

As Josh said, my name is Hunter, and I am honored to stand before you this morning and talk about the goodness of the Lord today. As Josh said, this isn't about my story, so much as it is about God's story, as it is about his gospel, his faithfulness in our lives, and so if you have your Bible, go ahead and turn to 1 Peter, chapter 5. That's where we'll end up today.

I don't know how specifically today is going to look. I know the Lord has been doing a good work in this room over the past three services. We're just trusting he is going to continue to stir hearts and stir affections towards Jesus today and he is going to be ministering to you in ways we could never minister to you, in ways our pastors could never minister to you. That's what we're trusting, and that's what we're hoping in, all for the glory and praise of his name in this place today. Amen?

This is about God today, and so I want to read this text over us before I share a little bit of my story and just ask that the Lord would use those words to sink into your soul right now, upfront, up top, and then we'll come back to it in a minute. So 1 Peter, chapter 5, beginning in verse 6, is where we'll be.

**"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."**

Amen. I just want to briefly share kind of where I have come from, just a snapshot of my life. I was born into a believing home. I was born into a home where both my parents were believers. In fact, my father was my pastor growing up. His dad was a preacher, and so I'm a PK. I'm a preacher's grandkid. I don't know what you call that, so I grew up in a heritage of faith...from a heritage of faith. My mom, her parents were believers and taught Sunday school for years, and so I was born, and my first Sunday, I was in church. I was in church any time the doors were open. Sometimes I even unlocked the church for people.

But growing up in church, the Lord saved me at a young age. When I was 6, he awakened my heart to his mercy and his goodness and redeemed me by the blood of the Lamb, and that's unbelievable to me that

the Lord can do that and move in such a way in a 6-year-old's life. That's my testimony, and that's what I pray will be my kids' testimony; they would not remember a day where they didn't know the Lord, the Lord save them from a young age and they would cling to his righteousness from a young age, and they would hate sin all the days of their lives.

So I grew up in the church. I went off to a Christian university and met my, now, wife, Becky. We have been married nearly six years, and she is an absolute treasure. She is the apple of my eye, and I adore her. She loves me well, serves me well. She is a prayer warrior for the kingdom, and I'm so blown away by the Lord's goodness to me in bringing me a wife like her. The Lord has given us two amazing kids. Our son, Carson, turns 4 next month, and he is just such a little encourager. You just see a sensitive heart in him at a young age, and it's so amazing to see the Lord is working in him so young.

Our daughter, Saige, just turned 2 in March, and she is one determined little girl. She knows what she wants, and she runs after it. Our prayer for her is that the Lord would grab her heart and would transform that determination into a reckless pursuit of Jesus. Our house is loud, and it's fun. We laugh a lot, and we play a lot. It's just such an honor to be a husband and to be a father. If you were to look at my life on paper, if you were to see where I came from, my past, my pedigree, my upbringing, all of those things, it would look picture perfect on paper.

Last fall, on October 22, I received a phone call at 3:00 a.m. in the morning from the Hot Springs Arkansas Police Department telling me my father had taken his own life. Dad was a pastor in the area for nearly 22 years. This was a man who, when I was 6, shared with me the excellencies of Christ, pointed me towards Christ, young. This was a man who, when I was in the fifth grade, asked, "Hunter, who in your class has no friends? Let's take them bowling tomorrow." This was a man who taught me how to love others.

When I was 14, he took me on my first overseas mission trip to Kenya, and the Lord used that trip to shape my worldview and to give me a deep desire and heart for the nations, for his kingdom. This was a man who never missed a ballgame of mine. He introduced me to music at an early age, and this man was hurting. He struggled with depression. He was walking in some shame over some things, and no one knew about it. No one knew the level of despair he was walking in, and so he had gotten away for a few days to think and write and go before the Lord over some things and, in a weak moment, believed a lie from the Enemy that his issues and his struggles were outside the grasp of the grace of God.

When I found out, my heart was (I felt) ripped out of my chest, like someone stomped on it, and so I stand before you today hurting, confused, frustrated at times, but I want you to hear me. My hope is in Jesus Christ this morning. My hope is in the cross of Jesus, that I have been redeemed, I have been purchased, I am securely fastened to the God of all the universe, and belong to the Lord.

I don't know what you're going through this morning. I don't know what you're struggling with. I don't know what you're suffering through. I don't know your past. I don't know what is going on in your heart in this very moment, but God does, and so we're asking him today to move in a powerful, mighty way, that we would be a people who would walk in freedom, who would walk in the light completely, to be known by God and be known by others.

So in the days and weeks following this news, the Lord laid this text on my heart, so I want us to just think about some things for a minute today, for just a little bit. Let's look, beginning in verse 6: **"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."** The days and weeks following this news, my heart and my mind were flooded with these anxious thoughts, with these fearful, worried thoughts. I was thinking about things in the past. I was speculating on things in the future. I was going crazy with anxiety, and none of it was bringing glory to the Lord. None of it.

The Lord was so sweet to remind me of this text. "Cast those anxieties, Hunter. Cast those anxieties on me because I care for you, and I love you." When you and I struggle with anxiety, we struggle with these anxious thoughts, we struggle with those worried burdens, Peter is saying, right here, ultimately, that's pride in us. We say, "God, I don't need you. I don't need your help. I can get through this situation on my own. I can make it on my own. I can think through this and overcome this on my own." Peter says, "No, humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, and the way you humble yourself is by casting those anxieties onto him."

No one was created to be able to withstand the weight of our burdens. Nobody. Not you, not me, not my father, not Peter. That's why Jesus, in Matthew 11, says, "Come to me all who are heavy laden, who are burdened, who are weary, who are tired, and I will give you rest. I will give you peace," and so Church, cast those anxieties on the Lord this morning, whatever they may be. Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God. Let's keep reading.

Verse 8: **"Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour."** This is not the Devil as a serpent. This is not the Devil as a gnat. This is the Devil as a lion, a ferocious beast...ferocious. He doesn't come to just give you disease. He doesn't come to just whisper lies to you, and he doesn't come to just annoy you. He comes to devour you, so pay attention. Be sober-minded. Be on alert. Be watchful. He is prowling around, looking, seeking for someone to devour, scheming, and he is always active in it.

There's never a day where the Enemy just takes off and goes to the beach. There's never a day where he goes and just says, "You know what? I'm going to let them be okay today." No. He wants to devour you. We have to be on alert. We have to realize. Believer in this room, I want you to hear my words: You belong to the King, the Sovereign Most High, and there is nothing...no life, no death...there is nobody, there is no created being, including the Enemy, who can snatch you out of the hands of an almighty God. Do you know that? Do you believe that?

You belong to the King. You have been secured by the blood of Christ, and so rest in that today. But the call is the same for all of us: Be watchful. Be prepared. Be on guard. Then Peter says in verse 9, "**Resist him, firm in your faith...**," and so yes and amen, the victory has been won in Christ through his work and atonement on the cross for our sins. The victory has been won, but we still have to fight. We still have to war against. We still have to resist.

So we put on that armor of God, as Paul writes in Ephesians, chapter 6. "Oh, that our shield of faith might be so enlarged that no matter how strong or sharp those arrows are from the Enemy, they would not penetrate to any level of our soul. The helmet of salvation would be so thick that no matter how crafty the lie is from the Enemy, we wouldn't fall prey to his lies and his schemes. The sword of the Spirit, the Word of God would be so sharp that we would pray, and we would meditate over, and we would read, study, and memorize the Word of God so we can fight off the schemes, fight off the Enemy, not on our own accord, not on our own strength, but by the Word of God."

In that analogy of the armor, the Sword of the Spirit, the Word of God, is the only offensive weapon in that analogy. Everything else is defensive...the helmet, the shield, the breastplate. The sword is the only offensive weapon, so study it. Read it. Pray it. Meditate upon it. "**Resist him, firm in your faith...**," and I love where Peter goes. Verse 9: "**Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.**" That's good news. That's good news for me.

In the days and weeks following after the news got out about Dad, I received phone calls and text messages and emails from around the world saying, "I'm so sorry you're going through this. I, too, lost a father. I, too, lost a mother or a brother. I, too, know someone who has struggled with this." So this isn't just my story today. This isn't just your story today. Not alone. In fact, there are men and women in this room, right now, who are struggling with the exact same things you are and who are suffering through the same things you are.

I want us to watch this video of a young lady in our church, a member. I want you to hear God's redemptive work in her life, his story of faithfulness to her through her trials and through her suffering. Let's take a look.

[Video]

**Rachel:** Hi, I'm Rachel, and I have been coming to The Village for a little over two years now. I was born in a Christian home, and my parents actually were founding members of First Baptist Church Highland Village, so I grew up here, basically, coming to church every week, several times a week, and all the youth events and everything. I was really, you know, taught what sin was, and taught that if I just avoided sin, then I would be okay, and I could go to heaven. I'd be safe from hell.

But at home, many of those sinful behaviors I was taught not to do were being done to me. I was sexually abused by my dad and my older brother for many years. As most children who are sexually abused do, I believed it was my fault; if I simply could just be a good kid and behave and just not mess up, this wouldn't be happening to me. I thought the abuse was punishment because I just couldn't be good enough, and if this was God's punishing me now, then what must hell be like?

So when I got to be, you know, a teenager and starting into college, I just was so tired of being perfect and trying to please everybody. I just felt like the church just kept telling me more and more things I couldn't do, and there was this impossible standard I couldn't live up to no matter how hard I tried, and so I just left and kind of decided I could have my relationship with God on my own out in the world. So I ended up in a life where I was drinking heavily. I was cutting myself. I was mutilating my body. I was just constantly thinking about suicide, planning it just constantly, just obsessively.

So that was kind of the low point. I had a coworker who invited me to a Bible study in Dallas, and it was just a bunch of young professional single women who just loved the Lord, and they, for the first time, really explained to me the gospel, who Jesus was, and that he loved me. This just broke my heart and called me to him, because I never understood before. I never really knew him, but for the first time, I did. I was so thankful.

One of my small group leaders told me about The Village, and so we went to a Saturday service about two years ago, and the teaching that night was about being good and the idea of goodness and how you can't really measure up to the goodness and perfect life of Jesus Christ. You might look at your neighbor or your family member and say, "I'm good compared to them," but if you look at the perfect life and love of Christ,

you just can never measure up. What's beautiful about this is it means I'm not a good person. I can stop trying. He loves me like I am right now. I found that so freeing because that means he loves me anyway. He sent his Son to live that life and love perfectly for me.

But I still struggled and wrestled with those old, sinful, dark, dark thoughts, and so just a few months after I became a Covenant Member, I just found myself in a really dark place, where I had gathered everything I needed to end my life. But at the prompting of the Holy Spirit, I sent an email through The Village Church website. I didn't even know who I was emailing. It was just an email to somebody, and somebody responded to that email right away and just walked with me out of that place and continues to walk with me to this day. They didn't just leave me there.

I joined the recovery support ministry and found out that I am not alone. I'm far from alone, and walking alone in this has been my decision this whole time. My past has not disappeared magically. I'm not fixed. I'm not completely better. I still struggle. I still have bad days and dark thoughts, but I'm not struggling alone. I have a strong biblical community. I have the Holy Spirit with me and in me every day, all the time, and he has actually pushed me forward enough in this process that I can now walk with other women who have been down my same path and just help them in their healing process too.

He has just completely redeemed all that I have been through because now I have this connection with other women who have been in the same place. Only the Lord could take something so dark and awful and turn it into something so beautiful.

[End of video]

Amen for that. What a powerful story of the Lord's faithfulness and work in our sister's life, and I love what Rachel said. She said when she went through recovery she realized she was not alone. She was not alone at all, and I know, from these words and from the truth and from God's voice, I'm not alone, and you aren't alone, whatever you're going through today. For whatever reason, my father felt like he was alone. Listen to the voice of God in this: "Never once will I leave you. Never once will I forsake you." The same kinds of sufferings you're going through...although they may look different with some details...are being experienced throughout the world by other believers. There's comfort in that.

Let's keep reading. Verse 10: "**And after you have suffered a little while...**" Okay, so Church, hear me. You will suffer. There will be seasons of your life where you walk through suffering. The storms will come. The tide will rise. Despair, at some point, will knock on your door, but be encouraged that it's only for a

little while. Even if it lasts you the rest of your life, compared to the eternal glory we have in Christ, it's only for a moment, and then it's gone. **"For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison..."** It's just a little while.

**"And after you have suffered a little while..."** This is good. **"...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."** Now I want to read that again. I want that to sink in with us this morning. I want that to weigh heavy on our souls: **"...the God of all grace..."** Grace upon grace upon grace, forever. **"...who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself..."**

So the Sovereign God over all the universe, the One who hung the moon and the stars and the sun, the One who created the planets and all of the galaxies, the One who formed the mountains, the One who cratered out the oceans and filled them with water, who filled those oceans with beasts, the One who knit you in your mother's womb, the One who sent his own Son to pay the penalty for our sins...God himself. Not some angel, not (in Isaiah 6) seraphim that comes and touches the coals to the lips. God himself will restore your broken heart. He will restore your shattered soul. He will confirm you belong to him. He will assure you of your salvation in his Son Jesus.

He will strengthen you. He will strengthen you, as Ephesians 3 would say, with his Spirit in the inner being so you would know how long, wide, and deep the love of Christ is for you, and...listen...he will establish you. He will establish you on the bedrock of salvation. He will establish you on that firm foundation, Jesus Christ. So no matter how strong those winds may be, no matter how tempting and how enticing those lies from the Enemy may be, you are firmly rooted in the grace of our God through the cross of Jesus Christ.

You're established. You're secured. I can tell you these things today not just in hopes of this. I can tell you these things today because he's doing it in my own heart daily. Even in my suffering, he's restoring my soul and strengthening and establishing me. Even in my mother's heart today, he's doing these things, in my brother's heart, in my wife's heart.

So I don't know where you are this morning. Again, I don't want to make this about an issue. I don't want to make this about suicide. I don't want to make this about depression. I want to make this morning about the gospel of Jesus Christ. As we resist the Enemy, we run into the open arms of grace this morning because there is where life is found. There is where freedom is, that we would walk in the light as he is in the light today.

Can you imagine what our church would look like if we walked in freedom from our sin and our shame and our guilt and our struggles, all of those struggles that entangle our hearts? Can you imagine the kind of

ministry that could take place in our cities, in our schools, and in our workplaces and in our homes if we walked free?

Some of you may be feeling some fear right now. I just want to remind you so gently there is no condemnation in Christ. There is nothing you can confess to and repent of that is outside the reach of his grace. There are some of you in this room who maybe don't know the Lord. Maybe you just came with a friend, or you just showed up. I don't know, but I want you to hear me. Consider Christ. There is absolutely no way I could have walked through what I have walked through in the past six months if God wasn't who he says he was.

If Christ didn't go to the cross, if he didn't take all of my sin and all of my guilt and all of my shame and, in exchange, give me his righteousness, if he wasn't crucified, if he wasn't resurrected, if he's not, right now, sitting at the Father's right side interceding on my behalf, on your behalf, if he's not doing those things, I couldn't have made it through. But I'm telling you, Jesus is who he says he is, so consider Christ. I'm begging you. I'm pleading with you.

We need to do some business here this morning. We need to do some work, and again, I don't know how that looks, but here's our hope: You would gather in groups of two or three, and you would run to the throne of grace in all confidence knowing God stands ready to forgive and ready to love and ready to restore your soul. Call out to him in your distress. Repent. Confess. Invite someone into your pain. We don't have time to play games, Church. The Enemy is actively pursuing us.

I promise you God's pursuit of your heart is far stronger and far greater, that we would walk in the light, we would drag sin from dark and drag it to the light. We'll also have some pastors and ministers up here. If you want to just come forward and respond and pray and ask for help, it's available. Gather. Come forward. We'll have pastors out in Connection Central, as well. I don't know how long this is going to take, but I don't want to put a time on it. Let's just go before the Lord today. Let's call out to him. Let's cry out to him in our distress. God is our help. I'm going to pray for us, and then we'll get to business.

Father, I thank you for the cross. I thank you that we now have life; we now have freedom and hope in the cross. I thank you that we believers have been sealed with the promised Holy Spirit and have been secured by your grace. Father, I pray, in the name of Jesus, for freedom in this room today. I pray your Spirit would work and move and stir in souls right now. I do pray against the Enemy, whatever lies he may be trying to speak in the hearts and minds of people right here. I pray against that in the name of Jesus. That there would be absolute freedom to run to the cross this morning.

Not just so we can leave here determined to do better, that we would leave here today with hearts that are changed, souls that are stirred for greater affections for Jesus. So I ask great God and King, I ask great things, big things, fully knowing and believing you are sovereign over all, and your tug on our hearts is infinitely stronger. Be near, God. Be merciful in this place. I ask all these things in the name of your Son Jesus, amen.

You guys go ahead and gather up. Pray. Call out to the Lord. Cry out to him. Again, we have pastors and ministers here ready to pray with you. If you need to get someone and go in the hallway or go to a prayer room, there's freedom for that. There's freedom in that, so you guys gather up.

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