



# HOPE PROJECT

## A 40-DAY JOURNEY

# WEEK 4

STUDY PLAN

## DAY 22 - July 6, 2020

### 1 Peter 3:10-12 (NLT)

“For the Scriptures say, ‘If you want to enjoy life and see many happy days, keep your tongue from speaking evil and your lips from telling lies. Turn away from evil and do good. Search for peace, and work to maintain it. The eyes of the Lord watch over those who right, and his ears are open to their prayers. But the Lord turns his face against those who do evil.’”

### Psalms 118:24 (NLT)

“This is the day the Lord has made. We will rejoice and be glad in it.”

**A**m I the only person who gets annoyed with people who are happy all the time? I can think of a whole host of reasons why they frustrate me. One is the guilt I feel when I'm around them. I seem to find a lot of reasons to complain. To safeguard these feelings and not overwhelm too many others, I've learned over time to complain internally or to a few select people who can handle my intensity. I tend to have very strong opinions and high levels of expectation. This means that I live with a constant, low-grade frustration that things are not as they should be.

Let me share a quick example. One day earlier this year, I was taking the kids to school. I'd planned my whole morning. I woke up on time. I had a great time reading the Bible and praying. I worked out, then showered. I had a high-protein, low-carb breakfast. With great expectations for the day, I prayed for the kids on the way to school and blessed them as I dropped them off.

I was headed to our weekly staff prayer meeting. The previous week I had laid into our staff about being late for staff prayer. We bring God our best, right? Low on the compassion, high on the challenge.

After I dropped off the kids and rounded the corner, I noticed that I-85, the major interstate by my house, was jam-packed. My trusted Waze app said that I would still make it by 8:55. I preferred to wing it, so I took another route. Long story short, I was late for staff prayer. I walked into the meeting as humbled as I have been in a long period of time. It ruined my morning.

Sometimes I'm so annoyed with my lack of happiness and the notion that contentment seems to always elude me. Don't we all look for happy days? We want the good life. In this passage Peter quotes Psalm 34, which was written 1,000 years earlier. The pursuit of happiness, evident throughout history, is still going strong today.

The whole world had its happiness shaken in the midst of COVID-19. How in the world am I supposed to be happy when I am stuck inside the four walls of my home, and it's raining outside? I can't even go to the grocery store without a spacesuit on. I haven't been alone with my wife without kids for three months. Happiness? Don't think so...

When we are stuck in less-than-ideal circumstances, we have several options. We can fight against the situation and use all our energy to bang our heads against the wall, we can try to outsmart the thing that we can't change, or, we can change our definition of happiness.

The longer I live, the more I realize that the kind of happiness the Bible is talking about is much more like what we describe as satisfaction. For me, it has to flow from a different metric. Peter says, *"the eyes of the Lord watch over those who do what is right."*

Not sure if that gives you comfort or creeps you out. There are eyes watching you throughout the day. These are the same eyes that burn with love and compassion for you. These eyes are not looking to curse. Just the opposite. The eyes of the Lord are looking to bless. He's trying to find people to strengthen and support.

I started a new practice recently. When I lay my head down on the pillow, I try to think back through my day. I recall decisions I made, words I spoke, my attitude as I interacted with others. I think through the work I accomplished when no one was looking. I think of the moments I wanted to say something sarcastic or hurtful and how the Holy Spirit gave me the wisdom to hold my tongue.

The other day, I lost my temper with my kids. Too much to get into here, but let's just say I was in my garage yelling like a toddler who had his toy truck taken from him. I kept pounding home this point: "Why can't you just get along?" It was not one of my finer moments. I had to humble myself and apologize to the kids, go on a prayer walk, and talk to a few godly friends who helped restore me.

As I was praying, these words of John's came to mind, "*Love covers a multitude of sins.*" 1 Peter 4:8 (ESV). It felt as though God—without excusing my anger—was re-affirming my attempts to make deposits into my kids' lives over the last 14 years of parenting.

In that moment my soul was happy, not because of my perfection or ability to get it right; I was happy because the gracious God of the universe let me know that He sees me. He's taking all my messes and He's combining them with His grace and my deep desire to please Him in order to knit together a life that blesses His heart.

Our brokenness can cause us to lose HOPE. God wants you to know today that He sees your desire to do what's right. For some it's very embryonic. He is way more concerned with trajectory than size. He can take whatever level of trust and obedience you give

Him and work with it. He wants to bless you and form you into a person of integrity, but you have to let Him work with you.

Choose today to do what's right. Own it when you mess up, and let those mess-ups push you further into His grace. Say you're sorry, and ask for forgiveness. Ask Him to help you change. When He helps you succeed, give Him glory. And when you lay your head down tonight, look back with satisfaction, knowing that your friendship with Jesus grew today.



## PRAYER

*Father, I'm so grateful for your kindness. Please help us become men and women of integrity. Help us keep our mouths from evil. Help us do good today and live for you. Please take our messes and make something beautiful.*

*In Jesus name I pray, Amen.*

## DAY 23 - July 7, 2020

### 1 Peter 3:13-15 (NLT)

“Now, who will want to harm you if you are eager to do good? But even if you suffer for doing what is right, God will reward you for it. So don’t worry or be afraid of their threats. Instead, you must worship Christ as Lord of your life. And if someone asks you about your hope as a believer, always be ready to explain it.”

One of my favorite things to do is participate in our Alpha group each semester. I love being around people who are exploring faith and trying to decide what they believe about Jesus. From the very beginning of our church, we have strived to create an environment where people can come and take things at their own pace. We will nudge, ask questions, and pray for you; but at the end of the day, you have to make your own decision to follow Jesus.

From the time I first made a decision to follow Jesus, I had an internal desire to share his Good News with other people. My mom recently found and showed me a little booklet I made when I was in early grade school. The booklet shows the plan of salvation and offers people a decision to follow Jesus at the end. She said that I used that book on my grandpa. Apparently, I told him if he didn’t turn to Jesus, he would go to hell. How would you like your seven-year-old grandson telling you to turn or burn?

I’ve gotten more gentle with my methods over time. Over the next two days, Peter is going to give us a much better approach—one that’s much more in line with how we do Alpha as a church.

Remember, Peter is writing to a group of mistreated followers of Jesus. They lived with constant threats and concern for their lives. As mostly peasants and slaves, the majority of them were constantly mistreated. Somehow, even against this backdrop, they were called to influence those around them with compassion and love, and be a shining light for Jesus.

Peter encourages the Christ-followers to be eager to do good. Have you ever noticed how a person who is eager to do good sticks out? My kids' responses to my requests to take out the trash or clean the dishes span a wide range. Sometimes I'm met with the look of disgust, and other times they are compliant. What's really surprising is when they do it without being asked. That's being eager to do good.

An employee, a friend, a child, a spouse, a house-worker who is *"eager to do good"* shines. Their life sticks out because it is uncommon.

When we live like this, we will still encounter moments when we're treated unjustly. When we find ourselves in unjust situations, Peter reminds us that our applause, approval, and advancement comes from God. Every eager-to-do-good moment of your life is captured on God's feed.

We don't need to live with fear; instead, we replace our worry with worship. What if I could make a choice to turn every moment of worry into worship? When I don't know the future, I can trust and thank God that He has a solution in mind. When your boss skips over your hard work, you can still give glory to the God who sees it all. You can replace your fear of lay-offs with a trust in the Lord who has you in His hands.

When we live like this, people will ask us questions. Our neighbors, family members, co-workers, and friends will be curious. Then, we are called to have a response to their curiosity. Have you ever



noticed how certain people's lives have a way of making us ask questions? Sometimes their lives are confusing in a weird way. Other times people are so different that you want to get close and know why!

Where does this come from? It comes from a real and abiding connection to the living God. It flows out of friendship with God. It is the result of a deep awareness of grace. The life that piques curiosity is filled with the HOPE of Jesus' ability to sustain us in the most difficult of circumstances.

Let's all put down our judgmental approaches and recognize that the greatest gift we can give the world is a flourishing relationship with God—one where we're ready to do good and we trust God to bless and reward our faithfulness.



## PRAYER

*Father, I pray that you would give our churches a passion for people who have never experienced your love. Help us to be increasingly eager to do good. Help us trade our worry for worship. Help us grow in our readiness to explain the good things you have done for us. Thank you for the hope of the empty tomb and the reality that you have defeated sin and death and made us new.*

*In Jesus name I pray, Amen.*

## DAY 24 - July 8, 2020

### 1 Peter 3:16-17 (NLT)

“But do this in a gentle and respectful way. Keep your conscience clear. Then if people speak against you, they will be ashamed when they see what a good life you live because you belong to Christ. Remember, it is better to suffer for doing good, if that is what God wants, than to suffer for doing wrong!”

**H**ave you ever noticed how certain friends bring out different parts of your personality? Parts of you come alive around different people. I think it's a lot like when Mary, the Mother of Jesus walked into the room with Elizabeth, the Mother of John. The baby inside of Elizabeth jumped for joy when he heard Mary's voice. The life inside of Elizabeth found a jam with the life inside of Mary.

I'm a better man when I'm with Stacie. I'm more thoughtful and kind when she is in the room. Our team really loves when she attends our meetings. I have other friends who bring out a funny side of my personality, other friends I love to dream with, some friends help me be more courageous, and others who help me think with more wisdom.

Imagine what it would have been like to walk in the physical presence of Jesus. A moment in His presence was enough to change a person's whole life. Simon of Cyrene was profoundly impacted by a brief interaction with Jesus. One day as he was walking into Jerusalem, he noticed a Nazarene being beaten on His way to Golgotha for His crucifixion. Soldiers ordered Simon to carry the cross (Mark 15:21).

We don't know how long this interaction took, but we do know it impacted Simon so much that his sons, Alexander and Rufus, later became followers of Jesus. The journey under the cross with Jesus changed Simon. Peter tells this story to Mark as he pens this gospel account.

Let's just camp here for a few moments. Beaten, bloody, bruised, crowned with thorns. Spit on and mocked. What was Jesus doing on His way to His last breath? He was whispering hope to Simon. Soldiers drive stakes into His hands and feet, yet when He is lifted up, He leads one of His fellow prisoners to salvation and asks the Father to forgive the soldiers for their ignorance. And if that's not enough, He also appoints someone to take care of His mom.

No wonder the soldiers said, "Surely He was the Son of God."

Jesus' life of devotion, power, and unconditional love provides the backdrop for Peter's life of influence. Peter's model for a "gentle and respectful" approach to evangelism was King Jesus. Jesus held children on his lap, restored prostitutes, hung out with sinners and tax collectors, and dealt with His enemies with so much grace.

He lived in such a way that those who spoke against Him would eventually be ashamed. He was willing to suffer for doing good. This was the Master's approach to reaching the unreached.

To Jesus, people were never a project to complete. To Jesus, people were and are friends to be loved. It was never about winning the battle of being right or understood. Jesus was willing to endure disrespect in order to show respect and honor to others.

Hey, if you are feeling convicted right now, join the club. I have so far to go. I want to get the last word in. I still like to be understood. I struggle when people think I'm wrong. I still care way too much about people seeing me the right way.

Jesus helped Peter get over that! The consistent transformation of the Holy Spirit in Peter's life had brought him from brashness to gentleness. As we will see soon, Peter was now willing to suffer.

Sometimes we have to choose if we would rather make a point or if we'd like to make an impact. Jesus said, *"I am humble and gentle at heart."* Matthew 11:29 (NLT). His gentleness empowers us to give up arguments and assumptions. We are now called to conversations and friendship with people around us who need to encounter the grace of God.

What's the best way to convince someone of God's grace? It's to live grace.

Ravi Zacharias was an apologist who recently passed away. I still remember listening to one of his books on CD while driving through the Mountains of Thailand on a big bus during the summer of 2003. My heart was in a place of real dependence at the time, mostly because there were several times I thought the bus was going to fly off the mountain.

I remember sitting on that bus with tears streaming down my cheeks as Ravi described his first encounter with the Good News of Jesus. As you can probably tell I'm still moved to my core by this Good News. The longer I follow Jesus, the more I see the disparity of His greatness and my brokenness. At the same time, in my brokenness, I am deeply aware of God's love for me that has poured into my heart through the Holy Spirit.

This love makes me more gentle and kind. This awareness of grace has helped me to see how often I am wrong and mistaken. If we have received such grace, how can we not be stirred to share this Good News with the world around us. Jesus has changed us in order that we might bring HOPE and LIGHT to our cities!

Let us go with this kindness, honor, gentleness, and love.



## PRAYER

*Father, I pray that you would help us become like Jesus. Help us be gentle and kind. Help us be willing to suffer if it is your will. Help us be the kind of people who join your mission to seek and save the lost!*

*In Jesus name I pray, Amen.*

## DAY 25 - July 9, 2020

### 1 Peter 3:18 (NLT)

“Christ suffered for our sins once for all time. He never sinned, but he died for sinners to bring you safely home to God. He suffered physical death, but he was raised to life in the Spirit.”

Welcome back! One of my favorite words in this passage today is YOU. I wonder how YOU are doing and what God is teaching YOU. In fact, if there is something cool God is doing in your life through this time, I really would love to hear it. I have been praying for you in some pretty specific ways. One thing I’m praying for is your personal connection to God. I’m praying for your friendship with Jesus, that you would experience the kind of hope only He can bring.

Let’s be honest, if I asked you to share this verse with a friend, it might be easier than to receive it for yourself. The truth is, we can tell somebody else how much God loves them, but sometimes it’s harder to think of ourselves as the recipient of God’s love.

I like the way the New Living Translation says, *“He died for sinners to bring you safely home to God.”*

I have a lot of memories of different homes throughout my life. The one place that sticks out most is 12034 Brewster in Livonia, Michigan. You can look it up; it’s a pretty cool house. My dad purchased it before he and my mom got married. The yard had a big grassy hill in the back. In the summertime, my brother Josh and I would roll down it like wrecking balls. We had a pool, a

basketball court, a pool table, and a few really cool, big Michigan trees. When I think about that place, I miss it. It probably was the place that felt most like a home to me. It is the only home that I have memories of my mom and dad together.

Home is supposed to be a special place. It's a place where you can laugh, cry, connect, and be yourself. It's a place where you have access to the people you love the most. It's a place where guests are honored and life is lived as it's meant to be lived.

This world leaves a longing for that kind of place, a place to call home.

Stacie says to me that home for her is anywhere she can climb into bed with me at the end of the day. We've made our home in a lot of different places over the last 17 years of marriage. I love the thought that we could call any place home. In a shack of an apartment on James Ave in Fort Worth, Texas, to breathtaking San Jose, California. We are at home when we are together.

Jesus suffered for our sins so that we could be at home with God. He was marred beyond recognition so that you could do life with God for all eternity. When you are going through hard times, you especially need a place to call home.

One day we will see Him in all His glory! Our bodies will be made new. We will receive a new physical home. We won't have to outbid one another or spend hours on Redfin trying to find it.

Jesus' moment of suffering makes a way for us to live with eternal hope. He died one time; a full and final payment for all of your sins, and with that one willing sacrifice, He changed your identity from sinner to child of God. He was raised to life in Spirit, and now He invites you to that same life. Because of Jesus you have full access to the Father right now. You can enter into His presence with confidence, knowing He hears your every prayer. Jesus' suffering has made a way for YOU!

By the power of the Holy Spirit, we can live at home with God today!

Take a few minutes to imagine yourself entering into the presence of the Father. Ask the Holy Spirit to give you increased understanding of grace and forgiveness. Spend a few minutes thanking Jesus for the price He paid so you could be at home with God.



## PRAYER

*Father, thank you for your mercy. Thank you, Jesus, for your death on a cross! Thank you for suffering for me. Holy Spirit, please help us experience “life in the Spirit” today.*

*In Jesus name I pray, Amen.*



## DAY 26 - July 10, 2020

### 1 Peter 3:19-21 (NIV)

“After being made alive, he went and made proclamation to the imprisoned spirits—to those who were disobedient long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at God’s right hand—with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.”

**W**elcome! Today is going to be a fun day for us. We are going to dive into a passage Martin Luther labeled as “a more obscure passage perhaps than any other in the New Testament, so that I do not know for a certainty just what Peter means” (Luther, Commentary on Peter & Jude, 166).

Currently, I have four commentaries open in front of me on my desk. I’ve read through all of them regarding this particular passage. I’ve read and absorbed and studied until I have smoke coming out of my ears. I feel like I’m back in seminary trying to make enough sense of what I’m learning to pass the class. Before I jump into the text, I’m going to take off my student hat and put my pastor hat back on.

Some people get tripped up on Bible passages that are hard to understand—like this one. Some like to hotly debate what the

original Greek words mean and the various theological explanations for these passages of Scripture which have been debated for thousands of years. I was like this for a little while, maybe two years. Then I got married, had a kid, and planted a church.

The church we started was reaching college students primarily. Our students were way more concerned with how they could stop looking at porn, what to do when they got their girlfriend pregnant, how to stop smoking pot, and how to overcome the shame from their past. They weren't sitting around their dorm rooms debating 1 Peter 3:19-21.

Yet, here we are. I am going to do my best to interpret a passage from the Bible that confused Martin Luther, the great theologian. As I mentioned in one of our earlier devotions, I like to think of it like a puzzle. Some puzzle pieces emerge quickly and clearly, while others pieces take longer to put together.

Several heart attitudes make a big difference when seeking to understand, especially regarding harder parts of the Bible. I remember being overly confident of my theological convictions in grad school. Now, I've been proven wrong on things I knew beyond on a shadow of a doubt in my late teens and early twenties. Seeing my overconfidence in the rearview mirror helps me seek truth with more humility. First, I would encourage you to read the Bible with humility, especially the hard parts. Secondly, obedience to that which is already understood helps you understand more. This is because you understand with both your mind and your heart. God's word is written from His heart and His mind. When you know His heart, it is a whole lot easier to understand His mind.

Let's look at several explanations for this passage.

First, it could mean that Jesus was actually preaching “through Noah to those who lived while Noah was building the ark” (The New American Commentary, 184, Schreiner quoting Augustine). The second option says Jesus was preaching to saints who were liberated by Christ between his death and resurrection, or third, those who were sinners in Noah’s generation, including those from other generations who never had an opportunity to respond to the gospel (ibid, 185). Fourth is that Jesus was preaching to evil angels and demons as a proclamation of victory and judgement over evil (ibid).

Every commentary I have read has a different conclusion, but all of them fall into one of these categories with some slight variation.

Y’all, I don’t know which is the correct view. This whole ark and baptism connection makes things even more difficult. The recipients of Peter’s letter would have had a better understanding of Peter’s intent.

That being said, here are a couple of things we can conclude. God used an ark to save people in the Old Testament. In addition to using an ark, God used a man named Noah. Noah preached for a long time to people that a flood was coming. He warned everyone to climb into his huge ark. For 120 years Noah built and preached. He called them to repent from their wicked ways and be saved. The only ones who listened were the eight members of Noah’s family. Noah and his family weren’t saved based on Noah’s perfection, but because he trusted in God’s provision. The Bible says that Noah was saved through the waters. God saved Noah, and He used the ark to make a way. As the flood water splashed on his face, he probably was thanking God and grieving the loss of friends below. The water and the boat were symbols of God’s saving power.

The water and the boat also pointed to a future day when Jesus would come to save the world. Now, the waters of baptism are a

symbol pointing back to what Jesus has done to make a way for us to be saved. Through the waters of baptism, we are reminded that this cleansing is not from dirt, but it represents how we are washed by Jesus' mercy and cleansed from our sin.

The interpretation I like most is one of Jesus descending into Hell between his death and resurrection. In the Apostles' Creed, a line says, "He was crucified, dead, buried, descended into Hell, the third day He rose again." Let's be clear. The creed is not the Bible; however, it is a description of how the early church understood the Bible.

This passage is one of the few in the New Testament that leads us to believe Jesus descended into Hell between His death and resurrection.

William Barclay wrote, "The doctrine of the descent into Hades preserves the precious truth that no one who ever lived is left without a sight of Christ and without the offer of the salvation of God." If Jesus did descend into Hell to give people who died prior to Jesus' death on the cross an opportunity to live eternal life, that's no small thing.

As I try to wrap this thing up, I apologize if I've confused you and/or left you wishing for more.

One thing I do want us to be certain of: Jesus, who conquered sin and death, is now seated at the right hand of the Father. He is greater than any spiritual force that can come at our lives. He is able to save and deliver us, and He will return again.

When He returns, all of these things will be made clear. For now, we can be certain that Hell is a real, permanent place, and according to Jesus and the New Testament, our opportunity is right now to turn to Him and avoid spending eternity in Hell. One day every knee will bow in His presence. Some will spend eternity

apart from Him in a place reserved for Satan and his demons. The rest of us who trust in Him for our salvation will be “with Him in paradise forever.”

In that place He will be crowned King and worshipped forever. There will be no more sin, sorrow, death, or suffering. If we are in Him, the moment we physically die, our suffering will be over. Our soul will slip into His loving arms.

I want you to ask yourself today, “Have I put my full trust in Jesus for the forgiveness of my sins? Have I given Jesus my entire life and placed my faith in Him as the Lord of my life?”

If you have not done that, will you do it right now?



## PRAYER

*Pray with me, “Jesus, I believe you died on a cross for my sins. I believe you conquered the grave and you are alive. I believe you will return. Please forgive me for my past. I give you my life today!”*

*In Jesus name I pray, Amen.*

If you just prayed that prayer, please let someone from your church know. If you email me to tell me ([pastor@echo.church](mailto:pastor@echo.church)), I’ll celebrate with you and help you get connected and resourced!

## DAY 27 - July 11, 2020

### 1 Peter 4:1-3 (NLT)

“So then, since Christ suffered physical pain, you must arm yourselves with the same attitude he had, and be ready to suffer, too. For if you have suffered physically for Christ, you have finished with sin. You won’t spend the rest of your lives chasing your own desires, but you will be anxious to do the will of God. You have had enough in the past of the evil things that godless people enjoy—their immorality and lust, their feasting and drunkenness and wild parties, and their terrible worship of idols.”

One of the greatest blessings of my life as a young man was the influence of an amazing student pastor and an incredible student ministry. Pastor Filipe from Echo and I were a part of the same student group as teenagers. We used to have these incredible retreats, and on Saturday night of the retreat you always knew there would be an amazing time of worship. I remember getting excited as the time for the retreat grew nearer. The worship music was just two guitars, a bongo drum, and a bunch of out-of-tune high school students singing at the top of their lungs. We really learned to sing and worship as loudly as we could and with as much sincerity as we could muster up. We meant the words we were singing as much as we could understand and mean anything at 15, 16, and 17 years old.

One of my favorite songs from that time was super simple. It contained this line, “I have decided to follow Jesus, no turning back, no turning back.” So simple. A prayer of commitment. A moment of decision. My eyes fixed on Him. My life is His.

I've been singing these words in my heart the best I know how for over 25 years. I am so grateful for all the people along the way who have influenced my life and loved me to Jesus. My mom and dad both imperfectly faced their own battles along the way, but I can say confidently at 38 they both loved me to Jesus. My mom came to faith out of the brokenness of an alcoholic household. My dad grew up with a lot of wounds from his parents, but they both decided to follow Jesus and resolved to do their best to help me do the same.

I had a whole host of mentors and people who poured into me along the way. Mike Bonser, Rusty Gailey, Dr. Stan Parker, Erik Shamblyn, John Worcester, Rick Burge, and Steve Stroope are just a few of them. What troubles me is the ones who are not mentioned here. Sadly, somewhere along the way, they decided to turn back. The journey got too hard, the suffering too great, and they threw in the towel on loving and following Jesus. Not all of us will finish the race well. It's kind of sad to think about, isn't it?

Peter gives us a part of the mindset that we need to embrace if we are going to keep running the race. He says that we need to be *"ready to suffer."* It's kind of like when we pick up the weights in the gym. The pain never feels good in the moment, but the future payoff makes it worth it. The transformation coming tomorrow makes us willing to bear up under the pain and grind it out for another round of curls and push-ups today.

When Peter says, *"you are finished with sin,"* he isn't saying that you won't ever sin again. He is helping us frame our lives through the reality that the power of sin and death no longer has to be our story. Our past really can stay in the past.

The more you experience this new life in Jesus, the less you want that old life. Sometimes you get a taste of it for a day or two. You gossip with some co-workers, you roll around in bitterness for a little while, you stay up late watching the kind of movies you

stopped watching a few years ago. They just don't taste as good anymore. One of my good friends told me the Holy Spirit really impressed upon Him that he needed to completely stop smoking pot. One night, when he got together with some old high school buddies, he tried it again for the first time in a few years. He said it was like the fun of the sin was gone for him.

Don't get me wrong, I think we could all singe our consciences and go off the deep end. But when you go back to sin after walking with Jesus, sometimes you vehemently want to say to yourself, "I'm done. I'm so done with that!"

Why? You're made new. The Holy Spirit lives in you now, and He is giving you new desires. He is changing you from the inside out and making you anxious to do His will.

Here's the tough news. Your readiness to suffer for Him will eventually become your readiness to do His will. The more willing you are to endure hardship, the more you will eventually want to do what's right. Over time, it will be less and less because you have to, and more and more because you get to. It will be more of a song you sing, "I have decided to follow Jesus, no turning back, no turning back."

Friend, He is forming you and shaping you. You and I both have a long way to go, but for today let's give Him some praise for how far He's brought us. Some of you are living today not as a slave to the pursuit of your own desires, but as a servant anxious to do the master's will. Praise God!

As we wrap up things today, let's arm ourselves for battle. Let's do war on the message in our culture that tells us we should pursue comfort and ease of life. Let's continue to become the kind of people who place a high priority on character over comfort and joyfully sing His praises in the midst of our hardships.



I have decided to follow Jesus, come hell, come high water, NO TURNING BACK!



## PRAYER

*Jesus, help us to follow you all the way to the end! Thank you for suffering on our behalf. Help us be willing to suffer for you—no matter the cost. Help us learn to love the life that is in you and realize that it is better than anything this world can offer us.*

*In Jesus name I pray, Amen.*

## DAY 28 - July 12, 2020

### 1 Peter 4:4-6 (NLT)

“Of course, your former friends are surprised when you no longer plunge into the flood of wild and destructive things they do. So they slander you. But remember that they will have to face God, who stands ready to judge everyone, both the living and the dead. That is why the Good News was preached to those who are now dead—so although they were destined to die like all people, they now live forever with God in the Spirit.”

**H**i, friend! I’m glad you’re back. You made it another day. You’re still standing. You endured. I told Stacie yesterday that I think I am going to get a tattoo on my wrist that says, “Endure.” I am joking a bit, but not totally. Sometimes I need to be reminded that by the power of the Holy Spirit I can faithfully endure whatever this world throws at me. And in the end, by His grace, I’ll still be standing.

Wise king Solomon said, “*Seven times a righteous person falls; eight times they get up.*” Proverbs 24:16. So, let’s rise together for another day. Go ahead and splash some water on your face, take a sip of your coffee or tea, and wake up. Ask the Holy Spirit to speak to your heart and mind. Let’s go!

One thing I love about Echo Church, and several of the other churches that have joined us for The Hope Project, is the surprising number of people who have made first-time decisions to follow Jesus. When someone makes a decision to follow Jesus, some things transform overnight, while other things take years to change.

One of the hardest decisions a person has to make after deciding to follow Jesus is what to do with their network of friends. Ideally, you would share with them the change in your life, and your friends would experience what you've experienced. We have intentionally designed Echo Church to help you make a difference in the lives of those around you. So after you publicly declare your love for Jesus, some friends and family members will come with you.

Other friends will likely stand in judgment. Peter literally uses the words, *"they are surprised that you do not run with them."* 1 Peter 4:4 (NASB). The new light in your life exposes the darkness in theirs. Your new purpose reveals the emptiness of their ways. Your peace reveals their angst, and you now are a reminder to them of what is missing in their life.

Let's be real, not every one of our old friends will act like this. But some will, and they can cause a ton of grief. Part of you feels conflicted because you want to love them to Jesus, but their very presence is toxic to your soul. It's really hard when this is someone you are close to—a brother, a sister, a best friend, a childhood friend, your classmate you have been buddies with for five years.

In this passage, Peter gives us HOPE for our struggle by reminding us again of the finish line. At some point the struggle is going to be over and we will stand before God and give an account for the life we've lived. In many ways this should make us tremble, but in other ways it should give us a holy longing to see His face and hear His words, *"Well done, good and faithful servant."* Matthew 25:23 (NIV).

While in high school, I received a lot of ridicule for my new life in Jesus. Several of the guys on the football team mocked me and made fun of my faith. To this day, I'm friends with some of them on Facebook. It's sad to me to see how many of them are still chasing the same life they chased back then. They continue

to pursue worldly things, not realizing the only thing that really satisfies is friendship with the Living God.

My struggle in the locker room of Farmington High School seems so small now. I'm so glad the Holy Spirit walked me through those moments and helped me continue to *"run with"* Jesus. Back then, I experienced many days when I didn't feel like it would be worth it. Now I can say without a shadow of doubt, "It was worth it." When you stand before Jesus and see Him in His glory, every moment of struggle will have been worth it, and you won't remember the pain.

Peter tells us all of this not to judge others, but to persevere with perspective. Why do you think he then adds this whole *"preaching to the dead"* thing back in here? See the day before yesterday for my feeble attempt to explain this concept. I think he places it right here to remind us that God doesn't want anyone to perish.

Short of compromising His character, He will do whatever it takes to help people experience His love. If Jesus, before His death on the cross, would go to Hell and back to offer everyone the opportunity of eternal life, how important do you think sharing the Good News is to the heart of God? Pretty important!

Jesus wants His people to join Him in this mission. Sometimes people won't come with us, but we keep moving, keep sharing, and keep bringing hope to those around us. Other than running with them in their ways, we do everything we can to love on those around us who don't know Jesus.

If you are being mocked or mistreated for your faith today, I pray that God would give you a long-term perspective in order that you might persevere. If you have lost your passionate concern for those who live in spiritual darkness, I pray that Jesus ignites your heart with urgency to share His Good News with others.



## PRAYER

*Father, I pray that you would help us persevere in the face of misunderstanding. Help us endure when we are mistreated. Help us care about lost people as much as you do!*

*In Jesus name I pray, Amen.*

