

1 Peter
Part One: Stand Fast
Pastor Rick Henderson **February 4-5, 2023**

I am so glad that you are here today. That probably doesn't surprise you to hear me say that. I'm always glad when we have a chance to gather together. Believe it or not, today is the day that we kick off a new message series that I've been prepping for and looking forward to for a year. This has been a long time coming.

Over the next 8 weeks, I aim to encourage you with the things that have encouraged me. Isn't that a need we all share in common? If this is your first time to church and you aren't sure about all of this religious stuff, or if you've been coming years and you're a devoted follower of Jesus, and to all those who are somewhere in between—isn't it true that there are times that we benefit from someone else giving us a transfusion of courage to face what stands in front of us?

Of course. Every single one of us benefits from that. Since that is such a common human experience, it naturally leads me to this question.

QUESTION: What are the things that knock you off your feet?

What are the situations, and what are the circumstances that cause you to need courage? You don't have to answer this out loud. We can all simply be honest with ourselves on this one.

- What is it that causes your knees to buckle?
- What is it that causes you to feel like there is no way forward?
- What is it that causes you to self-medicate with something that you know isn't good for you?
- What is it that causes you to feel like faith isn't enough to get you through it?
- What is it that nudges you into being a version of yourself that you don't even like?

Are you with me? Every single one of us has moments in our lives that knock us off our feet. For people in the room who are more irreligious and people in the room who are religious—here is an irony that we could probably write books about. There are things that knock irreligious people off their feet, and that cause them to feel a kind of jealousy for the faith that religious people have. And there are things that knock religious people off their feet that cause them to doubt the faith they have.

Whomever you are and whatever your background—this is something for all of us. Recently I was in the hospital with an elderly man who is facing a very severe health crisis. As I sat at his bedside I was captivated by his steady faith. He raised his hands in the air and said, "Tell the people at church who are praying for me that God is the one who is responsible for us."

This fragile man had courage from a faith that is anything but fragile. Maybe it's the loss of health or even death that is the thing that knocks you off your feet. Maybe it's something altogether different. Whatever it is, the New Testament book of 1 Peter can be a transfusion of courage for you.

I don't know if people write letters to each other anymore. Who writes letters? Young couples in love, do they write letters to each other anymore? There's nothing wrong with getting a snap from your boo, but nothing beats the old-school letter when you are in love. What do you do when you get a letter?

Where do you start? You always start at the beginning. As strange as it may sound, ancient letters often had personal stuff at the end. Sometimes the most meaningful content that would frame the whole letter, came in the conclusion.

1 Peter was never intended to be thought of as a book. It was a letter that was sent to churches. We are going to start at the end. This is just 2 sentences from the end.

1 PETER 5:12 *With the help of Silas, whom I regard as a faithful brother, I have written to you briefly, encouraging you and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand fast in it.*

The goal is encouragement **so that** we can stand fast. Every person shares this in common. We want a foundation that we can build our lives on. I think that I have just enough grey in my beard that I can get away with saying this. Everybody in life wants these 3 things.

- SIGNIFICANCE
- SECURITY
- SATISFACTION

It may not be true that everyone gets these 3 things. But everyone wants them. Significance is what makes life worth living. It's what we are convinced gives us value—self-worth. Security is what makes us safe. It's what protects the significance we need. Satisfaction is about being fulfilled. Together these three things give us a sense that we have worth, that we are safe, and that whatever we had to do to get it, it was all worth it.

Believe it or not, whenever you read about idols in the Bible, and that is a concept that comes up a lot, it's always about those 3 things.

IDOLS: Anything, other than Jesus, that we look to for **SIGNIFICANCE, SECURITY, and SATISFACTION.**

Did you know that followers of Jesus can have idols? Did you know that followers of Jesus can actually try and use faith as a way to serve the deep-down idols in our hearts? It's important to note exactly what Peter said.

1 PETER 5:12 *With the help of Silas, whom I regard as a faithful brother, I have written to you briefly, encouraging you and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand fast in it.*

Why didn't he just say, "the grace of God." The word **true** isn't fluff, it's intentional. Why?

We are all vulnerable to looking for encouragement in a **FALSE** version of **GRACE.**

This is where I'm going to ask you to lean in and to listen with energy and effort. To make this clear, communication requires effort from both of us. Here it is. When we use God, when we use prayer, when we use faith to try and get from God the things that we believe will make us significant, secure, and satisfied—we are not standing in the truth. **We are reducing God to a kind of valet for our idols.**

Jesus alone is the source of our significance, security, and satisfaction. The false version that we are vulnerable to is subtle and sneaky. The false version of grace is trying to get God to give us the things that we believe will make us OK.

- If health is the source of significance, security, or satisfaction in life—the vulnerability is to try and use God to get that.
- If marriage is your go-to source for significance, security, or satisfaction in life—the vulnerability is to try and use God to get that.
- If financial or career success is the source of significance, security, or satisfaction in life—the vulnerability is to try and use God to get that.
- If being admired by others is the source of significance, security, or satisfaction in life—the vulnerability is to try and use God to get that.

When someone tries to use God as a means to get from God whatever that thing is, and God never gives them that thing because he's not in the business of serving our idols, that's when we hear people say things like this, "Faith didn't work for me. Christianity didn't work for me."

Let's stand fast, and let's make sure to stand fast in the **true** grace of God. Now we're ready to move to the beginning of the letter and begin our journey into what the truth is.

1 PETER 1:1-5 *Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To God's **elect**, **exiles** scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, who have been **chosen** according to the **foreknowledge** of God the Father, through the **sanctifying** work of the Spirit, **to be obedient** to Jesus Christ and **sprinkled with his blood**: Grace and peace be yours in abundance. Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a **living hope** through the **resurrection** of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an **inheritance** that can never perish, spoil or fade. This **inheritance** is kept in heaven for you, who through faith are **shielded by God's power** until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.*

What stood out to you as we read that together? I highlighted some of the words for you. Much of what I highlighted has to do with our identity. We are going to see all throughout this letter from Peter that he speaking to people who are facing tough challenges. And over and over and over again, he keeps reinforcing our identity in Jesus. He keeps reinforcing what we have because of what Jesus did for us.

- We may be exiles and feel like we don't belong, but we are the elect of God.
- We are chosen by God.
- The Holy Spirit of God is working in us.
- We have a living hope. That's another way of saying the same thing we learned from the Apostle Paul in Ephesians. The same power that raised Jesus from the dead is available to us when we believe in Jesus. **This hope we have is alive and it's unstoppable.**
- We have an inheritance that can never be taken from us.

This is the true grace of God that when we remember it, we will be encouraged and able to stand fast—even when standing isn't easy. It's as if Peter is saying over and over again, "Remember who you are."

When I was a teenager, every time I would go out, my dad would say the same thing to me, without fail. He would say, "Remember who you are and what you are." Whether he realized it or not, my dad's parenting philosophy was biblical. **The courage you need and the clarity you need comes when you remember your identity.**

There is a verse that is probably going to come up a lot in this series. I want to encourage you to memorize it. Even if you are not good at memorizing, I want you to try. You can only be encouraged by what you can remember. This is it.

1 PETER 2:9 *But **you are** a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.*

Can we read this out loud together? 1. 2. 3. **[READ THE VERSE]** Marinate in and meditate on that. If you have trusted in Jesus, if you have given your allegiance to Jesus—that's who you are! Your significance was accomplished by Jesus. Your security is ensured by Jesus. Your satisfaction is guaranteed by Jesus. What are you facing? What are the things that threaten to knock you off your feet? Remember your identity. This is how we've committed to talking about identity at our church.

IDENTITY: I find joy in defining myself by what Jesus did, not what I do.
What is the story I'm telling myself about myself?

Peter wrote this letter to Jesus followers who felt alone and out of place. He wrote this letter to people who felt unwanted, and who lived in communities that were hostile to their faith. They faced a range of injustices and struggles that would cause our knees to buckle. And the constant refrain from Peter is to remember who you are in Christ.

Over the course of this series, we will tackle some very practical stuff. There's going to be some real talk in this series. But what has to come first is a reckoning with who we are. So, this is our thesis, our drumbeat throughout this series.

SERIES THESIS: Let your **IDENTITY** drive your **ACTIVITY**.

Too many people start here **[ACTIVITY]**. We don't start with behavior. Being encouraged by the true grace of God means we focus on who we are first. What we do always comes after that. We have a God-given purpose and that flows out of our God-given identity.

1 PETER 1:1 *Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To God's **elect**, exiles scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia*

This a word that gets a lot of attention. Every time you read the word chosen and every time you read the word elect—it's the same word. This is word that communicates rich and encouraging truth. And let's be honest. It's a word that has sparked debate. Debate is OK. Disagreeing is OK. Fighting and division is not.

I love studying theology and doctrine. I want you to love it too. What I'm going to say next may sound like gibberish to some of you. If you have no idea what I'm talking about—don't feel badly about that. Just hang with me. And for others of you I'm speaking your language and this is going be incredibly important to you.



There are more than these 4 major perspectives on this word. But it's one of these 4 perspectives that probably shape how you think about being chosen by God. Even if you've never heard of these before, you've probably been influenced by someone who advocated for one of these perspectives.

I've studied them all. I'm convinced that in each camp, you'll find people who are smart, who love Jesus, and who love his word. They just disagree on the best way to understand the full richness and depth of what it means to be chosen, to be God's elect. What I'm going to do today is highlight what everyone, from every viewpoint can agree on. Before I do that, I want to make note of this.

If you want to understand what Peter means, don't turn to **OLD THEOLOGIANS** before you turn to the **OLD TESTAMENT**.

All throughout Peter's letter, he uses vibrant imagery and metaphor to teach us the true grace of God. That imagery comes from the Old Testament. By all means, study old theologians, and pastors. There is so much to discover there. And yet, we will be flat-out wrong if our first move is to turn to theologians from 16th-century Europe. Because Peter is drawing from the Old Testament, we must go there first. To understand Peter means that we have to know and understand the Old Testament.

If that's the part of the Bible that you've been skipping over, I want to introduce you to the Bible Project.



This is a website and an app that has brilliant resources for you. Use this resource to better understand the Biblical story—especially if you feel a little uneasy with the Old Testament.

What are some things we need to know about being God's chosen, or being God's elect? Let's do a little Theology 101.

THEOLOGY 101: Election is more often about **SERVICE** than about **SALVATION**.

When you read the Bible cover to cover, you find passages about people being chosen or elected. The majority of those instances are about being chosen for service. The nation of Israel was God's chosen or

elected people to serve a very important purpose. It's important that we don't confuse service and election. If we do we won't be able to make sense of what we read. The Apostle Paul wrote this.

2 TIMOTHY 2:10 *Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, **that they too may obtain the salvation** that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory.*

Believe it or not, taking the Bible seriously means that we can't assume that being elect always equals being saved. Election is more often about service than salvation. Peter is writing to people who are saved, who are in Christ, and he wants them to know that being chosen by God has a purpose.

1 PETER 1:2 *...who have been **chosen** according to the **foreknowledge** of God the Father, through the **sanctifying** work of the Spirit, **to be obedient** to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance.*

If we are in Christ, we are chosen by God and we have a God-given purpose. Let's keep going with it.

THEOLOGY 101: If you are in the **ELECTED** one, you are one of the **ELECT**.

How many of you have watched the Chosen series? Do you know what it's called The Chosen? Because Jesus is the chosen one. Jesus is the elected one. You find this in the Old Testament and the New Testament.

ISAIAH 42:1 *"Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my **chosen one** in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him, and he will bring justice to the nations."*

As we journey through 1 Peter we will see how he keeps linking back to Old Testament prophets because they were talking about Jesus. From a biblical perspective, when we trust in Jesus, we are in Jesus. Being in Jesus means his status is applied to those of us who are in him.

2 CORINTHIANS 5:21 *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so **that in him we might become the righteousness of God.***

Jesus is holy—because we are in Jesus, we are holy.
Jesus is righteous—because we are in Jesus, we are righteous.
Jesus is the heir—because we are in Jesus, we are heirs.
Jesus is the chosen one—because we are in Jesus, we are chosen.

Here's the last observation about election.

THEOLOGY 101: Before you **WANTED** God, he **WANTED** you.

You are not the leftovers. God didn't settle for you. God didn't accept you because he had no other choice. Before the world was ever made, he looked forward into human history and he wanted you. He smiled upon you. It gave him joy to give undeserved kindness to you.

1 PETER 1:2 *who have been **chosen** according to the **foreknowledge** of God the Father, through the **sanctifying** work of the Spirit, **to be obedient** to Jesus Christ and **sprinkled with his blood**: Grace and peace be yours in abundance.*

You are not an afterthought. Before you wanted him—He wanted you. Here [SPRINKLED WITH HIS BLOOD], we see more Old Testament imagery. From a biblical viewpoint, sin equals death, and blood represents life. In Old Testament times, after a sacrifice, priests would sprinkle the altar and temple with blood. That may feel out of place in our culture, but it was powerful symbolism of death being overcome, life being given, and it was made possible by a sacrifice.

That's what the cross is about. Remember that; let it be a transfusion of courage. Would you stand firm on that? Would you stand fast in that good news?

Sometimes, in discussions about election and foreknowledge and trying to get our minds wrapped around the reality that we wanted and chose Jesus, but before we wanted him, he wanted us, and we are chosen by him—it's possible to get bogged down in a kind of scary question.

QUESTION: Does God *really* want everyone?

We don't have to guess. We don't have to speculate. We can be confident. Look to Jesus.

JOHN 3:16-17 *For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.*

What else does he have to do to convince you that no price is too high for him to pay in order to love you, forgive you, transform you, and make you his own? What could I say that could shine brighter than the cross? What could I say that is more compelling than Jesus gladly sacrificing himself for you?

If you are not yet a follower of Jesus, would you dare to really look at how much he loves you and what he has done for you? If you are a follower of Jesus, would you remember how much he loves you and what he has done for you? It's my hope that you can see him clearly.

Jesus was both the **ELECTED** one and the ultimate **EXILE**.

Most people I know don't like talking about sin. It's easier to talk about when we can keep it abstract or if we're talking about someone else. But when it gets personal, I don't know anyone who really enjoys talking about it.

And for those in the room, or online who are still trying to evaluate Jesus and Christians—this is point where you might expect me to be condemning of you. I have no interest in that at all. There's a good chance that you're a better person than me. You and I may disagree about what is right and wrong. But is there any of us who would say that we've perfectly lived up to our own standards? I've never met anyone who believes they are morally perfect.

In fact, everyone I know can tell stories about how their own morally broken choices had a real and negative impact on their relationships. If we felt safe to do so, some of us could tell heartbreaking stories of how morally broken choices devastated important relationships. The word that biblical writers often use to describe that is the word *sin*. And over and over and over again, biblical writers talk about sin as though it is equal to death. In those moments when we can get real honest about our morally broken choices and the morally broken choices of others—we see how sin really does bring death.

The absolute worst kind of death it brings is that it kills our ability to know God and be close to him. And this is why Jesus came. This is why God the Son, the second person of the trinity, was glad to be the chosen one, to take on what it means to be human and give his life for us.

On the cross, he was exiled so that we could be accepted. He was shamed so that we could be honored. He was condemned so that we could be forgiven. His blood covers the death of our sin and gives new life to any and all who trust in him. He was both the ELECTED one and the ultimate EXILE.

This is what we remember when we take communion.