

**1 Peter**  
**Part Three: The Favorite**  
**Pastor Rick Henderson**      **February 18-19, 2023**

I hope you have been asking yourself this question, “What is the story I’m telling myself about myself?” Whatever it is, that’s your answer to that question—that’s your identity. Our identities are complex things. They are tricky things. There are things about you that come and go. There are things about me that come and go. There are things we hold on tightly and there are things about us that we would get rid of if we could.

Because identity is both urgent and complex, I’ve found it helpful to think about identity like a deck of cards. Each facet of the story of you, each fact about you, is like a card in the deck. Not all cards are equal. Some of the cards in my deck are husband, dad, pastor, mediocre golfer, Saints fan. Now, if I get really honest with you, I’ve got some cards I’m trying to get rid of: quick to speak and slow to listen. That’s one of my cards. I try not to play that too often.

When it comes to our sense of significance, security, and satisfaction—whatever it is that we believe gives us that, that’s our Top Card. We’re in a church service. So, if I ask what your top card should be, everyone will say, Jesus. And that’s true. But it’s not always reality, is it?

Many of us want to say that it’s Jesus. But again, our identities are slippery and tricky things. Even if we want to follow Jesus, it’s so easy for other cards to slide up to the top. They aren’t bad cards. They just might be in the wrong spot. Cards like relationship status, career success, sexual fulfillment, comfort, financial status—these tricky devils have a way of becoming our true top cards.

Anytime that the top card is one that defines us by what we do instead of what Jesus did, we are going to find ourselves battling thoughts and feelings of insignificance, insecurity, and dissatisfaction. Last I checked, 100% of humans must face those three.

**QUESTION:** What do you do, and what are you like whenever you feel *insignificant*, *insecure*, and *dissatisfied*?

Whenever you’re feeling these things, is that the version of you that people want to go on a vacation with? How many of us would say, when I’m feeling these things, I become a version of me that I don’t even like? All of us can relate to that. The men and women who Peter wrote this letter to; they could relate to this.

Many scholars who’ve studied this letter agree that Peter wasn’t being metaphorical when he called them exiles. They were literally exiles. From time to time the Roman government would forcibly transplant its citizens from one city to another city. Usually, they did so for one or both reasons.

- They wanted to expedite a city or region’s assimilation into Roman culture, customs, and government. The easiest way to do that was to populate the area with people who embodied all things Rome.
- The second reason was to break up a cluster of dissidents—the people who government officials were tired of dealing with. Imagine there was an upstart new religion that said their leader was Lord over all things, even Lord over Caesar.

It's very possible that both reasons were in play with the recipients of this letter. It's very likely that they were forced to relocate to new and distant cities. Many of the men and women in these churches were unwanted by their government and unwanted by these new communities.

If that were us, wouldn't we battle feelings of insignificance, insecurity, and dissatisfaction? Absolutely. This is the context into which Peter wrote his letter. This is why understanding their identity in Jesus was extremely urgent. This is why a letter about the true grace of God was Peter's top priority. Let's turn our attention to chapter 2.

### **1 PETER 2:1** *Therefore...*

I don't mind being a broken record. I just don't want to be annoying. Whenever you read a therefore, everything that is coming next is a way of thinking or a way of behavior that we should adopt, and it's based on the information that was just covered. Based on the facts:

- You are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God
- The Spirit of God is working in you to grow you to be more like Jesus
- You have a hope that is alive
- You have an inheritance in Christ, that is protected by God's power, and can never be taken from you
- You are God's children
- Obedience to Jesus means loving like Jesus
- We have his Word, which is an enduring treasure

Based on all of that, there is something we should do. That's why this has been our anthem in this series.

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

What we do is based on who we are, not the other way round. It's always identity in Jesus first. Obedience is always second.

**1 PETER 2:1** *Therefore...* based on my identity in Jesus, based on your identity in Jesus—what should the activities of our lives include?

### ***rid yourselves of all...***

You don't even have to know what comes next to know that we've got serious work to do. It's probably going to be hard. It might even hurt a little. So, before we dive into that list, I want to remind us and encourage us with this.

Grace is opposed to **EARNING**, not **EFFORT**. (Dallas Willard)

Whatever comes next in this list, it is not your pathway to Jesus liking you more. Whatever comes next in this list is not a recipe for blessings, or more grace, or a better standing. Whatever comes next in this list is the logical outflow of all that we have already been given in Jesus. All that we have been given is perfectly secure. Here it is.

*malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind.*

“Of every kind” is interesting. This is Peter saying that’s he introducing the subject matter. He doesn’t have time to tease out all the different ways these can be expressed. That’s our job. It’s our job to think clearly and to intentionally think with wisdom. It’s our responsibility to put in effort to carefully examine ourselves for all the many ways these behaviors come spilling out of us.

For those of you in the room and watching online who wouldn’t describe yourselves as followers of Jesus, you don’t have to do any of this. If you want to go get a refill on your coffee, this might be a great spot to do that. But, if you stick around, I think you’re going to hear wisdom that will benefit you. It may not make your life better, but I think you’ll find it makes you better at life.

For those of us in the room and watching online who are followers of Jesus—this isn’t negotiable. Finding joy in submitting to Jesus and his word means we act and work to get rid of these things.

#### **GET RID OF:**

- Malice Whenever I desire or delight in somebody getting something less than what’s best for their well-being. I know you wouldn’t do it out loud. When do you quietly celebrate the misfortune of others? **What is your strategy to get rid of that?**
- Deceit Any effort to get you to believe something that isn’t true. Even if I don’t lie, I can be deceitful. When are you most tempted to have a casual relationship with the truth? What insecurity is driving that? **What is your strategy to get rid of that?**
- Hypocrisy Any effort to pretend to be something that I’m not, or effort that allows you to believe something that isn’t true about me. What is something that you are allowing someone to believe about that simply is not true? Why do you need them to see you that way? **What is your strategy to get rid of that?**
- Envy I resent that you have something good, and I want it for myself. What and who are you thinking about right now that triggers your envy? **What is your strategy to get rid of that?**
- Slander Using my words to make you feel less significant or look less significant in the eyes of others. What is going on that someone else’s mistakes make you feel superior? **What is your strategy to get rid of that?**

I want you to hear me say this. I love this church. I love you. It’s a thrill to be your pastor. I just want you to know that my only agenda is to preach the text. That’s the only thing that is driving this sermon. If you feel the discomfort of conviction—I feel it too! Let’s remember our identity in Jesus. All that we have in him is perfectly secure. Based on that, we can lean into this.

I also want to remind you of who Peter was writing to. He was writing to men and women who had no power, no prestige, and no privileges in their community. Because of the turbulence and severity of their circumstances, they likely felt as if their sense of significance, security, and satisfaction were under assault. Something that I think binds these behaviors in common is that they are often the go to tactics for people who don’t have power, or prestige, or advantages.

Let me ask you a different version of the question I asked you at the start. When things are happening in your life that you don't like, and you don't have the power, prestige, privileges to stop it or change it—what are you like, and what do you? I've got to tell you; this list of sins feels like a pretty good strategy. These behaviors are tempting, aren't they?

Jon Tyson is a pastor and author who I've met personally, and I've come to deeply respect. He's the kind of man who I think pastors and church leaders should be listening to. This is what he has to say about this list. Listen to the 3 ways he describes this list.

*Self-protection, self-assertion, and self-centeredness are deeply engrained mechanisms that destroy relationships...This is completely inappropriate for people brought into Jesus' kingdom. It's anti-Jesus.*  
—Jon Tyson

Self-protection, self-assertion, and self-centeredness are the natural responses when we feel pressured and squeezed by difficult circumstances in life. They are the responses that quickly come out whenever we feel like our significance, security, and satisfaction are under threat. What are we like when we get squeezed?

Whenever we're **SQUEEZED**, whatever comes **OUT** was already **INSIDE**.

The solution doesn't come from looking within. It comes by looking to Jesus. Christlikeness doesn't come naturally to any of us. That's OK. It comes supernaturally. That's why in chapter 1 Peter continually referenced the work of the Spirit in us. Now he says to do this.

**1 PETER 2:2-3** *Like newborn babies, **crave** pure spiritual milk, **so that** by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.*

Why is it that we crave most is often the thing that's not best for us? I played high school football in the state of Florida. I remember practicing in 90 degrees and 90% humidity. That's awful. I'm just old enough that I played during the era of coaches not giving water breaks a sign of toughness. We might go a couple of hours with no water. When we eventually did drink, I remember that the water tasted sweet.

When you are that hot and that dehydrated, there is nothing that I wanted more than cold water. For the medical folks in the room, you can describe the medical reasons I craved so strongly. And you'd be right. But there was something else too. My circumstances were such that it was easy to say no to soda, or coffee or any other drink. My circumstances helped me to reject what couldn't satisfy and only want what could satisfy. I think you follow me.

As long as we continue to entertain the idea that lesser things can fulfill us, it's going to be tough to crave pure spiritual milk. As our infatuation with lesser things goes down, our craving for pure spiritual milk increases.

**QUESTION:** What is pure spiritual milk?

**ANSWER:** Anything and everything that **COMMUNICATES** and **CELEBRATES** the true grace of God.

That primarily should be found in Scripture. It could be hearing someone's story of what God did in their life. It could be found in praying together. I love hearing other people pray. That encourages me. The true grace of God could be communicated and celebrated in a song. I don't want limit all the ways that it can be celebrated. The way that God communicated it to us is through his word. It is the source of pure spiritual milk.

If it's OK for me to be really honest, I think too many people are drinking spoiled milk. I think too many people keep sipping on and turning to stuff that can't satisfy. I think there is a hunger and thirst for something real and good. And if we pay attention, we can see indicators that people are craving something better.

Studying 1 Peter, I've found myself thinking about Ted Lasso.



If you're not familiar with the show, that's OK. It's not my goal to get anyone to watch it. This show and how people have responded to it might be telling us something.

Ted is a kind of exile. He's an American football coach who is now coaching a professional soccer team in London. Their football is very different from our football. The comedy is straightforward. I don't think the essence of the show is comedy at all.

- He's an exile—he's out of place.
- People see him as a threat to their beloved team, so everyone mistreats him and makes fun of him.
- At every turn, people with more power or influence attempt to exploit him or humiliate him.

This character is marked by unrelenting kindness. He believes the best about others, even when they don't believe it for themselves. And in time, his kindness transforms the people and environments around him. There are even powerful themes about fatherhood. The way people are responding to this show, I believe, is an indicator that all kinds of people are tired of drinking off spoiled milk.

There is something about this show and this character that represents what it should be like to be around Jesus followers. People are craving something better than what comes naturally. The difference between us living out what comes naturally to everyone vs. living out kindness, love, patience, and goodness has a lot to do with our own craving of pure spiritual milk. It has to get in us to be what is squeezed out of us.

**1 PETER 2:4-8** *As you come to him, the living Stone—**rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him...***

it's like Peter is being a gentle parent. I know that you feel are feeling rejected and unwanted. But would you look to Jesus. Even though he is the chosen one of God, even though he is the precious one of God—he was rejected too. Look to him.

***you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ...***

I came across the story of a monarch who visited the King of Sparta. Sparta was at one time the home of the fiercest warriors known to man. This visiting king had heard about the spectacular walls of Sparta that protected the kingdom. But when he got there, he didn't see any walls. Confused, he asked the King of Sparta, "Where the walls of Sparta that I heard so much about?"

The King of Sparta pointed to his army and said, "Behold the walls of Sparta. Every man a brick." Jesus is our king. When we trust in him, he makes us into something spectacular. What he is making us into is not a bunch of individual things. He is making us into something together.

One of my concerns is as we emphasize identity, we will only think individually. Hyper-individualism is a product of modern, western culture. That doesn't fit with the gospel. Jesus is making us into something new together.

*For in Scripture it says: "See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and **the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame...***

Would you let yourself feel the weight of that statement. Trusting in Jesus, finding our identity in Jesus is the cure for shame.

*Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, "The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone," and, "A stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall." **They stumble because they disobey the message**—which is also what they were destined for.*

This is where we might feel like all of us are stumbling. What does this mean? Cornerstone is like saying Jesus is the foundation. Some people read this and think it's saying that God predetermined that some people would reject Jesus as their foundation. Is that true? Is that the kind of thing God would do? Before we can answer that, we need to do Hermeneutics 101. If that's a new word for you, it's the art and science of interpretation.

### **HERMENEUTICS 101**

- The author **determines** the meaning, the reader **discovers** it.
- Bombard the text with **questions**.
- Context is **supreme**.
- Use **clear** passages to interpret **unclear** ones.

One of the ways that we try to arrive at what the author meant is by asking questions.

**QUESTION:** Why do they stumble?

**1 PETER 2:8** *“A stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.” They stumble because they disobey the message—which is also what they were destined for.*

**ANSWER:** Because they disobey the message.

So far, that’s pretty easy. But we haven’t resolved the dilemma yet. Let’s keep going.

**1 PETER 2:8** *“A stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.” They stumble because they disobey the message—**which is also what they were destined for.***

**QUESTION:** Who was destined for what?

**1 PETER 2:8** *“A stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.” They stumble because they disobey the message—**which is also what they were destined for.***

They were either destined to stumble or they were destined to disobey. That’s our only two options.

**POSSIBLE ANSWERS:**

- Anyone who disobeys is destined to stumble.
- Some are destined to disobey, which then causes them to stumble.

How do we know which one is the better answer? We engage in hermeneutics. The author determines the meaning. We’ve pointed out each week that we can’t understand what Peter means if we don’t understand the Old Testament. Believe it or not, Peter is quoting Isaiah 8. It’s a prediction or a prophecy about the coming Messiah. Remember, context is supreme.

The context of Isaiah 8 is that because of people’s sin and rebellion, they will reject the cornerstone and they will stumble. But Isaiah chapter 9 starts with the word, “nevertheless.” Isaiah 9 is all about people being brought from darkness to light because of the messiah that will come, even though they stumbled over him.

It may not feel clear to you yet. We use clear passages to interpret unclear passages. These passages are very clear.

**CLEAR PASSAGES:**

JOHN 3:16—Jesus came to save the whole world

MATTHEW 28:19-20—Go into all the world

1 TIMOTHY 2:4—God wants all to be saved

2 PETER 3:9—God wants all to be saved

PSALM 67:2—God wants salvation for all the nations, all over the earth

ISAIAH 45:22—God wants all the earth to repent

EZEKIEL 18:32—God has no pleasure in the death of anyone

I don’t think hermeneutics allows us to conclude that Peter means to communicate that God destined people to disobey. He destined that people who disobey would stumble. And this is an expression of love.

One evidence of God’s love for all of us is that none of us can escape **CONSEQUENCES**.

When we keep getting hit with the consequences of being our own authority, we are continually reminded that we need a better authority. That authority is Jesus. God intentionally, on purpose, designed life to work this way. He did it so that we would repent, not because he predetermined that some wouldn't repent.

If you have repented and turned to Jesus, this is what's true of you. If you will repent and turn to Jesus, this is what will be true of you.

**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.*

In week 1, I asked you memorize this verse. We need to know who we are in Jesus. We need to continually remind ourselves. We have an IDENTITY that will frames what the activity of our lives should be.

- **We are chosen.** All who are in Jesus are chosen and wanted.
- **We are a royal priesthood.** We are adopted into the family of the king. We are royals. And as priests, we represent him. Experiencing what we are like is supposed to reflect what he is like.
- **We are a holy nation.** We are probably going to get into this next week. Christian nationalism is a poor substitute to what we've been called to. We are the people of God and we have been set a part for his purposes. We live for his agenda.
- **We are his special possession.** Do you have any sense of how much you are treasured? When God looks at you, he says, "you're my favorite."

I think Peter wrote this to say, don't focus so much on the circumstances that you are in. Focus on being in Christ. Regardless of what circumstance you might be in, remember what it means to be in Jesus. You have a God-given identity and that comes with a God-given purpose.

I want to give us something to think about as we take this with us this week.

**BOTTOM LINE:** If people stumble, let it be because they **DON'T** believe what Jesus did and not that they **CAN'T** believe what we do.

Peter has given us a good mix of encouragement and hard truth. Everyone is responsible for how they respond to Jesus. Every Jesus follower and every church is responsible to reflect Jesus. May we be people that declare his praises, not just with what we say or sing, but in all aspects of how we live. May we be people who lead and inspire others to praise Jesus. Imperfect though we may be, let's be people who hold dear this great and good calling the has given to us.