

## Stand Firm

**March 1, 2015**

Good morning. My name is Kurt. I am one of the pastors. I want to tell you about one of the hardest parts of my job — it is watching the back door. The front door is easy. I watch people come and go each week by the church's front door. I look forward to seeing them the following week. The hardest part is watching the back door. That is the part that worries me. I am not speaking about a literal back door but I am referring to people who walk away from the church and do not return.

As elders, charged with shepherding the flock, we keep a list of folks that haven't attended church in a few weeks. Since shepherds look for the lost, we give people a call to let them know they were missed; we love them and offer to pray for them. Most of the time we discover people were simply traveling for business or they were out of town on family affairs. Those calls are a joy-filled conversations. They are an opportunity to reconnect with people we love and miss.

There are other conversations that aren't as easy. There are people who worship at CrossWinds but do not return. They slowly drift away and stay away. Why do they leave?

- For some it was a period of suffering in their lives or in the life of a loved one that pulled them away. They prayed for healing but God didn't answer their prayer in the way they expected. Out of bitterness, they began ignoring God because they concluded he ignored them. They drifted away.

- For others, it was the distractions of life, the vanity fair nature of this world.

They were busy with school sports, vacationing with family and so many busy events on the weekend that over the course of time, Christ — and his church — became nothing but a foggy memory. As a result, they drifted away.

- For others, the cost of following Jesus was too high. When they became Christians, they thought all their problems would go away and now they realize their problems were only beginning. As it says in 2 Timothy 3:12, all who live a Godly life in Christ will suffer. They didn't realize they were signing up to pay a high price. They drifted away.

- Still others have found themselves ensnared by sin, guilt and shame. Unable to break free from persistent patterns of sin, they became certain God was sick of them. They were sure they exhausted his forgiveness. Sin-sick when they look in the mirror, they drifted away.

As Peter came to the end of this letter, he was aware of the temptations we face either from laziness, distractions or outright persecution, to walk away from Christ and his church. He knew there would be times when we are faced with the choice to reject Christ or die, like we see with ISIS in the Middle East. Peter had one clear message for each of us as he closed his letter. Stand firm. Stand firm no matter what hits you. Stand firm no matter what it costs you. In these closing verses he told us what we need to know to be able to stand firm when everything else is pulling us away.

Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your

faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen. By Silvanus, a faithful brother as I regard him, I have written briefly to you, exhorting and declaring that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it. She who is at Babylon, who is likewise chosen, sends you greetings, and so does Mark, my son. Greet one another with the kiss of love. Peace to all of you who are in Christ. 1 Peter 5:6–14 (ESV)

As we look at this text, I want to begin at the postscript then return to the earlier verses.

### Closing Words

By Silvanus, a faithful brother as I regard him, I have written briefly to you, exhorting and declaring that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it. She who is at Babylon, who is likewise chosen, sends you greetings, and so does Mark, my son. Greet one another with the kiss of love. Peace to all of you who are in Christ. 1 Peter 5:12–14 (ESV)

**Who was Silvanus?** Silvanus was the man Peter instructed to carry this letter to the churches in Asia Minor. He was not simply a post man. Silvanus was not just told to carry the letter but he was also instructed by Peter on how to read this letter to the churches he visited. Silvanus was the stand-in preacher for Peter on Sunday mornings when he read Peter's letter. Silvanus' job was to read Peter's letter like Peter would have read it. Silvanus was preaching Paul's words in his place by reading his letter.

**Where was Babylon?** Obviously Peter was not speaking about the literal Babylon. History tells us Peter was writing from Rome. If he was writing from Rome, why did he speak about Babylon?

Babylon typified a culture in opposition to God. In this time, Rome was the culture that was opposed to God. A few weeks ago, we learned Christians were

already suffering for their faith socially. In a few years Nero would accuse the Christians of setting the great fire of Rome and horrific levels of physical persecution began that lasted for 200 years. This is why Peter wrote about Babylon. He is writing from Rome, a culture in opposition to the gospel, much like ISIS is today.

**What is this kiss of love?** It is not a romantic kiss. It is an expression of a warm welcome and friendship. This is similar to the kiss you see given on both cheeks between men in some foreign cultures today. Peter wanted Christians to express warm welcome and hospitality.

I want to drill into verse 12. Peter said he wrote briefly, exhorting and declaring that this is the true grace of God. What is the true grace of God? In one word, it is Jesus and the hope we have of eternity with him. Peter began his letter by introducing us to this living hope.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you... 1 Peter 1:3–4 (ESV)

There are no other options. Jesus died in our places, for our sins. Jesus was born again. Jesus is our living hope. One day Jesus will return. He will judge the world. As Christians, we are looking for that final day. We are looking forward to the return of Jesus. On that day we will get our inheritance from God which we do not deserve. We live looking forward to this day in the future.

Peter told us to stand firm in this. Don't drift away from Christ. Don't drift away from the church. Don't walk away from Jesus out of fear or laziness. Don't give up your hope.

In the preceding verses, Peter told us how to stand firm in Jesus — our hope — when everything else is pulling us away. If you want to stand firm, here is what you need to know.

**To stand firm, I must understand God's pattern for my life.**

Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you... 1 Peter 5:6 (ESV)

**Humbling myself means submitting to God's pattern of suffering before glory.**

When he said *humble ourselves under God's mighty hand*, that is not just something we do but it is a reminder of the way God works. Humiliation always comes before exaltation. This is the way God worked in the life of Jesus. It is also the way God works in the life of his people.

Jesus took on the form of a humble servant. He went from creating the universe and receiving unceasing worship, to pouring all of himself permanently into a human body, choosing to limit his divinity by constraining himself to humanity. Then he humbled himself to die a gruesome death on a cross that he did not deserve. It was not just any gruesome death, but in his death, God the Father poured out all the wrath every Christian deserved to endure for all of eternity for their sins upon his own son. It was only after the ultimate in humiliation that he was given the ultimate in exaltation and given what Philippians says is the name that is above every other name. It was only after his humiliation that he was exalted to the highest place. It is the same with the people of God. Suffering and weakness in our lives now always precedes the glory of our eternal inheritance.

If you don't understand this pattern you will not stand firm. You will give up. You will be shocked when you suffer and want to give up as you suffer.

You will think Christianity doesn't work because the Christian life is hard and you thought Jesus came to make you comfortable and successful. Nothing is out of whack when we are humbled. God is at work in our lives conforming us to become more like Jesus. To become like Jesus we must follow the pattern of Jesus, suffering first and exaltation later.

No place in the Bible does it say Christians will be loved and adored and heaven will be an afterthought. It says we will be despised and rejected on earth. This was a constant theme throughout 1 Peter. We may face suffering now, but remember the pattern. Glory is coming.

We have learned that our faithfulness in the midst of suffering now is directly connected to the greatness of our joy and glory that we will experience when Christ returns. That was the pattern for Jesus. That is the pattern for God's people.

**Humbling myself means bending my purposes for my life to God's purposes for my life.**

Humbling ourselves also means letting God work as he wills in our lives and not demanding life always be the way I want it. Humbling myself means bending myself to God's purposes for my life even if his purposes are not things I would normally choose. Humbling myself may mean accepting a difficult marriage, if that is the way God wants me to honor him. Humbling myself may mean accepting a disability either in myself or in a loved one that God allowed into my life that I didn't plan for. Humbling myself may mean accepting a period

of unemployment or underemployment as part of God's refining hand, even though I didn't plan for it. Humbling myself means accepting the humiliation God sends into my life as part of his good plan to conform me into the image of his own son through suffering.

When I say this we must remember God's character. God is not vindictive. He does not have morbid joy when we suffer. He is a loving father that comes to us, and at times, leads us into difficult circumstances that we would not choose. He leads us into those times for a loving purpose. He uses those trials to mature us, to purify us and as an opportunity for us to bring glory to his name in the midst of them. God promises I won't face those times alone. He promises to be with us. *We must trust that God has a good plan for us in our tough times.* Humbling ourselves under God's mighty hand means saying, "God, your will be done, not my will be done."

### **Humbling myself means trusting in God's timing of rescue.**

It also says "at the proper time God will exalt us." In our minds, what is always the proper time for God to rescue us of our suffering and humiliation? Right now. Like a good father, he knows that always exalting his children when they demand it can be the most unloving thing a good father can do for the children he loves. He knows *there is a proper time* to lift us up to rescue. We must trust his timing.

When it feels like God is not listening in the midst of our suffering, it is easy to question God's character or even his involvement in daily life. When we feel that God is not there, we must remember that God is not ignoring us. We

know he loves us because we know his character. If he has given us his own son, he will certainly give us all things. We must humble ourselves and trust that God loves us but he also knows the proper time to exalt us. We don't.

If you have known Christ for a while, you know that even though you didn't enjoy the rough times of life, it was in those times that God carried you. It was in those times God matured you. It was in those times you experienced profound intimacy and comfort from God that does not happen in the easy times. Today, when you look back on the rough times, they are precious to you. You can see that God exalted you in the right time.

Even if God chooses to exalt us and rescue us from suffering and trials in this life, and many times he does, we must remember those rescues are not what we live for. He may restore your marriage but your spouse will eventually die. He may restore you from unemployment and give you a wonderful job but someday we will retire. He may snatch your life from the jaws of death and gift you with flourishing health but one day you will die of old age.

The restoration of our earthly lives is not the exaltation we are living for. We are looking to the day when Christ returns and every enemy that stood against us is conquered, even death itself. We are looking for the day when our new identities in Jesus are fully revealed. We are looking to our restored bodies that will forever pulsate with vitality and energy. We are looking forward to an entirely restored universe where heaven and earth are combined and the effects of sin are forever gone. We are looking forward to the day when for all of eternity Christians are the grand display to every spiritual being and every physical being



in the entire universe of what it looks like for God to show the maximum amount of kindness, the maximum amount of love and the greatest amount of affection that will ever be displayed or can ever be displayed in the entire universe and for all of eternity. That is who we are. That is the day we are living for. We are the grand display of the greatest amount of undeserved love, kindness, affection and intimacy that could ever be shown. We deserve eternal, conscious, never-ending punishment, yet God adopts us to be brothers and sisters of Jesus, the highest and most glorious being in the universe. That is the mind-bending exaltation we fix our eyes on when we suffer. That is what enables us to endure the humiliations of this life because we know that the pattern is humiliation first, exaltation later. We follow in the footsteps of Jesus.

**To stand firm, I must know God cares for me.**

...casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. 1 Peter 5:7 (ESV)

If you are going to stand firm in your faith when life is hard, you must realize how much God cares for you. There is a connection between verse 6 and verse 7. We are told to humble ourselves under God's mighty hand. How are we to do that? The scriptures tell us we humble ourselves by casting all our anxieties on God.

In some of my research I ran across an interesting observation. One theologian noted that worry and anxiety in the life of a Christian are a form of pride. Have you ever considered these as prideful?

Have you ever carried luggage into a hotel? Some of us try to be studs and carry two or three bags at once. What do we say when someone offers to

help? What do we typically say? “No thanks. I am good. No help needed.” We could use help, but because of our pride we tell people we don’t need help carrying our burdens. We do the same thing with God. We get weighed down with all kinds of pressures, anxieties and burdens. God comes to us and says, “Can I take your worries? Will you cast all your anxieties on me?” What do we say to God? “I can handle it. I don’t need your help.” God is offering his mighty power on our behalves to carry our burdens but we don’t want to take advantage of it. God says, “Humble yourself. Give me all your worries. Let me take care of them. I care for you.”

Do we believe this? Do we really believe this? How much of our anxieties, worries and burdens do we give to God in prayer and then leave them at his feet because we trust him to love us and care for us? This is something we struggle with.

Have you ever talked with someone about something that excites you? While you are pumped up, you can tell from their body language they really don’t care what you have to say? Last week I was in California at a pastor’s conference. I was sharing at the breakfast table with other pastors what I learned the night before about shepherding. I started to monopolize the conversation with my excitement and I noticed some of the guys develop that zoned-out look on their face. When I paused in the conversation, one of the guys jumped in and completely changed subject to talk about retirement. I thought to myself, “I just got schooled. I don’t think these older pastors give a rip about my exciting discoveries on shepherding.”

I have news for you. God has never done that to you. He will never do that with you. If there is a burden on your heart, it could be big or small, he listens closely because he cares. God does not put us on pause because he is too busy handling prayer requests for ISIS. There is no concern in your heart that is too small. He says, "Give me your burden. Stop trying to carry it by yourself. I am the God of the universe. I can do a much better job carrying your burdens than you can. I care about you."

God doesn't just invite us to give our anxieties to him. He tells us to cast our anxieties on him. This is not casting like fishing where you throw something away then reel it back. This is throwing our burdens to God in prayer and leaving them in his hands, trusting that he will take care of those things that weigh down our souls. We can leave our worries at the feet of God and go away with peace.

The only way to stand firm in the hard times is to know we are not carrying our worry and anxiety alone. Leave your burdens at the feet of Jesus.

Some of you are not Christians, and as a result you feel weighed down. You are carrying bitterness and disappointment. Life feels out of control. Today God is inviting you into a relationship with him through his son Jesus. That relationship does not simply mean you will spend eternity with him but it means he loves you now. Beginning today you can give him the anxiety and worries of your life. He cares for you. He will work things out for you. Today, turn to Jesus and be saved for all eternity and you will also be freed from your burdens.

**To stand firm, I must understand the enemy against me.**

Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing

that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. 1 Peter 5:8–9 (ESV)

This is the third time Peter told us to be sober-minded. It means to be clear-headed. It means to be alert. Don't be unaware. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a lion waiting to devour you. Peter's point was that we need to be alert to the spiritual realities of life. There is a real devil that wants to destroy us. There are two errors Christians fall into with the devil. Some Christians err in developing a fascination with him. Other Christians err in ignoring the reality of his existence. Peter kept us from falling off either end. He told us the devil is real and we need to be aware that he is seeking our destruction.

The Bible tells us the devil is not equal in force or in power with God. That is the belief of eastern religions with the ying and the yang. They believe good and evil are equal but opposite forces locked in eternal conflict. That is not what the Bible teaches. The Bible says the devil is a created being. He was an angel that rebelled against God. Today he leads other fallen angels in rebellion against God.



Revelation 12:9 says Satan is the deceiver of the whole world. He is the father of lies. The devil is the ultimate liar and deceiver. That is what he does to the world and what he tries to do to us. He tries to deceive us.

The title "Satan" means adversary. He is always our enemy and never our friend.

The title “devil” means slanderer. He tries to ruin our names before God and God’s name before us. That pretty much sums up Satan’s work. He tries to deceive us, fight against us and speak evil about us. What does this look like in everyday life?

- He tries to exploit every indwelling sinful desire in our hearts and lead us to temptation and sin.
- He tries to take any sin we commit and use it as a foothold to take further ground in our lives and use that foothold for earthly and ultimate eternal destruction.
- He tries to separate us from the people of God and the book of God. He knows that when we are apart from God’s people and God’s Word, we are vulnerable. Satan is behind trying to keep you away from church and Bible reading.
- He wants to lead us into activities that cloud our minds and dull our senses to make us spiritually unproductive. That is drugs, alcohol, and foolish activities that preoccupy our minds and waste our time.
- Satan loves to convince us that we can handle the problems of life by ourselves. His original sin is pride. He tries to cultivate pride in place of humility.

While Satan is powerful, we do not need to fear him. Jesus was completely victorious over Satan on the cross. One day, Satan and his demons will be thrown into the lake of fire which was prepared as their final resting place of eternal and just torment. In the meantime, in God’s wisdom, he allows Satan to roar as he seeks to devour God’s creation and his people. Why has God not

vanquished Satan? We know God has a good purpose for allowing Satan to continue to roam.

Even though Satan is like a destructive lion on the earth, he is also a lion on a leash. He can bark and he can bite but he can only go as far as God allows. We see this in the book of Job. Satan couldn't do anything against Job unless God allowed him. God holds the other end of Satan's leash.

When Peter said Satan was prowling around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour, he was referring to the suffering faced by Christians. Satan uses persecution to instill fear in the heart of Christians in hope that they will withdraw from God as they run in fear. Satan uses persecution to turn Christians away from standing firm.

This is why we need to stay sober-minded. We can't allow ourselves to grow spiritually careless. There is a spiritual war against us. The physical earth is a spiritual battleground where Satan is trying to oppress and conquer the children of God.

### **How do we resist the devil?**

The best way to resist the devil is to believe the truth of God's Word about Jesus and the good news of his life, death and resurrection. That is called the gospel. Satan doesn't want you to believe the truth of the gospel. He doesn't want you to believe that Christ died for all of your sins. He doesn't want you to believe the cross of Christ is enough to forgive and cleanse you from even dark and hideous sin. He does want you to believe the cross of Christ is enough to cleanse you from repeated failures and repeated sins. He doesn't want you to believe the gospel will transform you through the power of the Holy Spirit into a

completely new person. He doesn't want you to believe that Christ gives us the power and strength to say, "No" to sin. We resist the devil by believing the gospel.

**To stand firm, I must believe God's promise about my final future.**

And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen. 1 Peter 5:10–11 (ESV)

This is God's promise to us. After we have suffered a little while on earth, the God of all grace will himself restore, confirm and establish us. What is the hope that we know we can stand firm on? Our hope is that after our failures and struggles in this life we will one day see God face to face. It is God's promise to us!

Our hope is not in our strength. It is not in our own doing or willpower. Our hope is the God of all grace — who called us to himself — will carry us through to our eternal home. Remember that it was God who came looking for us. He rescued us from all of our sin and death. He sought us first. This God of all grace will keep us to the end.

The God of the universe, because of his unfathomable grace through Jesus, will carry us home to heaven. On that final day, when Jesus is revealed and our identity as the forgiven, restored and established sons and daughters of God is revealed; when we are seen as the grand display of God's kindness, forgiveness, love and restoration that can never to be topped or repeated for all of eternity; on that final day we will see the hope we lived for, the hope we suffered for and the hope we longed for. On that day we will shout at the top of

our lungs, “All glory to God, all glory to God. To him be dominion forever and ever. Amen.”

That is the message of 1 Peter.

### Prayer

Father, we thank you for 1 Peter. We thank you for our identities in Christ and for the future hope that we look toward. Thank you there is hope in our hard times. Thank you that we can cast all our burdens on you and leave them at your feet knowing you will carry them because you care about us.

Even though Satan may roar and tear at our flesh, I thank you he is a defeated enemy. Thank you that after this life of earthly humiliation we will be received home to glory and to mind-boggling exaltation as the grand display of your kindness. Help us stand firm on this hope. Amen.



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