

Church, do we believe that there is absolutely nothing that could separate us from the love of God? Do we believe that there is no life, no death or nothing that can separate us from His love? I pray that we are convinced of that.

My name is Hunter. I'm on staff here at the Village. I'm usually up in the booth, so I get to see the backs of your heads a lot, which is cool. If you don't know what I've walked through for the past three weeks, I just want to briefly share. About three weeks ago, I received a phone call about 3:00AM from the Hot Springs Police Department telling me that my father had taken his own life.

My father was a local pastor in the Dallas/Fort Worth area for nearly 22 years. This was a man who pointed me to Christ when I was six-years-old. This was the man who, when I was in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade, asked me who in my class had no friends. He'd say, "Hunter, who doesn't have any friends?" I told him the guy's name, and he said, "Let's take him bowling tomorrow." So this was a man who taught me how to love. When I was fourteen, he took me to Kenya on my first mission trip overseas.

This man was hurting and struggling with depression. He was walking in some shame. And for whatever reason, he could not bring that into the light and confess it to me. I had no idea how badly he was hurting. So when I got that news, I was just crushed. He had gotten away for a few days to read and write. He did that all the time. He needed to go before the Lord on some issues. And in a weak moment, he believed the lie of the enemy. It tore me apart. My mother, my brother, his fiance, my wife and I were just heartbroken.

In the midst of all that, the Lord began to flood our hearts with His Spirit. He began to just pour out gallons upon gallons of grace upon grace on our lives. I could spend all night telling you about the stuff that He has been doing. Just the fact that my mother was here this morning and able to sing worship is unbelievable to me. But we were hurting and are hurting. So I want to stand before you tonight and tell you that I'm hurting, but I also want to tell you that my hope is in Jesus Christ. I pray that, whatever you're going through, your hope is in Jesus Christ and His cross.

So the Lord began to prove Himself faithfully over and over again over the next few days and weeks. He laid a text on my heart that I want to share tonight. I truly believe that the Lord wants to use it to minister to us tonight. There are those in this room who are hurting and suffering who need to hear this from the Lord. This text is convicting, it's comforting and I pray that it would stir your heart to worship. The text is in 1 Peter 5. 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."

Immediately after I got the news, my mind and heart just began to be flooded with these anxious thoughts, with these worried thoughts and with these fearful thoughts. It was ridiculous the things that I was worried about. As I read this, the Lord really convicted me. Because when you and I worry, when you and I are anxious and fearful, that's ultimately pride in us. That's pride that says, "God, I don't trust You with these things. I'm going to make it on my own. I'm going to tackle this on my own." So what Peter is writing here is, "When you cast those anxieties on the Lord, that's you humbling yourself. Because God is a Father who cares for you." So cast your anxieties among Him tonight, church. Whatever you're going through, cast your anxieties on Him.

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 isn't imagery of a puppy dog, this isn't imagery of the serpent and this isn't imagery of a gnat that just wants to annoy you. This is imagery of a lion, a powerful beast. He is not here to just give you disease, he has not come to just make you uncomfortable and he has not come here to just whisper itty-bitty lies (although he does those things). He wants to devour you. Hear me when I say he hates you. Hear me when I say he wants to instill fear into your life.

But let me tell you one thing. Jesus Christ is greater and you belong to the King. There is nothing that can separate that, nothing. So run to the cross. The cross of Jesus Christ is greater than any created being, including the devil. In His sovereignty, God is over all things. So be watchful, be mindful and be sober-minded.

"Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world." Now I don't know what you're suffering right now, what you're walking through, what's hurting you or what your distress is. But I can assure you that you're not alone in this. In fact, in every single service today that I have shared this with, I had someone come up to me and say, "I lost my son. . . I lost my mother. . . I lost my brother to suicide." I'm not alone in this, and you're not alone in your struggle, whatever it is. God is faithful. He is near. I promise you this.

"And after you have suffered a little while. . ." So you will suffer. If you haven't already suffered in life, there is a good chance you will. But don't be disheartened. It's only for a little while. Even if it lasts for the rest of your life, it's only for a little while. Compared to the eternal glory we have in Jesus Christ, it's just a moment. "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."

This isn't the imagery from Isaiah 6 where the seraphim comes and touches the coal to the lips to cleanse from sin, and this isn't John the Baptist preparing the way for Jesus. This is God Himself. "The God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you." He will restore your heart. He will mend your heart. He will heal your heart. He will confirm that you belong to Him. He will confirm the calling that you are an heir to His kingdom. He will strengthen you with the power of His Spirit in the inner-being so we will know how deep, wide and strong the love of Christ is for us. He will do these things. He's doing these things in my own life, and I promise you He will do these things in your life. He will establish you. He is faithful.

So I don't know where you are tonight. I don't know what you're struggling with and I don't know where you're hurting. There is a chance some of you are having selfdestructive thoughts. And let me tell you, suicide is not the answer. Yes, my father is worshiping with the King right now in glory, but suicide is not the answer. The cross of Jesus Christ is the answer. Run to the cross. Run to the cross with all you have.

So I know some of us are hurting right now. I know some of us are struggling. I know some of us are pleading before the Lord for mercy. Can I just tell you that I love you? I don't know all of you, but as a believer in Jesus, I love you and I want to pray with you. Our team wants to pray with you. You have friends who want to pray with you.

And then there are some of you who may not have any idea what I'm talking about. Know that what I'm saying is true. Jesus is the Christ, and He is mighty to save. There is absolutely no way I would have made it through these past few weeks if Jesus wasn't who He said He was.

So for our remaining time, we're just going to get after the Lord in prayer. If you need to confess sin, let's drag that sin into the light. If you need to talk with someone, we have pastors who will pray with you. We just need to do business with

the Lord. Because my father, for whatever reason, could not share that, and it breaks my heart. But Jesus is greater, folks. Jesus is greater than whatever you're walking through. No matter what you're walking through, He is greater.

There is nothing that you can confess to us or to your friends that is going to change their affection for you. There is no shame and no condemnation in Jesus Christ. So I pray that we understand that. I pray that your hope would be so rooted in Jesus Christ that it does not matter what you feel like you're hurting with. The grace of God covers whatever you're struggling with. I don't care how wretched you feel you may be. The grace of God covers that. The Lord, through the work of Jesus Christ on the cross, has paid the ultimate price, and we now have freedom in Him. He has come to set us free.

So the staff and I want us to be a campus that walks in complete freedom from our shame, sin, hurts and struggles. Can you imagine what our church would look like if we walked in that kind of freedom? Can you imagine the kind of ministry that would take place week in and week out, all for the glory of His name?

So let me pray for us. "Father, I thank You for Jesus. I thank You for the cross. I thank You for the call to come and die. I thank You for the call to repent and to believe on the person and work of Jesus Christ on the cross. So Father, I pray in the power of Your Spirit that You would begin to move, stir, convict, comfort and urge Your people towards confession, repentance and sanctification in You tonight. Father, I pray that in the power of the name of Jesus, this room would be a room where there is no fear, no shame and that we worship absolutely free tonight in this place. So send Your Spirit to just infiltrate this room. Send Your angels to stand guard around the corners of this room and to wage war if there needs to be war in the heavenly realm. For those in this room who don't know You, I pray that You would be mighty to save tonight. I pray that You would be quick to change hearts for the glory of Your name. For those who need to confess, I pray that You would just gently urge them towards confession, whatever that looks like. For those who are hurting, Father, would You comfort them? So Father, I thank You for the cross. Thank You for Jesus. Thank You that He came to give us life and life to the fullest. May we run hard after Him tonight. It's in His name that we pray often. Amen."