Do you find it difficult to hold on to hope when our culture is becoming increasingly hostile to Christianity? Just this week, America’s largest university system in California “de-registered” InterVarsity Christian Fellowship on all 26 campuses because InterVarsity refuses to allow non-Christians to serve as leaders of their groups.

One astute observer had this to say, “America’s college and university campuses are increasingly resembling closed countries.” In commenting on this situation, Albert Mohler wrote, “What we’re looking at here is not only the ‘de-recognition’ of these organizations, but the stigmatizing of evangelical Christianity.”

How do we handle all the anti-Christian antagonism in our country? Our present culture seems to be in a moral free-fall, doesn’t it? Liberties that Christians have taken for granted are being removed. Marriage has been reframed and redefined. The sanctity of human life is under attack.

BTW, Walk for Life is next Saturday morning.

Do we just cave into the culture around us? Do we become combative? Or, do we go with the gospel by bringing Christ into the culture? How do we maintain hope when everything seems so hopeless? How do we remain Christ-centered when our culture is becoming increasingly caustic toward Christianity?

These questions and more are answered in the book of 1 Peter. We’re kicking off a brand new series today called, “Living Hope: Seeking Holiness in a Hostile World.”

In order to apply the Word to our world, let’s view this letter as “Peter’s Epistle to Edgewood.” Could I encourage you to tread this entire book at least once a week? In just 105 verses, it ties together all four of our key vision words – gather, grow, give and go. As we dive in, it’s my prayer that we will gather with God’s people to hear God’s Word, that we’ll grow deeper in our walk with Christ, that we’ll give what we’ve been given and that we’ll be better equipped to go with the gospel to the culture around us. Incidentally, we put together a booklet called, “Edgewood on Mission” that contains the combined text from last weekend’s message and our Vision Night on Sunday night.

When I told Ray Pritchard that we are beginning this series, he responded with these words: “Never have we lived in more unstable times with complete moral collapse at home and the rise of brutality on a scale hitherto unknown in the Middle East.” And then as he reflected on the impact Edgewood is making in our community, he added these words, “These are exciting...times to pastor a church in such a strategic location.” I couldn’t agree more!
On July 18, 64 A.D., the city of Rome ignited in flames and burned for six days while the emperor Nero played his fiddle. Historians tell us that it’s likely that Nero started the fire but when it blazed out of control, the citizens became hostile and so he blamed the Christians for starting it. This unleashed a fire of persecution against believers that spread to other parts of the Roman Empire. Nero was nasty to Christians. He reportedly covered Christ followers in tar and then set them on fire while they were still alive, using them as torches to provide light for his garden parties. He also covered Christians in the skins of wild animals and then sent his hunting dogs out to tear them to pieces. He also nailed some to crosses, lacerated others with hot knives, and even fed Christ-followers to lions for sport.

Christian groups under Nero weren’t losing their status; they were losing their lives. It’s into this hostile culture that Peter writes the letters we know as 1st and 2nd Peter. Friends, with things becoming increasingly hostile toward Christians in our culture, it’s imperative that we know who we are, where we’re from, how we’re to live, and to cherish what we’ve been given.

1. We must know who we are. Look at the opening phrase in verse 1: “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ.”

- Saved. Peter was really a paradox wasn’t he? While he is listed first in all the lists of the disciples and he made some courageous statements about Jesus like: “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God,” Jesus also turned to him one time and said, “Get thee behind me, Satan!” John MacArthur points out that when he acted like his sinful self, Jesus called him Simon but when he acted out his true identity, he was called Peter, or Rocky for short. It’s striking that he doesn’t call himself Simon here, but Peter.

Friend, if you’re saved, you have a new identity as well. And if you’ve bailed or compromised or denied Christ in any way, you can have a fresh start just like Peter did. One of my favorite verses about the Resurrection is when Jesus turned to Mary in the garden and said in Mark 16:7, “But, go tell the disciples, and Peter…” He wanted Peter to know that there was hope. His denials did not disqualify him. And then, in John 21, Peter was recommissioned by Christ with these words, “Feed my lambs, tend my sheep, feed my sheep.” As we study his letter we’re some of the sheep that his words will feed.

- Sent. Peter is an “apostle.” The word “apostle” means an officially commissioned messenger or one “who is sent forth from.” When attached to the phrase “of Jesus Christ,” we know he’s referring to the official office of an apostle. While there are not apostles today, in a real sense you and I are the Savior’s sent ones. We’ve been called to gather, to grow, to give and to go with the gospel message. As we learned last weekend, because we’ve been told to go, we’re to live as ones who are sent.

Friend, do you know who you are? Next, we must know where we’re from.

2. We must know where we are from. Verse 1 continues: “…To the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia…”

2
This week I Googled the word “home” and a map popped up saying that I reside in three different places. According to the all-knowing search engine, I live at Friendship Manor, State Farm Insurance and Rock Island Nursing and Rehabilitation Center! Interestingly, there were 1.6 billion hits for “home.” Do you know where your home is?

For three years our family knew what it meant to feel like foreigners. In 1996, when Emily was 8, Lydia was 5 and Becca was only 2, we sold our home and most of our belongings and moved to Mexico City where we served as missionaries for three years. As much as we tried to learn the language and the culture, it was abundantly clear that we were not Mexicans, especially when anyone would listen to how I slaughtered Spanish. We rented a home and lived there but we were not from there. Every six months when we had to renew our visas by making trips to the border we were reminded that we were temporary residents.

- **Strangers in the world.** Friends, we are scattered strangers living in an increasingly strange land. The word “pilgrim” refers to a temporary resident in a foreign place. Here’s the deal. If you’re a Christ-follower, this world is not your home. You are not from around here. Philippians 3:20 says that our “true citizenship is in heaven.” It should always feel a bit like you’re on a guest visa because your true home is in heaven.

Unfortunately, some of us put our roots so firmly here that we seldom focus on our real home. It’s so easy to think that this is all there is. We get all up in stuff here as we look for people, possessions, pleasures and other pursuits to give us satisfaction. It will never work because we come from another place and we are made for another place. C.S. Lewis once said, “It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this.”

The heroes of the faith listed in Hebrews 11 had this figured out because in verse 13 “they confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.” Peter hits on this theme at least two more times. In 1 Peter 1:17 he says that we’re to conduct ourselves carefully “throughout the time of our stay here” and in 1 Peter 2:11 he pleads with us: “Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against your soul.” It was when Lot stopped being a sojourner and instead settled down in Sodom that everything important to him went up in smoke!

Actually, you don’t have to travel to a foreign country to feel like a stranger. Whenever the gospel of Jesus Christ changes a life, nothing is the same. Once you transfer your allegiance to Christ, others will think you’re a bit odd. Some of you know about that don’t you? When I got saved and the Lord took away all my desire for alcohol my buddies thought I was wacked out.

When you say no to fishing so you can gather with God’s people, your friends will think you’ve freaked out. If you decide to be faithful to your spouse because of your faith, you are a resident alien. If you’re a Christian teenager and you’re striving to live for Jesus, you are a stranger at school. If you’ve chosen the path of purity, your friends will think you’re acting like a puritanical pilgrim. If you’re single and you choose to only date a
Christian, your friends may think you’re missing out. When you publicly identify yourself with Jesus Christ through baptism (as three are doing this weekend), you’ll enter the life of an exile. One pastor says, “1 Peter is a good word for the exiles who have been pushed to the margins of society.”

- **Scattered by God.** The word “dispersion” means “scattering.” God’s people had been dispersed into what is modern-day Turkey – Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, which were Roman provinces. God still scatters His people right where He wants them so that they can live on mission for His glory. In Pontus and in Port Byron. In Galatia and in Geneseo. In Cappadocia and in Coal Valley. In Asia and in Andalusia. In Bithynia and in Bettendorf.

I love attending Second Winders. This is a ministry for people 54 and up (that’s how old I am) that meets on the second and fourth Thursdays of the month. This past Thursday we had 174, plus about 30 workers! Have you noticed that we’re running out of room everywhere? One Second Winder told me that she can hardly wait to start giving to a building campaign!

Pastor Ed always walks around with a microphone and loves to ask guests where they’re from. If the guest says, “East Moline,” he says loudly, “That’s my favorite town.” He says this for every town or city someone is from. He does such a great job with this. It strikes me that wherever you live; God says to you, “That’s my favorite town for you right now. While you’re scattered there as a stranger, live on mission and sow the seed of the gospel.”

In Acts 1:8 the believers were told to go with the gospel from Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria and to the ends of the earth. They didn’t do so well at their assignment so in Acts 8:1 we read that God sent persecution to propel them out on mission: “At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria…” Verse 4 says that these strangers “who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word.” Carl Henry had some great insight when he wrote: “The early church didn’t say, ‘Look what the world is coming to!’ They said, ‘Look what has come into the world!’”

First, we need to know who we are. Second, we must know where we’re from. Thirdly, we must know how we’re to live.

3. **We must know how we are to live.** Check out verse 2: “Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ…” Don’t miss the beautiful reference to the Trinity in this verse – God the Father, the Spirit and Jesus Christ. Peter doesn’t explain the Trinity but rather just assumes it and celebrates it.

- **Selected by God the Father.** “…elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father.” Don’t be afraid of the words “elect” and “foreknowledge.” It should give you
great comfort to know that if you’re saved you were selected before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4). This doctrine helps us see that God has selected us for salvation and for sowing the seed of the gospel wherever we have been sovereignly scattered.

We don’t have time to dive into election and human responsibility but let me just say that they are not contradictory but complementary. God sovereignly selects and we are responsible to respond. I like how the Baptist preacher Charles Spurgeon handled this question: “How do you reconcile God’s sovereignty with man’s responsibility?” “I wouldn’t try,” he replied, “I never reconcile friends.”

Jesus puts these two friends together in John 6:37: “All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, [that’s election] and the one who comes to Me [that’s human responsibility] I will by no means cast out.” Here are two verses from Acts 13 where these two friends are found: Verse 39: “And by Him everyone who believes [human response] is justified” and verse 48: “…and as many as had been appointed [divine election] to eternal life believed.”

- **Sanctified by the Holy Spirit.** To be sanctified is to be set apart for God’s exclusive use. Everything we have has been given to us so we can’t help but give back to Him. All of this is “for obedience.” Truett Cathay, the founder of Chick-fil-A, died this week at 93. He was once asked about his legacy: “I’d like to be remembered as one who kept my priorities in the right order. We live in a changing world, but we need to be reminded that the important things have not changed, and the important things will not change if we keep our priorities in proper order.”

- **Sprinkled by Jesus Christ.** In Exodus 24:6-8, after God’s people made a commitment to the covenant, Moses “sprinkled blood on them.” Here’s the idea. The blood had to be personally applied in order for the covenant to be sealed. Likewise, the blood that Jesus shed on the cross has to be applied to your life personally through faith. Hebrews 12:24 refers to our redemption as coming through “the blood of sprinkling.” Drop down to 1 Peter 1:19 where we read that we are redeemed by the “the precious blood of Christ.”

Dr. Brantley is the missionary doctor who had Ebola and now is doing fine. I heard this week that he gave some of his blood to another missionary doctor who has Ebola in the hopes that his antibodies will help to heal that doctor. Here’s the deal. The one infected had to not only be open to the idea but had to receive the blood in order for it to work.

First, we need to know who we are. Second, we must know where we’re from. Thirdly, we must know how to live. Finally, let’s make sure we know what we’ve been given.

**4. We must know what we’ve been given.** Look at the last phrase of verse 2: “Grace to you and peace be multiplied.”

- **Redemption through grace.** The word grace means gift. Specifically, it refers to God’s unmerited favor poured out on people just like you and me. As a recipient of God’s grace
himself, Peter mentions grace in every chapter of this letter, actually using the word 10 times in this brief letter! We certainly don’t deserve to be redeemed, do we?

- **Reconciliation through Peace.** The Bible says that because of our sins, we are at war with God and thus enemies with Him. It’s only through the shed blood of Christ and our response to His grace that we can be made at peace with Him.

Friends, have you noticed that when you’re going through pain or persecution that you are more keenly aware of your need for grace and peace? Peter wants his readers to know that grace and peace can be “multiplied” to us. This word means “to greatly increase” or to be taken to its “maximum measure.”

Christianity has always advanced when under attack. God’s grace and peace are multiplied to us when we’re in a mess. It’s becoming increasingly difficult to stand for Christ today but it was far worse during the Roman Empire when persecution and problems were pulverizing believers. Many lost their lives and those who lived lost their livelihoods. Friends, we can become alarmed, angry, argumentative and abrasive. Or better yet, we can live attractive and appealing lives.

I like how InterVarsity is responding to being derecognized on California campuses. Just this week they announced that they are “developing a new style of campus ministry” that doesn’t “rely on established campus structures.” As they approach their 75th Anniversary, Greg Jao, the national field director noted: “Our campus access challenges give this generation of students an opportunity to reinvent campus ministry.”

One blogger puts all this in perspective when he reminds us that God will still do His work on campuses because He works in at least four ways that have nothing to do with whether a Christian group is officially recognized or not.

- **God works through relationships.**
- **God’s people don’t stop talking.**
- **The gospel is powerful and attractive.**
- **Adversity is God’s specialty.**

Speaking of California, it’s our privilege to partner with the LifeCity team as they have now launched a church in the Silicon Valley. Last Sunday 97 people attended, 7 got saved and 5 were baptized! Seven Edgewood members have moved out there and a week ago nine other members were there to serve and encourage the team. I’d like you to hear from one of them now [Marie, Donna, Randy].

1. **What’s one highlight you’d like to share?**
2. **How has your life changed since going?**

It’s time for us to know who we are, where we’re from, how we’re to live, and to cherish what we’ve been given. Here are some action steps.
1. **If you’re saved, see yourself as scattered in this community to sow the gospel.** Determine to have a gospel conversation with a neighbor, a co-worker, a family member or a friend this week. Think of one person right now. Get their name in your head and their face on the screen of your mind. And then by God’s grace, initiate a conversation.

2. **Live out your convictions so that you stand out as a stranger in this world.** If you’ve been compromising; determine to be a man or woman of conviction. Don’t be afraid to be an alien. If you’ve become caustic, it’s time to be more compassionate. What one thing can you stop? What one thing does God want you to start doing?

3. **Personally ask Jesus to save you from your sins so that you’ll have a home in heaven.** I guess I do have three homes – wherever I am with Beth, that’s my home. My other home is in Moline. But my real home is in heaven. Do you have a home there? Have you responded to grace so that you can have peace with God? The first step is to be broken and admit that you’re a sinner in need of salvation. And then reach out to Christ and ask Him to save you.

Invitation Song: Sweetly Broken