

Introduction

Good Morning. If you have your Bible, and I hope that you do, I want to ask you to go ahead and take that out. Open it up to the Book of 1 Peter, beginning in 1 Peter chapter 2 and later in chapter 5. We are also going to take a moment and we are going to look at a couple of biographical moments in the life of Peter. We're continuing on in this series, discussing how Peter shows us how we can discover what the purpose is for our lives... what on earth we are indeed here for. So last week, we talked about the fact that the very first calling that God has placed on our life is to simply receive the love that God has given us through His Son Jesus Christ, just to receive that. In that moment where Peter declared who Jesus Christ was, that moment of worship, was a response to that. Now this week, we are going to move into the second calling. We're going to look at a couple of different places in Peter's life, and then see how he grew theologically and spiritually over the years. So this is what we are going to do; we're going to start in the Gospel of John chapter 18. We're going to just read a passage, and then we're going to flip over and we're going to really study 1 Peter chapter 2. Then we're going to come back to John and look at one more incident in the life of Peter. So, go ahead and stick your thumb there in the Gospel of John and in 1 Peter as well, and that's where we will be moving back and forth between today. The first calling of God on our life, as we've studied from the life of Peter last week, is to simply receive the love that God has given us and then to respond in worship. This week I want us to recognize the calling. If you've already started your devotional reading for today, you know this. It is the fact that you have been formed for God's family. So what does that mean? It means that if God has already given you this love and this grace and you've received it, then you can no longer just stand still. You now have to respond to it, and one of the ways that we respond is by coming in to the Church. You may not know this but Peter is a huge fan of the Church. I want us to understand why that is and why it's so essential for you and for me to be part of a local body of believers.

So let's start today in John 18 and then we'll go from there. John 18, starting in verse 15, is a moment where Peter is at a low spot. Literally and figuratively he is cold right now; he is far from Jesus because Jesus has been brought in to trial. Peter and another disciple, probably John, are following along behind, and they get to a place where Jesus is about to be tried. What happens? John 18:15... *"Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple. Since that disciple was known to the high priest, he entered with Jesus into the court of the high priest, but Peter stood outside at the door. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the servant girl who kept watch at the door and brought Peter in. The servant girl at the door said to Peter, 'You also are not one of this man's disciples, are you?' He said, 'I am not.' Now the servants and officers had made a charcoal fire because it was cold, and they were standing and warming themselves. Peter also was with them standing and warming himself."* Skip over a couple of verses to verse 25. *"Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. So they said to him, 'You also are not one of his disciples, are you?' He denied it and said, 'I am not.' One of the servants of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, 'Did I not see you in the garden with Him?' Peter again denied it, and at once a rooster crowed."*

Peter, freezing literally, stands by a fire. The Bible says it was a charcoal fire. The Greek word there is "anthracite." It's a high-carbon coal that they would just pile together and light on fire. So instead of wood, they would make this fire out of coal. He stands there and he is warming his hands over it. But he's not just literally cold here, is he? He is also spiritually cold because his fear has overtaken him, and he has decided that he cannot confess the fact that he knows Jesus. He fears for his life, and so he does not admit that he even knows Him. Cold. But something happens to Peter. Between this moment and sometime, probably about 30 years later, whenever he is writing his letter to scattered Christians throughout the Roman Empire,

Peter has become the most ardent supporter and defender of Jesus Christ and his Church. What took place that changed Peter's heart?

1. Like a baby. (v. 2:2)

Go ahead and flip over with me to 1 Peter chapter 2. I want us to see why it is that Peter is in love with the Church. I also want us to understand the different metaphors and analogies that Peter uses to describe the Church so that we can see the very reason that we have been indeed formed for God's family and that we are intended to be brought into a church. So let's read 1 Peter chapter 2, starting in verse 1, together. *"So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander. Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk that by it you may grow up into salvation, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good. As you come to Him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves, like living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God, through Jesus Christ. For it stands in Scripture: 'Behold I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in Him will not be put to shame.' So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, 'the stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone and a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense.' They stumble because they disobey the Word, as they were destined to do. But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation."*

Peter gives this beautiful, poetic exhortation to the Church. He uses that word "Y'all" all through this passage, saying "You guys, y'all, you are supposed to do these things. This is what it means to be part of the Church." Why? What's he trying to communicate? Well the first thing that Peter says is, "You are called to belong to this Church, like a baby, like an infant. In fact, he even says "Like an entire group of infants." If you go back and you look in verse 1, he says, *"Put away all malice, and all deceit, and hypocrisy and envy..."* verse 2, *"...like newborn infants, long for pure spiritual milk."* Now this is an interesting phrase, I think, because throughout the Scripture... I know that you have probably heard it as well as I had... in 1 Corinthians 3:1 and Hebrews 5:12-13: Believers are exhorted to leave behind being infants in Christ, and instead they are pushed and they are told, "You need to be mature in Christ; leave behind milk, long for solid food; leave behind the milk, long for the meat." So when I read this, it was interesting to me because Peter says, "No, I want you to be an infant, longing for pure spiritual milk." What's he getting at?

I have two kids. There have been moments in my life when those children were infants. They awoke in the middle of the night. And in a very rare moment of attempted heroism, I would go into the room, and I would leave my wife and say, "You stay here. I'm going to go comfort these lovely children." And I would pick the baby up. He would scream and I would rock him and I would shush him and I would sing to him. And he would say to me, in his best baby voice, "My dear man..." (Laughter) "... I love you but you cannot give me what I want right now. Go get the woman who brought me into this world so that I can now have some dinner." (Laughter) Because only his mom could give him what he was craving. No matter how much I held him, no matter how much I loved him, I could never satisfy his longing because he was craving milk. Peter says, "I want you to crave pure spiritual milk. That's what I want you to be like." You know actually the phrase there "pure spiritual milk"... the literal Greek phrase in this place is "adolos logikos gala." What does that mean? Well, it does not actually say "pure spiritual milk" literally. Translated it says this: "Crave

unadulterated milk from the Word." Whoa. Unadulterated milk from the Word. "I want you," Peter says, "to find your satisfaction, the only thing that will fill your longing, the only thing to be the Word of God and what God has to say about you." Now why does that matter? Because people outside of the Church and really, even if we're honest, those of us inside the Church, are constantly bombarded by images and by messages telling us who we ought to be, what we should long for, things that we should need. Peter says, "I don't want you to buy into what anybody else tells you. I want you to believe and know that you can only be nourished and have your longings satisfied, first and foremost... in fact only like a baby longing for milk... I want you to be only satisfied by what the Word, the unadulterated milk of the Word says about you. I want the Word of God to feed you."

Now why does this matter? We are literally told this, from a very small age, that we need things, that you should buy things, that you need to look different, you need to wear this. Have you been to cereal aisle before? We've all had this experience, right? You go to the grocery store, you go to the cereal aisle, and there you see the best of the best. Right? You see Cinnamon Toast Crunch. You know it's good. Can I get somebody? Cinnamon Toast Crunch? Okay. (Laughter) Can I admit that I eat that? I don't get to eat it anymore, but there was a time. I would drink the milk. It was good. You see the best of the best; you see the worst of the worst. I don't even know what that is because I was eating Cinnamon Toast Crunch. But have you ever noticed that not on the very bottom shelf, but the second shelf from the ground, the cereal that they put there. Have you ever noticed that? That's not where they put the Bran Flakes, in case you were wondering. (Laughter) That's where they put Toucan Sam. That's where they put the Froot Loops. Why? You see, there's Sam right there. (Pointing to the video screen) I want you to look at that picture of Sam. Look at where his eyes are directed. You may think, "Oh, he's looking at the cereal." No. Do you know what he's looking at? He's looking at your three-year-old. (Laughter) I'm serious. Your three-year-old is walking down the aisle. He has seen the commercial. She has sung along with Sam, following his nose to the fruit flavors of Froot Loops, and then there he is and he is looking right at her. She says, "Momma, can I have the Froot Loops?" He says, "Daddy, can you get me the Froot Loops?" You see, because they don't care if you want to buy the Froot Loops, they know that they don't have to convince you. All they have to do is convince the three-year-old, and then you'll buy the Froot Loops. From the time that you were old enough to watch the Disney Channel or Nickelodeon, or those infomercials that they run, why in the world would my nine-year-old want me to buy a Topsy Turvy tomato plant? Because they run the commercial on the Disney Channel... (Laughter) I'm telling you they are after us, but it doesn't stop when you're a kid. You have been told, "You need more hair, you need to lose weight, you need these clothes, you need this car. You know you really could have done a better job on this report. I wish that you were a little more friendly. I wish that you had done a better job here. I wish you were more like your brother; I wish you were more like your sister." You have been given messages about who you are and what you are supposed to be your entire life, and sometimes we seek satisfaction in those. What Peter says is that the Church is actually not people who are satisfied by those messages. They only seek to know the unadulterated milk of the Word because that is who tells us who we are. You see, there are people who are here today... Do you know what you need more than anything? You need to hear this truth: Jesus Christ has redeemed you and bought you for a price, the price of His life, and He came back from the dead to demonstrate that He has conquered death. This is what He wants you to hear today, "I sing over you, redeemed child of God." That's what He wants you to hear. And you know what? You need to say "Yes" to that today. You need to just receive that. Because once you receive that, you can leave behind all of the nonsense that everybody tells you about who you are, and you can just say "Yes" to what the Word of God, the unadulterated spiritual milk, the unadulterated milk of the Word, says about who you are in the presence of God. You can stop worrying about what anybody else says about you, and you can just stop and reflect and receive Jesus Christ who said that I am a child of God, bought at a price.

2. In a house (v. 2:5)

But Peter doesn't stop there because then he goes on. He says, "Look, I want you to want this milk of the Word so that you might do some things." Verse 4: "*As you come to Him,*" so once that's happened, once you are getting your identity in Christ, you are receiving that milk, "*... a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God, chosen and precious, you yourselves, like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house.*" Same grammatical construction there: Unadulterated milk of the Word. This says "Now be built into a house of the Spirit." Once you get the milk of the Word of God, the Gospel, in your life, then you are built together, up into a house where the Holy Spirit might dwell, which is the Church. It is not this literal building. Church is not a place that you go to. Church is a place where you fit together into a house. It's a place where you belong. Let me explain.

I told you guys a couple of weeks ago that I used to help my dad out as a plumber, and I'd get to dig the ditches and that sort of thing. Another one of the jobs that he would give me was the cutting of the PVC pipe. So he would holler out measurements to me. I would take a tape measure. I would measure out that pipe. I would make a mark with a pencil, and then I would either take the hacksaw, or if I was fortunate enough that we had the power saw that day, I would chop the pipe off. I would rub off the extra rough part there on the end, and I would take it to my dad. Then we would put on the primer and the glue, and we would fasten it into the next piece of pipe. We would do that. You learn very quickly whenever you are doing that, that there is a reason that every person in construction says, "Measure twice, cut once." Because if you measure the pipe incorrectly, it will not fit into the joint or other section of pipe that you are attempting to connect it to. Right? Houses are built when things fit together. If you look at your house and there are cracks in the wall, you say, "There's a problem." If you saw the joists in your roof and they didn't fit together, you would not want to live there because you would think that your house was about to collapse down around you. The image that Peter gives us of the Church is then, "You are a living stone, and now you're built into a house of the Spirit..." on what? "...the cornerstone Jesus Christ." So we now come into this place to fit together. Sometimes people think that the Church is just a gathering. No, no, no. Let me explain. PVC pipe...I can make a big stack of PVC pipe, but it could do nothing. There's a giant pile of pipe right there, but it's not a house. It's not a plumbing piece of a house. You can get a whole lot of Christians in a room, but that is not a church. It's a church when they start to fit together and connect and build up into the house of the Spirit. We're always exhorting you that you need to be in a Life Group. Do you know why? Because you need believers that you connect with and you fit with and you serve. When the Bible says 53 times in the New Testament that you should do a "One another"... Love one another, serve one another, bear one another's burdens. What he is saying is that the Church is a place where you live out and connect. Paul uses the analogy of a body so that way we know if I'm a hand or I'm a foot or I'm an eye or I'm a nose. I have a particular function within the body. I have gifts that God has given me. We have to fit together and be built together in Christ. You need the Church because you need to be connected in. Some of us have been just part of a stack of pipe, but we have never actually gone to the trouble to connect with other Christians in community, as the Church was designed to do. So therefore, we always say, "I don't like church," because what you're talking about is an event that you attend. You're not talking about the community within which you were destined and asked and commanded to be part of. You haven't connected. It is not a coincidence that the word house also means family, all throughout the New Testament; whenever they talk about houses, they are oftentimes talking about family. Peter says, "This is a house of the Spirit." Look, you don't need any more garden club friends. You've got plenty of those. You don't need any more buddies to hang out with and watch sports. You've got plenty of those. Do you know what you need? You need people who can say to you, "I want to help you grow in the knowledge and walk of Jesus Christ. That's what you need. Those sorts of people don't always look the way that you think that

they would look, and they don't always have the same interests that you might have, but do you know what they are? They are family. The reason that the Bible says that we are brothers and sisters is because very clearly Peter and other writers of the New Testament are attempting to explain the relationship within the Church is something where you fit together like a family, and you don't leave your family behind. So, I want you to know that the Church is more than just your buddies that you have. The Church is a place where you live together and you operate together as a family.

3. To a people. (v. 2:9)

So then Peter goes on though. He says, "It's not just infants, it's not just a house..." Then he gets down to verse 9: *"You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession."* You are a race, a people. I want you to think about that for a second. Peter declares that through the identity we receive in Jesus Christ, that the Church now is a brand new race of human beings. Now that's shocking. Now the reason that that's shocking is this. Peter, whether you remember it or not, actually struggled with racism. In Galatians 2:11, Paul says this, "Whenever Peter came, I had to confront him straight to his face." Why? Because he had stopped eating with the Gentiles and was only eating with the Jews. You see, the Jewish people, they believed that they were God's chosen people, so therefore they were unclean if they were around other people, people who were not them. So they spent the vast majority of their existence separating themselves from outsiders so that they might not be considered unclean. But there came a time when Peter received a vision, in the Book of Acts, directly from the Lord. The Lord said, "Do not call anything that I have made unclean, and He sent Peter to Cornelius, to a Gentile. Peter knew he had a direct word from God that he was supposed to interact with Gentiles, but he fell back into old ways. He succumbed to racism again, and he only hung out with his own people. Paul called him out on it. He said, "Hey, if the Gospel is real, this isn't just about a certain color or a certain culture. This is everybody." Why does it matter? Let me tell you why it matters. Because right now what the Lord is saying through this part of His Word is that whenever we were redeemed in Christ, we all became a brand new race; a brand new race. And it's not a race that is determined by the blood that flows through your veins. It's determined by the blood that was poured out on the cross of Calvary. So now there's a brand new race, and that race is the Church. Now this is significant because in the ancient Near East racism was rampant. You think it's bad now; it was really bad then. Today, Peter wants us to say, "Church, we can no longer make gods of our culture or of the way that we dress or the way that we feel comfortable. Instead we have to live and worship in a way where we can interact with people of all colors, of all cultures. Why? Because racism is dead at the foot of the cross. Because now there is a brand new race, and they are bound together in Jesus Christ, and He gives them a particular job. He says this: "This race, you are a chosen race..." What are you? "A royal priesthood." What does a priest do? A priest intercedes for someone on the behalf of God. Now, Christians ever since the reformation through Martin Luther, have believed in a doctrine known as "The Priesthood Of All Believers" which essentially means this: "I don't need a priest to intercede on my behalf to God." But those who are far from God, those who are away from God, they may need someone to intercede for them so that they might know who Jesus Christ is. This is now what Peter says, "You are a brand new race. You have been born at the foot of the cross through the power of the empty tomb. This new group of people has been born up and it's called the Church. Now you have a calling, and your calling is to be a priest for all the people in your life that don't know who Jesus is. Now that doesn't mean that you can save them yourself. Do you know what it means? It means that you go to them and you are the ambassador. You are the emissary. You carry the good news of Jesus straight up to them. You say, "I want you to know who God is."

Now this matters for us because we live in, as we have discussed many times, the most ethnically diverse city in the United States. Rice University has declared that Houston last year passed New York City as the most ethnically diverse city in the US. Over 200 people groups call the city of Houston home. If there is now a brand new race where color and culture do not matter any longer and it is called the Church, you tell me what should we look like? I think it's pretty obvious. If we are to be priests who go unto all of the cultures that will receive us, and 200 of those cultures are in this city, what cultures will we go unto? All of them, because every nation, every tribe, every tongue, every color matters to Jesus Christ. He has not declared that He will reconcile some of the world to Himself. He has declared that He will reconcile all of the world to Himself, and the earth will be filled with His glory.

So this is what I want us to think about. For instance, you may be saying, "Why did someone read the Scripture in Japanese this week and French last week and Farsi three weeks ago?" Because we are wanting to drive home this very clear truth: People who speak English are not the center of the Church. The human race is the center of church, and they are at the foot of the cross, Jesus. (Clapping) So we are wanting to communicate that our church is a church for the nations. So now this is what this means we have to do. Wherever we are, we are called, if we are redeemed, to be priests to the people around us. In your apartment complex, in your neighborhood, in your office, you are called to be a priest, to carry the Gospel, to intercede on God's behalf with those people that you have been put in contact with. You have no accidental friendships. You have no accidental work relationships. You have no accidental relationships, period. You are there on purpose, and you have one job: To tell them about Jesus. If you want to see the Great Commission fulfilled, guess what? It's not going to happen because you have a pastor. It's not going to even happen because you have ten pastors. It's only going to happen whenever the Church of Jesus Christ is mobilized, trained, and released to go into the world and be priests unto all the world. Because people in this room can go into places and cultures that I will never be able to touch. You will be able to have conversations that I will never be able to have, and praise God for that. So every person in this room, you are a priest. If you have been redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ, you are a priest. You have a job to go and carry the Gospel because you are part of this new race, this new picture of humanity. He says, *"Proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His... light."* You go out and you just tell everybody, "This is what He did." You say, "I don't know theology." Okay. You just tell them, "This is what God did to me," and it starts to work. You see, in verse 10, "Once you were not a people. Once this never would have been possible but now you are."

4. Among exiles. (v. 2:11)

Verse 11: *"Beloved, I urge you, as sojourners and exiles, to abstain from the passions of the flesh which wage war against your soul."* The next thing that Peter says that we are is that we are among exiles. We are exiles. What does that mean? This word would have had very specific context in his mind, whenever he spoke this word, because his people, the Jewish people, had been conquered in 587 B.C. by Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon. His army had come in and razed the city of Jerusalem to the ground, had then taken the best and the brightest, the educated classes, and had taken them off to Babylon. Do you remember reading the story of Daniel and Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, whenever either you were a kid or maybe you have read that in the Book of Daniel as you have been reading through the Scripture? That is the process of exile. Maybe you've read the story of Esther. That is when the Jewish people are in exile. Maybe you've read the story of Ezra. That's when the Jewish people are coming out of exile. What is exile about? Exile is a very specific strategy of genocide. This is what Babylon did. They would come in and they would destroy, they would conquer you, and then they would capture all of your people. They wanted to have your intelligence and your goods, so they would bring the smartest people back with

them. But instead of making them slaves, they would train them in their ways. They would educate them, and they would give them particular jobs within the kingdom, and this was the thought: "If they live here long enough, they will marry our people, they will have children that look like us, they will worship our gods, and they will fall prey to our culture, and eventually there will be no other nation that would even look like that. They will be part of our nation now." They would just assimilate them in. That was the thought. But you probably have to ask a question. "But that didn't happen, did it? I mean, they were conquered and they were in exile for hundreds of years, but eventually they went back and there still is a Jewish People." Why? ...Because they learned how to be faithful in the midst of exile. They said, "We will only worship our God. We don't care if you throw us into the fiery furnace. We will only worship our God. We don't care if you throw us into the lion's den. We will only worship our God. We don't care what King Xerxes has to say. We will only worship our God. We want to go back to the place from which we came. We will stay faithful to one another and to our God. We will live as exiles in the middle of this." Peter then says to the first century Church, "Hey... Right now you're in the middle of a world that does not believe or love you: Pagan Roman Empire worshipping many gods. They think that you are an atheist because you believe that there's only one God. They want to torture you. They want to come after you. They want to arrest you, and you have to choose right now, how you will live. Will you live as someone who tries to hide within the culture or will you live as an exile? Say "I'm right here but I'm still going to be faithful to my God. I'm only going to worship my God." Now you think about that. In 587 B.C., when you think about first century Rome, and now you think about 21st century America, do you think there are some similarities there? The Church of Jesus Christ in the 21st century is an oddity. We believe that there is a God. We believe that God became flesh in the person of Jesus Christ. We believe that his death on a cross paved a way for us to have relationship with God. We believe that He arose again on the third day, and that gave us the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives and guaranteed us that Jesus had conquered death. We believe that forgiveness is not optional, but it's something that we are called to. We believe that sexual purity is something that we do, not because it's necessarily easy or something that we want to do, but it's because it's what God commanded. We believe that generosity to others matters because the things that have been given to us are not of our own, but they are gifts that are from God. We believe that we should love our enemies, not because we want to but because Jesus loved us whenever we were enemies with God. We do these things, even though they are odd, because we are exiles. You see, you need to be part of a Church not just for all of the other reasons that I've talked about. Do you know what? You need to be part of a church not to hide from the rest of the world but because it's a lot easier to be obedient to God's Word when you have a team. You need at least one other person. You probably need like 20 people, but you need some people in your life that they will spur you on to live faithfully in the midst of exile. I don't want to step in front of what God wants to do, but if I look at our world right now, I don't see things getting any easier for people who are people of faith and living in exile in the United States. Now God could change that tomorrow, but if He chooses not to, we have to decide, "Will we be willing to live as exiles and maintain the purity of the faith no matter what the rest of the world around us thinks?" Only you can decide if you will live in that way.

So what does that look like? Well, Peter says, he wants you, in verse 12, to keep your conduct among the Gentiles... not away from the Gentiles, not hidden from the Gentiles, but right in the middle of the Gentiles... "Keep your conduct that you have in the middle of the Gentiles honorable so that whenever other people or they even call you evildoers, then they will see your good works, and they will be drawn to God." In other words, you live right in the middle of them and you live the life of purity, even though they make fun of it, even though they think you're dumb, even though they think you're odd, and what happens? God uses it. And so the second half of verse 12 says this, "...that they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation." In other words, whenever Jesus Christ comes back, they won't be

pushed away but they will be praising God because your good works have pointed them to who Jesus Christ is. Wow.

5. With the flock. (v. 5:2)

Turn the page and go over to chapter 5. When you get over to chapter 5, you now see what Peter is getting after. He's like, "Look, I want you to live this life of holiness. I want you to learn the things of Scripture. You need catechism. You need training so that you can know what it is that you are supposed to believe and how you are supposed to live. Scripture needs to inform. You need to be on mission. You need to be in the middle of those people, living holiness, so that you can declare who Jesus Christ is." And then he uses one last analogy. He gives an analogy and he says this: *"I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge but being examples to the flock. And when the chief shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory."* This is the directive that Peter gives directly, actually, to pastors. That's what elders are. They are pastors and shepherds within the Church, under-shepherds under the Chief Shepherd who is Jesus Christ. But Peter calls to mind the most common analogy of the church in all of Scripture: a flock of sheep, a flock. Now who likes that? Who wants to be called a sheep? Don't sheep kind of smell? Aren't they kind of dumb? Do I really want to be called a sheep? Psalm 23, probably the most often-quoted Scripture in all of the Bible. *"The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters."* Why do you need a shepherd? Why do I need a shepherd? Let's just be honest. Because I am dumb. I do need Him. I make mistakes all the time. Hey; so do you. You need a shepherd, and you don't need just some guy who can stand on a platform and teach a book. You need someone who is your Heavenly Father to shepherd you and then for the Church to do its job and to shepherd. You see, I'm not the shepherd of this flock. I'm an under-shepherd of the Chief Shepherd to shepherd this flock. *"He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for His Name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me. Your rod and your staff, they comfort me."* Now that's an interesting phrase that we don't typically understand. In other words, the crook that shepherds would carry around, that stick... they would hit sheep with it and say, "Get back over here." He says, *"Your rod and your staff, they comfort me."* In other words, whenever God whacks you sometimes, He's doing that for your own good. He's bringing you back in line. You thought He was doing it to hurt you. No, He's doing it to bring you back into the fold. He's saying, "No, no, no... not over there. Back over here." *"You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil. My cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever."* I want to be a sheep when I read that passage because I need to be shepherded by God. And if the Church is the flock of God and the elders are supposed to help oversee that shepherding, I need to be in that.

In John chapter 10, Jesus says it again. *"I am the good Shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep."* In Matthew 9:36, Jesus is looking out at the people and He sees them and this is what the Bible says: "He looked at them and He saw them as if they were *"...harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd."* You know, here's the funny thing. A lot of us are sitting out there today, and do you know why we have never said "Yes" to the Church? Because we have thought, "I don't need to be shepherded. I don't need someone to oversee me. I don't need someone to bring me back into line." Let me just dispel a myth. We all need to be shepherded... every one of us. That includes me. The elders of our church hold me accountable. If they see

me doing something that I shouldn't be doing, they call me back into line. The staff, the elders, the deacons of this church... they all are charged with being under-shepherds of the Chief Shepherd, to help love and give individual attention. I wish I could give individual attention and love to every single person in this room because I love to do that. I'm a weird person. I like to see people at the hospital. I like to go and just comfort people and minister to people. I wish that I could do that for every single person at Houston Northwest, but I can't because I'm not Superman. So what does that mean? We need a team of shepherds to go out and shepherd the Church together. And here's the thing. You may have just been thinking, "This is just about me and Jesus." No, no, no. This is about you and Jesus and a flock of sheep that want to help shepherd you toward Jesus. You need the Church. You need individual attention and care, and you need that even if you believe it or not.

We are going to have our next membership class on November 17th. I want to encourage you. If you have not joined the Church yet, you need to come to that. If you've been visiting and you've been here a long time and you have yet to join, you need to come to that and you say, "Okay, I'm done just visiting. It's time for me to be part of the Church. I need to be shepherded, and I need to help shepherd others." The Church is not optional. It's beautiful.

So we get to the end of Peter's letter, basically. He's told us how incredible the Church is. Why? What changed? John chapter 21; at the end of the Gospel, Jesus is resurrected and He appears to Peter one more time. This is what we read: *"After this Jesus revealed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias, and He revealed Himself in this way. Simon Peter, Thomas (called the Twin), Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of His disciples were together. Simon Peter said to them, 'I am going fishing.' They said, 'We will go with you.' They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing."* These are professional fisherman, by the way. They caught nothing. *"Just as day was breaking, Jesus stood on the shore; yet the disciples did not know it was Jesus. Jesus said to them, 'Children. Do you have any fish?' They answered Him, 'No.' He said to them, 'Cast the net on the right side of the boat and you will find some.'* Now, for those of you who don't fish, this is not a particularly good strategy. Are the fish just going to swim underneath the boat and get in the net? Okay. We'll see. *"So they cast it and now they were not able to haul it in because of the quantity of the fish. That disciple whom Jesus loved therefore said to Peter, 'It is the Lord.'* When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment, for he was stripped for work, and threw himself into the sea. The other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far off from the land, but about a hundred yards off. When they got on land, they saw a charcoal fire in place." Charcoal fire, anthracite. The word is only used twice in the entire Bible. One time it's used when Peter is warming his hands and he says, "I have no idea who Jesus is." It's used one other time and this is it. What happens? *"They saw a charcoal fire in place with fish laid out on it and bread. Jesus said to them, 'Bring some of the fish that you have just caught.'* So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, 153 of them. And although there were so many, the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, *"Come and have breakfast."* Skip down a few verses. Go down to verse 15: *"When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these? He said to Him, 'Yes, Lord. You know that I love You.'* He said to him, *'Feed my lambs.'* ...the flock of God. *"He said to him a second time, 'Simon, son of John, do you love Me?' He said to Him, 'Yes, Lord. You know that I love You.'* He said to him, *'Tend my sheep.'* He said to him the third time, *'Simon, son of John, do you love Me?'* Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, *'Do you love Me?'* and he said to him, *'Lord, You know everything; You know that I love You.'* Jesus said to him, *"Feed my sheep."* Do you think it's an accident that Jesus built a fire out of charcoal when He could have gathered up some driftwood? No way. He said, "Peter I know that you denied Me three times, and now I'm going to ask you three times, 'Do you love Me?' He says, "Yes." And what does

he say to him every time? He does not say anything outstanding or special, He just says, "Love my Church. Feed my sheep. Tend my lambs. Feed my sheep." Listen to me. If the Saviour of the world gave final instructions to Peter and this is what He told him, "Love my Church," let me ask you a question. Why do you think that you get to pick or choose if you should love the Church? Let me break it down for you. You don't. So if right now you've been giving the Church kind of that long-distance love... we all know what long-distance love is. It's just for people who don't want to commit. It's time to get serious and to say "Yes" to the Church of Jesus Christ because He says, "Feed my sheep." So will you say "Yes" to the Church?

The next time we have a membership class on November 17th, will you come? Will you say, "Yes. I need to connect with some believers in a Life Group. I need to be baptized. You know what, I've just been gathered, I've never said 'Yes'; I've never been baptized. Well I just received Jesus Christ as my Saviour. I've never really received the love that God wants to give me. Will I live on mission for the Church wherever I am?" The implications for you, I can't tell you. God's Word tells you but this is the point. Peter went from someone who had denied that he even knew Jesus to saying, "The Church of Jesus Christ is the most beautiful thing in the world." He can change your heart too, if you'll let Him. Let's pray.

"God, we are so grateful for your Church. When everybody else says the Church is irrelevant or boring, we know the truth: That the Church is your Body. It is your Bride. It is built on the living Cornerstone. It is a group of infants longing for pure unadulterated milk of the Word. It is a House for your Holy Spirit. It is a group of exiles living in holiness. Father, we know that we are a brand new race, born at the foot of the cross. God, we give You glory in that, and we say 'Yes' to it. So, Father, may we stop pushing away from the Church, and may we start saying 'Yes' because we need it. You designed it, You gave it, and so we say 'Yes' to it. Father, I pray that those of us who need to respond today would say 'Yes' to You, whether it's saying 'Yes' to your Son Jesus, 'Yes' to your Church, or 'Yes' to another part of community. God we say, 'Yes.' We pray this in the Name of your Son Jesus Christ. Amen."