



# Central Peninsula Church

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1 Peter 1:1-2  
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## Our True Identity

### SERIES: *A Guidebook for Aliens*

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It's so good to be with you this morning as we open God's Word together and as we yield our hearts to His instruction and seek His desire for us. We're going to begin a 4-week series today in the amazing and encouraging little book in the New Testament: the letter of 1 Peter.

Have you ever felt out of place? Somehow strangely disconnected from your surroundings, maybe even anxious or ill at ease because you've discovered that you're fundamentally different from those around you? And no matter what you do you simply do not fit in. Most of us have had those experiences. All of us at some time in our lives have felt that odd sense that we don't quite belong. George Gobel put it well when he said, "I felt like the whole world was a Tuxedo and I was a brown pair of shoes." Have you ever felt like that? Oftentimes, as followers of Jesus, we may feel like we don't belong because in fact we don't. Johnny Cash reworked the message of an old hymn with the refrain that goes, "The world is an evil place, but the truth is we're just passing through." You see, we as Christ followers really don't belong here. Our identity is rooted in a different world. And our home is somewhere beyond the reality of this life.

There's a great little movie that didn't win any academy awards but illustrates this theme well. It's a movie called *Elf* that came out around Christmas time. It's the story of a young elf named Buddy who was strangely out of place at the North Pole. He didn't fit in with the other elves; he was clumsy, and no matter how hard he tried he just could not keep up with the toy making quotas that were so easy for the other elves to achieve. It didn't help that Buddy was three times as big as his classmates in elf school. It was just painfully obvious that he simply did not belong in a world inhabited by elves. But what he didn't know was that in reality he belonged to another world. In fact he was not an elf at all, he was a human being who had become displaced in a world of elves. His struggle was a result of his living in a world where he never really belonged. He was from another place. And though he may have lived in the North Pole surrounded by elves, it wasn't his true home.

Now I know that the writers and producers of *Elf* didn't set out to express a profound biblical analogue. But they really did; because you and I as followers of Christ are really in the same struggle. We live and dwell and function in a world that is not our home.

I think for most of us this reality is becoming more and more evident. We live in a world that continues to drift along without a moral anchor, valuing tolerance above truth and openness above revelation. I think parents of junior high and highschoolers maybe get a better glimpse into this reality than the rest of us. The challenges of raising Godly kids today is a fierce fight against the current of our culture that creates battles for our kids that keep mom and dad desperately on their knees. The moral options are wide open. Of course the topic of same

sex partnerships that we've looked at the last few weeks is one issue among many that daily confronts kids. And there is an invitation to experiment that is applied to every aspect of life: "just go try it on," "just check it out, be open philosophically, spiritually, and sexually. You never know what might fit for you so check it out." And this is all seen as a healthy path to self discovery.

How do we live and how do we stand in times like these? How do we hold on to the anchor of our faith in the midst of so much confusion? And how do we keep from folding under the pressures to fit in and not make waves? And how do we express to the world the grace and truth of the presence of Christ in our living?

Those are hard questions. And these are very interesting times to be a follower of Christ. But these are the same questions that were pressing on Peter's heart as he writes this letter. And as we'll see this morning, particularly in these opening verses, Peter lays for us the foundations, helping us understand who we really are so that we can stand firm and live grace filled lives in times just like our own. So please turn with me now to 1 Peter chapter one. And we will read together verses 1 and 2, **"Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, who are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, that you may obey Jesus Christ, and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in fullest measure."**

### I. I'm Being Restored

This letter is written by Peter around 64 AD, which you might remember was just before Paul's writing of 2 Timothy. In fact some scholars believe that Peter was in Rome to visit Paul in prison. So this was at the very beginning of the severe persecution of Christians under Nero that began in Rome and within five years had spread throughout the Roman provinces. Peter is writing to a group of mostly Gentile believers who he says were scattered throughout a region known as Asia Minor, or modern day Turkey. He writes to tell them to get ready because the winds of suspicion had grown into hostilities and were now mounting towards persecution.

In a brief summary verse near the end of the letter in chapter 5 he says, **"I have written to you briefly exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it."**

So the purpose of this letter is first to instruct us in the true grace of God. To lay before us the essentials of our faith. To remind us of the things we absolutely need to grasp if we are to live well in the confusion of our day. And then Peter writes to encourage us to stand firm when the pressure is on. To hold onto the true grace of God in a world that is not our home.

But what strikes me first in these opening words is Peter's own bold self declaration: Do you see it there? *Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ...* What an amazing statement. Peter an apostle? A sent one? A messenger of the Lord Jesus who walks in His authority and writes on his behalf? Wasn't he the one who argued with Jesus on the boat in Luke 5? Peter, who was then called Simon, was asked by Jesus to lower his fishing nets back into the water and he said, "Master, we have worked hard all night and caught nothing, but if you say so (though you don't know a thing about fishing) I'll let down the nets one more time."

And it was Peter who boldly walked on water until he lost sight of the Lord and Jesus had to pull him out before he drowned, and then rebuked him for his lack of faith. And it was Peter who impulsively tried to protect Jesus when he took his sword and lopped off the ear of a Roman guard in the garden. And it was Peter who lied to save his own skin. Denying he even knew Jesus, not once or twice, but three times. And each with greater boldness.

If this were an election year for apostles we'd have a lot of dirt on Peter. But Peter is more than the sum of his failures. There's an amazing conversation that takes place in the gospel of Luke that made an impact on Peter his whole life. Jesus said to Peter, who was also called Simon, **"Simon, Simon behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again strengthen your brothers."**

Peter was deeply aware of his failure. He carried around with him the memories of his brokenness and he battled the impulsive parts of his own nature. But he also knew the call of Jesus upon his life. And I think this is where Peter emerges with these words, "Peter an apostle of Jesus Christ." It's almost as if he's saying, "My faith has not failed, I have turned to him and now I'm writing to strengthen you my brothers just as Jesus said I would."

Let me ask you this morning. When do you feel like giving up the most? For so many of us it comes when discouragement sets in, when we can't seem to see beyond our own failures. When I think of the times that I've been particularly tempted to throw in the towel, to surrender to the current and let myself be dragged along, it's at those times when all I could focus on was my failures and the stains in my past. It's almost as if a certain kind of spiritual paralysis sets in that says, "who am I to stand for Christ" or "how can I ever be used of God with all the dirt on my record" or "I'm such a loser, will I ever get beyond the brokenness I carry." And there are some of you here this morning who hear those same voices, who are struggling with that same sense of discouragement. You're feeling like your failures are too big for God to restore or too many for you to overcome. But Peter the failure, Peter the impulsive, Peter the prideful, is Peter the apostle of Jesus Christ. And God is in the business of restoring and healing and cleansing and equipping in your life in the same way He was in Peter's.

The first thing we need to know to stand firm in a world not our own is this: God is faithful to restore the broken. God is not overwhelmed by your failure or intimidated by your past. He is faithfully at work in your life

to restore, to heal, to equip and use you for his purposes. As believers in Jesus Christ, we are being restored. That's the first thing we learn about who we really are.

## II. I'm Chosen by the Father

**"Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Gallatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia,..."** Peter addresses the believers in Asia Minor as resident aliens who were scattered throughout what is now the north and central regions of Turkey. Literally Peter calls them "wanderers of the dispersion," which was a clear reference to the people of Israel after their captivity in Babylon when they lived as aliens, refugees who were dispersed and scattered throughout the land. They were uprooted from their home, they were a displaced and marginalized people. A people who did not belong. Peter says that's how the believer is in relationship to this world. John Stott describes our relationship to the world this way: "Everything we have and are in Christ both comes from God and returns to God. It begins in his will and ends in his glory. For this is where everything begins and ends. Yet such Christian talk comes into violent collision with the man-centredness and self-centredness of the world. Fallen man, imprisoned in his own little ego, has an almost boundless confidence in the power of his own will, and an almost insatiable appetite for the praise of his own glory. But the people of God have at least begun to be turned inside out. The new society has new values and new ideals. For God's people are God's possession who live by God's will and for God's glory."

But even though I may be out of phase with the world, its values and priorities - not fitting in or finding my niche - though I may be an absolute failure in the eyes of the world, I'm chosen and loved by God. Peter writes to those who are "chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father." That means that the Father effectively picked me out to be His very own. Can you imagine that?

One of the things my wife Nancy and I have missed as a couple in these empty nest years is the warm little holiday tradition of going out together as a family and choosing our Christmas tree. In our family it's otherwise affectionately referred to as our annual Christmas fight. It doesn't seem to matter where we go; we've cut them down in the forest, we've scoured the lots, we've checked out this recommendation and that but it all turns out the same. Everyone wants a different tree. The only tree we seem to agree on is the one the other guy just picked out and is now putting in his truck. We have spent hours in the cold, standing, arguing, turning, shaking, and rejecting tree after tree until one by one we give up and let the last person standing get their way.

But that's how we choose things. We choose things on the basis of beauty or character or quality, don't we? There has to be something attractive about the thing before we will choose it. But you and I are chosen by the Father simply out of His affections. Not because of our beauty, but because of the riches of His love. Not by what we could do but simply by His desire to choose us as His own. The apostle Paul says it this way, "And God being rich in mercy, because of His great love in which he loved us even when we were dead in our trespasses and sins, made us alive in Christ." By grace you have been saved. Isn't that amazing?

That's tough to really get our heads around. But ponder

that for awhile. The Father chose me. Much has been said and written over the years about the impact of a Father's love in the forming of a child. For any of you dads out there let me say the greatest gift you can give your kids is to openly and affectionately express and demonstrate your love for them. That's your biggest job. And if you do that well you'll impart to them a gift that will stabilize them for a lifetime. And of course many of us struggle with a vague sense of insecurity and uncertainty due at least in part to the absence or the inconsistencies of a father's love.

But this is where our confidence to stand firm begins. If we are to be stabilized, if we are to be strengthened to be able to stand in a world that is not our home, we must grab a hold of and be saturated in the Father's love for us. Drink that in this morning. If you are a believer in Jesus Christ. No matter where you've come from or how you came: The Father Chose You. In fact, He delighted in creating you and He looked forward to having you as His very own before you were even formed. That's what Peter means when he says that you were chosen according to foreknowledge of God the Father. Next time you're tempted to cave in under pressure, tell yourself, my Father chose me! I don't need to fit in in order to be secure. I don't need to bend my principles in order to feel like a success. I am His and He delights in me, I'm chosen to be His very own. I have found out that the greatest deterrent to spiritual compromise is rooted right here; in a healthy grasp of the depths of the Father's love.

### **III. I'm Sanctified by the Spirit**

And we are sanctified by God the Spirit. Some of you may be thinking, if God chooses us then what about our "free will?" Do we ever need to make choices ourselves? Well, the scriptures present both sides as being equally true. We are invited and even commanded to make a choice to believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. But at the same time it is God who chooses those who have believed. It's a paradox that theologians have struggled with for years. We won't plunge the depths of it this morning, but I think Peter gives us a glimpse into how this works itself out in the process of coming to Christ.

He says that the Father has chosen us "by the sanctifying work of the Spirit." I love that. It means that the Spirit of God is busy at work behind the scenes. He softens our hearts, He causes us to open our eyes to our spiritual poverty. He's busy melting down our resistance, dismantling our barriers, so that we will be open to the invitation of God.

Twenty-nine years ago I was on my way to play a job in a band at the Holiday Inn in San Francisco. I had been wrestling for months with the claims of Christ. I had raised every argument against believing in Him that I could think of. I'd go to church on Sunday and then I'd go home and carefully review my philosophy books, and I listened to the well reasoned resistance of the skeptics. But on August 1st 1975, as I drove my Datsun pickup on 280 up to the city, with tears in my eyes, I pulled over to the side of the road and said, "God, I have no idea who you are or why you would even want me. But I know that my life is so screwed up that I need someone outside of me to take over. And God, or Lord or Jesus (whoever you are) if you'll have me; I'm yours." It sounds so cliché, but I truly felt the burden of my broken heart being lifted and lightened as I surrendered to a God I barely knew but somehow had come to trust for the very first time. I was bewildered and I had no clue how I had gotten from

skeptical to surrendered sinner that night.

Peter explains how I got there. It was through the sanctifying work of the Spirit of God. You see, from my vantage point that was a moment of decision. And it was a choice that I had resisted and agonized over for months. But there's another side of the story. The Spirit had been at work all along. In fact, I can now see the Spirit was at work softening and preparing me for that day, years in advance. He'd been at work from the very beginning, wooing me to the Father's heart. That's the Spirit's job. In 1975 I made a decision to give my life to Jesus Christ; but long before that the Father chose me and he sent the Spirit after me until that night 29 years ago.

C.S. Lewis had a similar conversion experience. For months his friend J.R.R. Tolkien had urged him to consider the claims of Christ. But Lewis was an atheist with a strong disliking for the church. Until one day in a car on the way to visit the zoo. Lewis chose Jesus; he said, "When we set out I did not believe that Jesus Christ was the Son of God, and when we reached the zoo I did." Then looking back on that day he said, "An atheist cannot guard his faith too carefully. Dangers lie in wait for him on every side. In the car that day, God closed in on me."

It could be that you're here this morning and even as you've been listening you've sensed a strange softening inside. You can't quite put it all together, but for the first time you're hearing that the Father loves you and desires to have you as His very own. Don't be weirded out. It's simply the Spirit at work in your heart. He's wooing you to the Father, breaking down the resistance, revealing your deepest need.

But the work of sanctification doesn't end there. The Spirit is active in the life of each and every believer to bring him or her to maturity in the Lord. That's why Peter says that this sanctifying work is so "that you may obey Jesus Christ."

The word "sanctify" means to put something to its intended purpose. I sanctify the piano when I sit down and play it. A piano was meant to be played. That's what it was made for. The Spirit's ongoing work in our lives then is to cause us to be put to our intended purpose. And since we were made to live a life of obedience to Jesus Christ, the Spirit is at work to cause us to be humbled before the Lord, to be softened, and tender to the Lord's direction and open to His correction in our lives.

God may even be closing in on you this morning. Maybe as we worshipped a moment ago you just had this sense that the Lord was addressing some area of compromise in your life. You've been struggling to bring to Him some moral failure. Or you've been wrestling with God to let go of a relationship that you know isn't honoring Him. And this morning He's stirring in your heart giving you the courage you need to turn and obey Jesus Christ. That's the sanctifying work of the Spirit of God.

I think this truth is particularly important to grasp in times like our own. Many Christians feel like we're on the losing side of the battle within our culture today. But remember Peter, speaking to believers who were soon to experience severe persecution for their faith and he tells them that the sanctifying power of the Spirit of God is relentlessly at work. Not only is He faithfully drawing men and women to Himself, He's equally busy giving me the conviction and

courage to follow after Jesus in obedience so that I can stand where and when I need to stand. You have the resources by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to stand in the work place, on the soccer field, in your family. And you have the Spirit actively at work in your life so that you can walk in obedience to Jesus today. You may be facing some tough decisions to obey Jesus Christ this morning. Maybe it's in the workplace where you've been uneasy about the way you just go along with the flow. Or it could be in your marriage where you know obedience means being faithful to the covenant made even in tough times. Or in your singleness, when everyone around you seems so willing to compromise their standards, you want to be faithful to obey what you know is right. Or there's a habit of the heart that you need to give up today and you've been sensing the Spirit's touching on this area this last week. And today He's closing in on you.

The sanctifying power of the Spirit is at work to give you the heart and the strength to walk in obedience today. God faithfully restores the broken. God the Father chooses us by His love to be his very own. And God the Spirit is busy at work to sanctify us so that we will live a life of obedience to Jesus Christ.

#### **IV. I'm Forgiven Through the Son**

Those are such great truths. But the portrait of who we really are is only made complete by what comes next. It's the blood of Jesus applied to our sins. It's "His sprinkled blood." This is of course a reference to the blood of Jesus that dripped down His dying body as He hung there on the cross to blot out your sins and mine.

We have been chosen by God the Father, and God the Spirit is actively at work in our lives. But it's God the Son who paid the price. It was the Son who died so that you and I might live. And it's in the Son through His shed blood that we have access to what we so desperately need. The forgiveness of our sins.

That's what he means by the sprinkled blood. It's the blood of the sacrifice in the temple that was sprinkled on the mercy seat to bring the forgiveness of sin. The Lord tells Israel in Lev. 17, "**The life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it for you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement, by reason of the life.**" Mel Gibson said of his powerful and bloody portrait of the cross, "In the Old Covenant, blood was required, in the New Covenant blood was required. Jesus could have pricked his finger, but he didn't; he went all the way." And folks, we say this: he went all the way for you and me. The blood was sprinkled on the cross to cover your sins and my sins.

So what do we need to stand firm in the confusion of our day, to live a life of grace in a world that is not our home? We need to embrace who we really are. We need to know and be steeped in the theology of these two short verses. In times of great temptation when the pressure is on we remind ourselves of these four things. I am being restored from my brokenness and made useful for the purposes of God. I am deeply loved and chosen by God the Father. I am sanctified by God the Spirit to walk in obedience. And I am forgiven, sprinkled clean by the blood of God the Son.

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