving Jesus and blessing people.

I pray that one day many tens of thousands of people in the Bay Area will turn to Jesus as our churches come together. I pray that, as scope grows and ministry increases, we would maintain humility and passion. I pray that we would realize that it's only by grace. After all, God could easily have chosen someone else for our roles. Leading is a sacred privilege!

His plan is beyond what we could think, ask, or imagine. He has called us, and He's leading us to have faith to believe that He wants to increase the scope of our impact, and yet, at the same time, to stay grounded in the reality of His return. When He comes back, He will test our work. And He will show us our work for what it's worth. We will receive a never-ending crown of glory and honor, all because we were willing to follow the example of the One who was crowned with thorns!



PRAYER

Jesus, help us lead others the way you lead us. Help us to become good shepherds. Increase our care and concern for the lost sheep of our area. Help us sacrifice for the good of others and add value wherever we go.

In Jesus name I pray, Amen.

