



HOPE PROJECT

A 40-DAY JOURNEY

WEEK 6

STUDY PLAN

DAY 36 - July 20, 2020

1 Peter 5:5-7 (NLT)

“In the same way, you who are younger must accept the authority of the elders. And all of you, dress yourselves in humility as you relate to one another, for ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.’ So humble yourselves under the mighty power of God, and at the right time he will lift you up in honor. Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you.”

Our family divides responsibilities based upon wiring and experience. Stacie tends to be better at many things, particularly cooking. My contribution is usually on the back end—helping with dishes and clean up. When Stacie brings the meal to the table, I often say, “I love this meal. It’s one of my favorites.” When I say it, I mean it! Meal creation is one of the many things she does with excellence.

I have wanted to say the same things many times throughout this journey of hope. I love this passage; it’s one of my favorites. I feel that way about today’s passage. The Holy Spirit has used these few verses in my life many times to correct my thinking, redirect my steps, and encourage my heart. It makes me happy to think about His desire to do the same for you.

I’ve made it my practice when writing these entries to get on my knees and invite Him to move in my heart as I write. Would you be willing to get on your knees right now and invite Him into our time together?

“Come, Holy Spirit, you are welcome in my heart today. I humble myself before you. Unless you speak, this time will not bear fruit. I want to hear from you today.”

I am about to turn 39 years old. When you read this, my birthday will have passed. I'm not sure if you consider me to be young or old. I know it's relative. I'm going to choose the middle. I'm about halfway between 20 and 60. For me, age twenty is almost 20 years ago. Many memories are distant, but several of them have been stored as core memories. I remember cutting my teeth in ministry and experiencing a surprising measure of success. Stacie and I started leading a middle school ministry. At the time I did not take into account context and conditions. The community and church were primed for the work, so we doubled in size rather quickly. Lives were being changed, and students were set on fire by the Holy Spirit.

Between you and me, I gave myself a lot of credit for the success we were experiencing. I had many arrogant thoughts during the time. Stacie and I had many conversations about how differently I would lead if I were in charge. I would give her a list of strategic changes and how those changes would cause faster growth. I was not taking into account that my branch was growing on His vine!

God has a funny way of allowing us to be humbled by our circumstances. We moved from South Carolina to Texas after graduating from college. When we moved, we got the chance to “be in charge.” The second time around was harder than the first, and my experience was much more humbling.

I remember many conversations with God in round two—talks during which I begged His forgiveness for my arrogance. During this season, I began to see and experience the difference of living with humility. Looking back now, I get tears in my eyes thinking about the kindness of God to meet me in my repentance.

I think most of us have moments where we overestimate what we have to offer God and how much God needs from us. I'm sure certain personalities struggle with this more than others. No doubt, Peter was one who had his moments, particularly as a young man. On the night Jesus was betrayed, Peter made sure Jesus knew his commitment level as he said, *"Even if I have to die with you, I will never deny you"* Mark 14:31 (NLT).

Twenty-four hours later, Peter had denied Jesus three times. If you recall, Jesus graciously told Peter this would happen by the time the rooster cried out the next morning. I wonder how Peter thought about roosters from that point forward. I wonder if hearing a rooster crow each morning served as a reminder of Peter's need for grace.

Jesus would later restore Peter. From this point forward, Peter was a changed man. Over the years, Peter learned how to live with humility.

I've watched many people walk through humbling circumstances and still fail to humble themselves. The longer you stay on a road marked with pride, the harder and more painful the road gets. The pain starts with pebbles and finishes with boulders. Some people live without hope because they won't humble themselves. But remember, at any point along the route, you can turn around. Jesus will be right there.

Humility is the pathway to hope! Peter connects humility to reduced anxiety and worry. There's something so powerful about realizing you can't control the world. Or circumstances. Or other people. All of your concerns are a concern to God. His concern is matched with His capacity. A great God who is also a good God. Humility opens the door to experience more of His goodness.

I understand why Peter starts by addressing young men, and I can relate to his transition to addressing everyone else. God gets

no delight out of humbling us. It's just that when pride walks on the stage, God walks off. Where you find humility, you also find grace and mercy. The wind of the Spirit blows in the sails of a contrite spirit.

I have a few “roosters” in my life. One of them is watching God bless the church I lead. I know what my life is like without Jesus. I know how I lead apart from grace. I have gotten glimpses of who I would be if He hadn't stepped in to change my story. Parenting is another rooster for me. I often have moments where I get glimpses of how I would parent without God's help. It's not a pretty scene.

Every one of us can make a decision to put on that humility shirt. It's a daily choice. Doing so is the difference between life with God opposing you or the wind of God at your back. Today I wonder if you would make a decision to humble yourself before God. Now is a good moment to finish the way we started—on our knees.

Will you take a few moments right now to bow in His presence? Present your concerns to Him. Tell Him where you feel inadequate, and ask Him to help you today.



PRAYER

Father, we humble ourselves before you. We recognize our need for your grace. Please help me live with your wind at my back instead of your hand in my face.

In Jesus name I pray, Amen.

DAY 37 - July 21, 2020

1 Peter 5:8-9 (NLT)

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

Last summer one of my sons thought it would be funny to dump a cup of ice water over my head. His impulses are often not controlled by a filter. Of course this would be the case for many middle school boys. For a few weeks after the incident, I lived on high alert. I wish I could give you more stories to illustrate, but time will not allow. To be honest, it seems like I’m always on high alert with these kids.

Spiritual warfare is often misunderstood. I believe that there is a clear connection between Peter’s words about humility and spiritual warfare. Pride exposes our lives—including our hearts, minds, egos, work, relationships—to the enemy and his lethal attacks.

Pride is not our only threat. Apathy and presumption that all is well are also a couple of our greatest challenges. Sadly, we can live unaware of the war being waged around us. Ask God to destroy pride, apathy, and presumption in your life so that He can continue to work in you and mature your walk of faith. You have come a long way. You have changed. Your life is on mission, and you are actively working to build God’s kingdom. The enemy hates Jesus; why would he not hate you, as well?

You are loved by Jesus, Satan wants to harm Jesus by harming you. He could care less about your peace, your joy, or your hope. He will do everything he can to make your life miserable. He wants to destroy your marriage, your career, your relationships, your finances, and your integrity.

I've had numerous demonic dreams, which often happen on Saturday night right before I preach on Sundays. I've watched many people go crazy and leave the faith. I've had moments where anxiety and anger come out of nowhere. I've seen the enemy attack my kids and my wife. I've watched him try to tear me apart from people I deeply love and care about. In short, I don't trust him, not even with a cup of cold water.

Your greatest strategy for spiritual warfare is an alertness birthed out of humility. He is far more powerful than we are, but he is no match for Jesus. He cannot stand against Jesus, but you cannot stand without Jesus. When the enemy comes knocking on my door, I want to be sure that Jesus is in my house.

I've also experienced him using isolation. He wants to separate us from one another. Community saturated with open and honest relationships is one of our greatest tools for standing strong when the fiery arrows start coming. This is one of the primary reasons we have groups going in conjunction with The Hope Project. You and I need people to stand with us in the day of battle.

So today, I want to call you to alertness. Your biggest problem is way more spiritual than you think. Maybe you have been looking at your situation the wrong way—from a purely human perspective. Will you shift your focus today? Prayer is one of your greatest tools in doing that. Humility makes the ground solid. Alertness helps you see the struggle through a spiritual lens.

God can make you strong. He can give you everything you need to run this race all the way to the end. The One who is in you is

greater than the enemy who is against you. Stand firm. Place your feet on the rock. Put down the distractions. Cry out for alertness. Let Him help you be fully engaged today.

Take a moment to ask the Lord to give you eyes to see what's happening around you. Ask Him to help you discern how to address problems in the spiritual realms. Ask Him for wisdom and grace to walk in the power of the Holy Spirit today.



PRAYER

Father, we are grateful that you are a protector. We turn to you for protection against our enemy. We humble ourselves before you. Help us to stand strong and fight the good fight for your glory.

In Jesus name I pray, Amen.

DAY 38 - July 22, 2020

1 Peter 5:10-11 (NLT)

“In his kindness God called you to share in his eternal glory by means of Christ Jesus. So after you have suffered a little while, he will restore, support, and strengthen you, and he will place you on a firm foundation. All power to him forever! Amen.”

Welcome back. It's hard to believe we are almost done with our journey of hope. I hope our time together has strengthened your faith and helped you love the Word of God like never before. God sees your commitment and intentionality, and He wants to help you finish strong.

Let's invite the Holy Spirit to come and help us experience the kindness of the Father today! Come, Holy Spirit. Help us experience the Father's heart and learn to love Jesus more. We surrender our time to you. Please speak!

Anyone reading this who has children would agree that birth is one of the most profound experiences of life. Stacie insisted that both our biological children be born without any pain meds. Anyone who knows my wife would not be surprised. She has an extremely high pain threshold. I gladly accepted the “birth coach” role.

My job was to stand at her side and do whatever I could to help. I rubbed her back for hours with a tennis ball, turned music up and down, prayed, encouraged her, let her squeeze my hand. It is a very important job, but by comparison very easy.

Several times during the process, I stared into her eyes while she was in deep pain. As we locked eyes, she said nothing, I knew she was struggling, and my heart was filled with such deep compassion. There was nothing I could do, other than stand there and say, “This will be over soon, and it will all be worth it. Come on, you can do this. You are going to make it.”

Some suffering in life feels like it’s worth it. Other times, difficulty feels worthless. Sometimes I want to argue with God about the unfair nature of the trials He allows me to go through. I often find myself wrongfully comparing my trials to the trials of others. This just discourages me because it’s such a waste of energy. When you are in the middle of deep pain, you need someone by your side to remind you that your struggle is going to be worth it. You will get through this.

Not everyone struggles well. I have known many people who jumped ship in this journey because they just couldn’t deal with the pain. Their marriage was too hard, the relationship with the kids didn’t feel like it was worth it, the ministry was taking longer than they expected, growth was less instantaneous than desired. The list could keep going.

Peter is finishing his letter the same way he started. He’s giving us hope for our struggle!

If we have placed our trust in Jesus, we can have confidence that one day we will enter into eternal glory. Jesus has paid the price. He is the means. We are saved only because of the kindness of God. Once again, His mercy gives us hope.

I need the hope for future glory, but I also need something for today’s struggles. I need to know that what I’m going through is changing me. I need solid affirmation that if I endure it will be worth it. I need to know that if God is not changing my situation, it is for a reason and He will use it for my good.

Speaking from experience with Jesus, in our passage for today Peter promises four things God does with our trials.

1. **God will restore you.** The same word is used to describe the mending of a fish net or resetting a bone after it's been broken. He is the Healer. You may feel torn apart by your trial. Perhaps you have told yourself, "I can't do it." Maybe this season of life has left you broken. Areas of your life are scattered in pieces all over the floor. You wonder how you could ever be made whole again. But then God takes your broken pieces and makes a beautiful mosaic displaying His grace.
2. **God will support you.** The original word support in this passage means "to establish." The word literally means "to make solid." God is using trials to make you like a rock. When you look eyes with Him, you will see His compassion. He has endured and can relate to your pain. Keep your eyes focused on Him. If you don't give up, your character will be solid. Your trial is becoming your testimony.
3. **God will strengthen you.** Like a trainer would, He is helping your faith muscle grow. Your hope is increasing. Naturally, a part of us wants an easy life. There is a part of me that wants to eat gallons of ice cream and sit on the couch five hours a day, but a core desire overrides my wishful thinking. I want to be strong in faith. Perseverance grows our faith muscles. There is no hope without hardship.
4. **God will place you on a firm foundation.** Even now, He is laying a foundation you can trust. Your character is becoming more reliable. God has placed you on solid rock. Petros! Like Peter, your name is being changed. Jesus sees you for who you are becoming. This trial will make you a rock, but that can only happen if you don't give up!

Don't give up, my friend. We can persevere together. I know it's hard, and I know for most of us it's not the life we would have chosen. Rather than using our strength to try and outsmart the trial, let's give our efforts to outlast it!

Take a moment to name your current trial. Now, thank Jesus for His help. Ask Him to give you eyes to see how He is currently restoring you, supporting you, strengthening you, and placing you on a firm foundation.



PRAYER

Father, thank you for your kindness! Help us to persevere. Help us see how you are working in our lives and redeeming all of our pain for your glory and our good.

In Jesus name I pray, Amen.

DAY 39 - July 23, 2020

1 Peter 5:12 (NLT)

“I have written and sent this short letter to you with the help of Silas, whom I commend to you as a faithful brother. My purpose in writing is to encourage you and assure you that what you are experiencing is truly part of God’s grace for you. Stand firm in this grace.”

Last year, I experienced something that made me want to throw up in a bucket. I had just come off of a meeting and had about 30 minutes before my next meeting. My assistant at the time, Jazmine, said to me, “Pastor, we need to talk.” I’m not sure why, but immediately in my gut I knew she was letting me know she would be leaving our church’s staff. Over the next few minutes, she told me it was time for her to leave the Bay Area. She explained to me how God had opened a door for her to move home to Arizona. Long story short, she continued to serve our staff and my family virtually from Arizona for almost a year. Eventually, God opened up a door for her to work for a wonderful church outside of Phoenix.

Last week we scheduled her “exit-interview.” She didn’t know that we had planned a surprise Zoom call with our executive team, so Stacie and I got to watch her cry through the next 30 minutes as everyone on the team expressed their love and gratitude for her faithfulness.

Jazmine served as an assistant for our family for almost four years. She prayed, shuffled kids from appointment to appointment, worked on major projects, helped keep meetings on schedule, challenged

me to become a better leader, and improved the culture of Echo. She hardly stepped on a stage and rarely had a mic in her hand, but she had a huge impact on our local church. She will always have a special place in our hearts.

Sometimes people like Peter and Paul get all the credit, when in reality it takes a whole army to accomplish a vision. A vision is not built on the talents of a few, but the sacrifices of the many. Silvanus, or Silas, was instrumental to Peter and Paul's work. He shows up in many places throughout the New Testament, alongside the apostle. Silvanus was a helper, and he was content to take a back seat as long as the Gospel was being preached.

These two verses remind us that even the great apostles needed a team. Peter needed Silvanus help to write the letter. My guess is that Peter did a lot of talking and Silvanus did most of the writing. The Greek in 1 Peter is some of the best in the New Testament. Silvanus would have been more educated and more articulate. He could take Peter's passion and curate it with a pen. It's beautiful to think about how God even used teams to write the Bible.

I'm so grateful for the team at our local church. I'm grateful for Stacie being the first to believe in our vision, followed by others—like the Santos and Hibiske families—who moved across the country to help start Echo Church. I have such a deep love for those on our executive team at Echo, including Tim, Lucille, Darren, Vivian, Billy, Pastor Paul from Crossroads, and so many others who have made great sacrifices to accomplish this vision. Most of you don't know them, and that's okay. What's important to know is that every great vision requires a team. God's dream for your life cannot be accomplished without others.

Peter ends his letter with a final thought about standing in grace. He acknowledges Silvanus and then turns to the subject of standing strong. I am certain Peter's transition was intentional. Peter was able

to write with grace because of the Holy Spirit's power and Silvanus' help. They go hand and hand. We need help from God, and we need help from people.

We were not meant to do life or ministry alone. We need each other. We need one another to make a difference and to finish strong.

I'm encouraged to do two things because of this verse. The first is to give credit where credit is due. People who have supported you should be honored. If you get to the platform, acknowledge those who helped build the platform. As a project succeeds, pass on the credit. When your family wins, let your spouse shine. Find creative ways to distribute the glory. If you do this, people will want to be on your team! This will create a culture wherever you serve. I love when I give praise to a team member here at Echo, and they immediately give credit to someone else. It is a sign to me that they have embraced our culture.

Second, I'm reminded that I need to always work to do things with others. Every project needs more than one set of hands. The Lord designed each of us with gaps so that we could rely on one another to fill those gaps.

Who do you need to thank today? Who do you need to give credit to? Maybe there is someone on your team who needs recognition. Your words of encouragement could fill the sails of another leader today. Also, what have you been trying to accomplish alone? What if you took a step to come alongside another person with their dream and then invite someone else to come alongside you with your dream?

Grace is required to stand firm, and a huge part of that grace is the support of other people.



PRAYER

Father, help us to become people who do things together. Help us support the dreams of others, and build teams around the visions you've placed into our hearts. Help us see people the way you see them and actively work to develop the gifts in those around us.

In Jesus name I pray, Amen.

DAY 40 - July 24, 2020

1 Peter 5:13-14 (NLT)

“Your sister church here in Babylon sends you greetings, and so does my son Mark. Greet each other with a kiss of love. Peace be with all of you who are in Christ.”

Dear friend, I must admit I’m sad that our time together here is coming to a close. I have enjoyed sharing this time together, as we’ve learned about Peter and his friends from the early church. I hope and pray that you love Jesus more now than ever. I am trusting that the Holy Spirit has placed inside of you a hunger and passion for the Word of God like never before!

Before we finish our last day together, let’s invite the Lord to join us one more time.

King Jesus, we declare our love for you today. Your name is worthy of praise. Help our hearts be opened to your word today. Please speak to us. There is nothing we want more than to be in your presence and hear from you today.

Several years ago, Stacie had reconstructive jaw surgery. I will spare you the medical details, but it was necessary for her long-term health. The six hours I spent in the lobby of the waiting room were the six longest hours of my life. I tried not to think about them breaking open her face and putting it back together. I tried not to think what might happen if this thing went bad. I tried to just pray and not eat too much. When the doctor came out with good news of a successful surgery, my heart was so happy.

There is a sad part of this story, however. Stacie experienced some pretty significant nerve damage during surgery. She lives with a constant pain that makes it hard for her to drink cold drinks or step outside when there is a cold wind. The saddest part is, we can't kiss on the lips anymore, at least not without Stacie experiencing pain. Before this happened, I never truly realized how important and beautiful a kiss could be. There is something so divine about a kiss. It is a gift from God, especially between a husband and a wife.

I have said before that there are only three women I'll kiss—one is 60 years old, one is 38, and the other is 6. You probably guessed it's my mom, my wife, and my daughter. At some point kissing Karis will get awkward, but I'm sure my mom will still be trying to kiss me on the lips when she's 80. For my Mom and Karis, I always turn my head just a half inch to the side right before the lips touch. Not sure why, it's just so personal to touch lips with another human, no matter how close they are. There are different types of kisses. We won't get into those details here, but we can all agree that a kiss is a form of intimacy.

I'm glad we don't kiss to greet one another at church services. Even if that used to be a thing, it's highly unlikely that people would be kissing after COVID-19. Maybe there will be a "mask kiss" that emerges through this season.

COVID-19 has hit me in different ways than expected. There are certain aspects of my old way of life that I don't miss, but there are some things I have had to grieve deeply. I love to hug people. Just like kisses, there are different types of hugs. Admittedly, I think some people hug weird; I even used to have a "back hugger" at Echo. Our security team helped me eliminate the approach from behind after a couple of instances of my being enveloped without my consent.

Although some people get it wrong and really mess it up, we were made for each other. The body of Christ was made for togetherness. God created us to fellowship. We weren't made for

separation or walls. We were made to come in close and extend peace and love. I have felt this love from Peter throughout this whole letter. Our lives are to be lived with deep love for God and one another.

Where do you think Peter got this tenderness? I'm sure you can guess. Three years by Jesus' side changed him. His boldness was now coupled with kindness. Jesus had returned to Heaven, but He left love here. You know where this love comes from? It is a by-product of the hope the Holy Spirit gives to our lives.

Romans 5:4-5 (NLT) says, *"And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation. And this hope will not lead to disappointment. For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with love."*

History tells us that Peter was murdered upside down on a cross for his faith in Jesus. When Jesus was crucified, Peter cowered in fear. I just recently discovered that many historians believe that Peter first watched his wife be martyred. He then requested his cross be turned upside down because he was unworthy of being killed in the same manner as Jesus. By the power of the Holy Spirit, Grandpa Peter stayed faithful all the way to the end!

Peter is gone, Jesus is in heaven, but the Holy Spirit remains with us to fill our hearts with hope. No matter what our circumstances, His presence is our hope. We have become conduits of this hope to a dark world. Like Peter, we too are waiting for the day when He returns. But for now we can walk with living hope.

That hope fills our hearts with love and brings peace to our communities, our churches, our businesses, and our families. Our 40-day journey together is coming to close, but our hope journey continues. Hope is a person, not an event. Because Jesus is our hope, the best is always ahead of us.

Thank you for hanging in there. Don't give up, soldier! Keep seeking the heart of God. Humble yourself. Recommit your ways to the King. Remember, this life is so short. When it's all over, you will stand before the King. It will be worth it when you hear those words, "Well done, good and faithful servant." Matthew 25:23 (NIV).



PRAYER

*Father, thank you for leading us during this time. We love you!
Help us stay faithful all the way to the end.*

In Jesus name I pray, Amen.

