

Harris Creek Baptist Church
Jonathan Pokluda
Series: Forged
October 22, 2023

Living in the End Times

1 Peter 4:7-11

⁷ The end of all things is near. Therefore be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray. ⁸ Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. ⁹ Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. ¹⁰ Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. ¹¹ If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.

Harris Creek, how are we doing? (Audience responds.) Let's go, let's go! So, my dad was like John Wayne, if you've got that image. I grew up on a farm. He was a rancher. He would get his Wranglers starched. I don't know if anybody does that anymore, but he would have these deep creases down the front of his legs. And there was a certain sound it would make when he would put his pants on, kind of pry his foot through that thick, starched jean. He would wear this white shirt. This was his dress code: a white, button-down shirt, with a belt with a belt buckle, his boots, and a straw cowboy hat. Every day. He had this old Chevy truck, long bed, manual shift, pull a trailer, Chevy truck. He switched to a Ford later in life, but most of my life he was a Chevy man.

He would leave early in the morning. He was a no-nonsense kind of guy. Don't let him catch you sleeping late. This was really pertinent to me in the summertime. He would leave before the sun would come up for work, he'd go get coffee with some guys, and he would come home about mid-morning. Our house is off the main road. There's a gravel road that gets to our house that has two cattle guards. We call the Big Cattle Guard on the road; you drive down that gravel road and you get to the Little Cattle Guard. There is a certain sound his Chevrolet truck would make as it would drive over that Big Cattle Guard if it was completely silent; say, if you were sleeping. So, for me, right at about 10:30 every day in the summertime, that was like, "You better get up!" And I learned, that when that chain, he had a big, old chain in the back in the bed of his truck, and a toolbox, and when that chain would rattle around in the distance at the Big Cattle Guard, I had a minute and 17 seconds. (Audience laughs.) One minute and 17 seconds to get out of bed, make it look like I had been up, grab a shovel. "Hey, Dad! How've you been? I've been working since the sun came up. Yeah, man!" Make it look like I was doing what it is I was supposed to be doing. If he had asked me to do something, I needed to either get it done in a minute and 17 seconds, or make it look like I was giving it a Grade A effort. In fact, sometimes I would get up before he'd come home at 10:30, and I would sit in the living room. We called it the "Good Living Room." I don't know why; it was the only living room we had. But, in the Good Living

Room, there was a window and you could see out to that cattle guard, and I could see when his truck was coming down, so then I could get busy. Sometimes I would work harder to not get caught not doing what it is I was supposed to be doing, than it would be to actually do what it is I was supposed to be doing, if you follow me. “All right. When is he going to come home so I can *look busy*.”

I tell you this because right now there seems to be an obsession with, “When is Jesus coming back?” Call it the End Times, the Rapture, the Return of Christ, whatever that is in your mind; I’m getting lots of questions around this. I think wars, rumors of wars, things that are happening in our world, and I think one of the reasons that we’re obsessed with this is because we think, “If he’s coming back, then I need to do what it is I’m supposed to be doing.” The punchline, the Grand Reveal is, “Absolutely!” Whether that’s tomorrow, 10 years, a thousand years, you are to be living today as though He’s coming back. What I’m trying to tell you is that you are in that minute seventeen. Okay? Jesus is at the Big Cattle Guard. What is it that He’s asked you to get done? Peter is going to bring that to great clarity for us today.

In this series, called Forged, we’re looking at Peter’s first letter to the Church. The Church are Christians, both Jews and pagans, or Gentiles, converted to Christians, scattered throughout Asia Minor. About 64 A.D. is when this is written, under great persecution of Nero, of the government, and Peter writes this letter to remind followers of Jesus what’s important. We’ve taken this ancient text, and we’re applying it to our context in 2023. The big takeaway is, how are we to live in the last days? That’s today, that’s the message. How are we to live in the last days?

God has asked us to do some things, and we only have a certain amount of time to do them. Maybe just today; Jesus may come back tomorrow. It may be your life on earth, but you only have a certain amount of time to do them.

Every Friday, I take questions. I’ve been asked over 500,000 questions. I’ve answered thousands of questions, 50 to 100 every Friday. Here are some from this Friday. (Screenshots of questions appear on the screen.) “Why do I feel fearful about the end times even though I’m saved?” “Is the rapture before or after 7 years of tribulation?” “I get really anxious about Jesus coming back – but I know He’s good. Is that normal?” “God said I’ll have a husband but now I’m worried we might get raptured before it even happens.” That’s honest. “Is it wrong to be anxious about the end of times? Why do I feel that way?” “Pre? Post? Or A?” ... millennial, is the question. I can tell you; I’ve been doing this for a while, (J.P. points to the screen) that’s not normal. That’s not even half, that’s not even a fourth of them. I just grabbed some of the themes. Everybody wants to know, “Hey, what about the End Times?” Let me show you what the Scripture says.

Let’s go to Matthew 24:5-8, it says, **“⁵For many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am the Messiah,’ and will deceive many. ⁶You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. ⁷Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. ⁸All these are the beginning of birth pains.”** So, let’s just go down the checklist. We’ve got some headlines. People claiming to be the Messiah. Has that happened? (On the screen is the front page of the Waco Tribune-Herald from Monday, March 1, 1993: 4 Agents Die in Battle with Cult, 16 officers injured in Texas siege; The SINFUL

MESSIAH, Part One, with a picture of David Koresh.) WACO, someone told me this week it means, “We Ain’t Coming Out!” I’ve never heard that before in my life! Okay, wars and rumors of wars. (Several newspaper headlines appear on the screen: “RUSSIA LAUNCHES UKRAINE ATTACK, Biden condemns ‘premeditated war’”, with pictures of Biden and Putin. “WAR IN EUROPE, Putin declares war on Ukraine ...”, with picture of Putin and a city being bombed at night. Several other headlines aren’t fully visible.) Ukraine, Russia, Israel, Hamas. Anybody heard anything about World War III? Rumors of wars? Famines? September, the headlines were full of famines. (Two newspaper articles appear on the screen: “SIX MILLION PERISH IN SOVIET FAMINE,” with heartbreaking pictures. “The terrible face of famine,” with a picture of a dejected father holding a malnourished child.) Earthquakes. (These headlines appear on the screen: “HUGE QUAKE TOLL—MEXICO DEVASTATION.” “Giant Earthquakes kill thousands in their sleep.” “QUAKE HORROR, ... dead in ‘truly apocalyptic’ earthquakes.” Headlines are accompanied by photos.) In 2023, there have been over 100 major earthquakes. When I say major, that’s over a 6.0 on the Richter Scale. I would have guessed 3, I don’t know. Over 100!

So, the boxes are checked. You say, “Hey, do you think Jesus is going to come back in our lifetime? I would say, “Absolutely!” But here’s the deal, here’s the deal. It’s zero risk to me to say that, meaning, I want to live as though He’s going to come back in our lifetime. If I’m wrong, what does it matter? He may come back tomorrow, He may come back the day after you die, He may come back in a thousand years. Are we in the last days? YES! But I don’t know if the last days are two days, or 20 years, or 2,000 years, or 200,000 years. Peter said we were in the last days. Jesus said we were in the last days. What that means is, Jesus was on earth, and He accomplished everything there was for Him to accomplish, and He ascended to be with the Father, and He’s coming back, and you don’t know when. But you’re to live as though He’s coming back tomorrow. So, here’s the question: What would you do different if you knew He was coming back tomorrow? And you know what I hope the answer is? Nothing. Nothing. Nothing. I’d do exactly what I did yesterday. I’d share with the people that I’ve been sharing with. I’d serve the way that I’ve been serving. I’d love the way that I’ve been loving. I’d be involved in the church the way that I’ve been involved in the church. I wouldn’t do anything different!

We’re going to be in 1 Peter 4:7-11 today. The flow of this text, it’s really a list of things to do: pray, love, be hospitable, speak God’s words, serve with God’s strength, that’s what you’re going to see as we move through this text, we’ll start here in Verse 7: **“⁷ The end of all things is near.”** Clear? Peter tells them, tells the Church: **“⁷ The end of all things is near. Therefore be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray.”** You might translate that better as, “The end of all things is coming.” So, what does that mean? It would be like if you said, “Hey, when is your dad coming back?” And I said, “Any minute.” And you said, “In five minutes?” And I’d say, “Any minute.” And you’d say, “In fifteen minutes?” And I’d say, “Any minute.” And you’d say, “Today?” And I’d say, “Any minute.” Meaning, He could come back any minute. I don’t know *when*. This is what Peter is telling us. The end of all things is coming. Christ’s return is imminent. He’s coming back. What’s my eschatology? Jesus is coming back. I’m not giving him any rules or regulations, or taking specific texts and trying to figure out all the things. Sometimes we do that with a great motive. Let me say that clearly. We want to understand the Word of God. Sometimes we do that because in our subconscious, we think, “When do I need to start obeying?” Yesterday. Last week. So, He calls us to pray, and He says specifically, my first point

...

1. *Pray with perspective.*

What do I mean by perspective? That He's coming back! That we pray with this sober mind. Here's the deal, when my dad's truck would rattle over that first cattle guard, all of a sudden, if I'm sleeping, I'm jumping up and everything comes into focus. Everything is like, "I'm sober-minded now. What is it that I need to do?" He's saying, "Pray like *that*. Pray with the perspective that the end of all things is near." There are times when we pray with perspective. You've done this. Everyone has done this. Atheists in the room have done this. Last week (JP refers to last week's sermon), we got on an airplane, turbulence hits. You're thinking a wing might fall off. "Oh, dear God, I pray that she's not pregnant, God!" "I pray that she stays pregnant, God." "I pray that you would protect this child." "Would you heal them, God?" "Cancer, God?" "Help me in my marriage, God!" "Bring me someone to marry, God!" You've prayed focused. There's been a time in your life, where you've prayed, and it's you and God. He's saying, "Hey, maintain that." What's the hardest thing about prayer, for a lot of us? Focus. Our minds wander. (JP prays in a weak voice.) "Lord, I just pray that you would be with us today. And God, help us today. And would you just be here? And just ..." My uncle says, about us, that we say "just" a lot. 'And God would you just ...? Would you just ...? He calls them We Just Prayers. "And we just ask that you ...?" I think that's a fair criticism. "Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord ..." "Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy ..." "Bless us, O Lord, and these thy gifts which we are about to ..." That's just different than wartime prayers. I've said it before. We do Room Service Prayers. (JP mimics talking on the phone.) "Hello, do y'all have any chocolate cake?" That's different than walkie/talkie prayers. "Yes, God, I'm going into Starbucks. Who do you have in here you want me to share with?" "Hey, I'm going over here, Lord. Where do you want to bring your Kingdom into this situation?" "I'm sitting in the carpool line. Who's in front of me? Who's behind me, God? What do you want me to do? Why am I here?" "I'm in second period, God. The crazy kid's in here. What do you want me to do, God? How can I partner with you?" It's just different. Wartime prayers. Pray with perspective. The end of all things is near. If you've been here a long time, and I've said this before, I'm not trying to entertain you with words right now. I'm efforting to give you instruction of what it means to follow Jesus. So, if you're here, and you say, "I want to be a Jesus follower." Cool. If you've got the Gospel, do this, pray like this. The Enemy's tactics, they're the same that they were: to lull you to sleep. The same for the apostles in the Garden. Jesus said, "Stay awake!" "Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep."

Can you imagine if God shows up and answered all your prayers today? What would change? For some of you, the only thing that would change, if God showed up today, and said, "Hey, magic wand. Hi, I'm God, all your prayers are answered." For some of us, we would just be a better us. The only thing that would change around us is us. For some of you, He would show up and say, "Hey, I'm here to answer all your prayers." "Really?" What did you do? "I'm here!" "Cool. What prayers did you answer?" "Yours!" "Which ones?" "All of them! I'm here! You just asked me every day to be with you. 'Be with us, God.' I'm here! I was already with you. You had my Holy Spirit. I was with you." What would change if all of our prayers were answered? I think prayer is one of the greatest evidence of faith we have. I'm talking about solitude prayer, by yourself prayer. No one's measuring you. There's no performance in it. It's

just you and God. As you look back on this past week, and we measured your faith based on your prayers and solitude alone, how are you doing?

He says, Verse 8: **“8 Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. 9 Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.”** Interpretive challenge: How does love cover over a multitude of sins? Super simple. The more you love someone, the more you’re able to overlook their shortcomings, the more you’re able to extend grace to them. You see this in relationships, like a mother to a child, whose child can do no wrong. Love covers over a multitude of sins. The greater you are at loving everyone, it’s easier for you not to be frustrated by someone’s shortcomings. Somebody’s shortcomings in your life are a test of how great you are at the Christian command of love. How can you do that? Love covers over a multitude of sins. So, my second point, he says, “Love without lamenting.” I put ‘lamenting’ there for the alliteration. The word in the text is ‘grumbling’. Love without lamenting.

2. *Love without limits.*

Should you love this person? A better question to answer for the rest of your life is *can* you? *Can* you love this person? Because if you *can*, you *should*, and if you *can't*, it's worth asking, “Why?” Why am I not able to love this person? He says, **“Above all,”** that’s how Verse 8 starts. **“Above all love ...”** 1 Corinthians 13: **“The greatest of these is love.”** John 13:35: **“They will know that you belong to me because of the way you love.”** Matthew 22: **“The greatest commandment, the greatest command in all of the Bible is love.”** Is there any confusion? Christians should be marked by radical love, and if you are not able to, and I’m not trying to shame you. I’m really efforting to give you practical steps. If you struggle to do this, return to the Gospel. There may be a misunderstanding. There may be some confusion around the Gospel. **“For God so loved the world that he gave his only son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”** Are you sure you got it? And getting it (JP points to his heart) is different than hearing it (points to his head). If you struggle to love other people, you most likely, almost always, struggle to understand how you were loved by God first. **“We love because He first loved us.”** All of this is in the Scripture, and so, go back to that. Don’t get distracted. “Did he just say I’m not a believer?” No, no, no. Listen, listen. Don’t get distracted by that. You go find out. Just go get with God, and say, “Okay, God, do I really understand how you love me through your son, Jesus Christ? Do I really believe that He died for my sins, as a payment for my sins? He was put in the grave. He raised back to life. That I’m going to be with you forever and ever and ever because of what you did for me. **“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—it is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.”** Do I really get it? (JP points to his chest.) And just wrestle with that. Honestly, all believers should wrestle with that on the daily. To return to the Gospel and reflect upon it. Can we get it? So, he gives us something really practical here. **“Show hospitality ...”** That word means to be generous to strangers. **“Show hospitality without grumbling.”** That word for grumbling, it’s an onomatopoeia. Remember what that is? Bang! Pow! That word for grumbling is ‘γῳγγύζω’ (ing-gong-good'-zon) It doesn’t mean anything. It’s just the sound of grumbling. Isn’t that funny? “Hey, can I borrow your truck?” “Ing-gong-good-zon!” “Hey, can you help me move?” “Ing-gong-good-zon!” That’s what’s happening here. You are to show love without frustration. To be a conduit of God’s love to others. This is the way that we are called, this is the evidence of Christianity. If one of us has a dollar, all of us have a dollar. If one of us has an empty bedroom, then none of us are homeless. That’s a really high call, a really high bar

of membership. When you're going through the membership class at Harris Creek, I want to make sure you know what you're signing up for. I feel like we spend an hour just trying to talk you out of it, so that you understand. "Okay. Hold on. Let me make sure I have this. I'm not just checking a box in an evening for a class." There are so many churches, and I'm not saying we're better than others. I'm saying there's a really high bar here. That we care for one another with what God has entrusted to us. We are agents of grace to Him. And it's not Socialism, it's Christianity. And it's not new. The way that we care for the brothers and sisters of the faith in the Body, it's not new. Tertullian wrote this in the second century. He was a Christian author, a prolific Christian author from the second century. He says, "What marks us in the eyes of our enemies is our loving kindness. 'Only look' they say, 'look how they love one another'" This was written at the beginning of the Church, as the Church was growing and under persecution, shortly after Peter's Day.

You probably have heard the word "agape," if you've been in church long. Agape, in the King James version, it's translated as 'charity' or 'charitable'. 'Brotherly love,' 'sacrificial love,' that's the word here, in this text, 'agape.' What you may not know, is there was a word 'agapon' or 'agapeo,' which is the verb form of how you love. The best way to describe it is you would say a mother 'agapeo' her child; she is able to go without food, without sleep, she makes sacrifices to insure the life of that child. This is how that verb 'agapeo' was used. When they wrote the Septuagint, which is the Greek version of the Hebrew Bible, they're observing Christians, and there's not a word to describe how Christians treat each other. So, they take this verb, the way that a mother sacrificially loves her child, and they come up with this new word 'agape' as a noun. That word didn't exist. 'Agape'— that's how Christians love each other. The way that a mother loves her child is how this tribe of people, who follow the way of Jesus Christ, it's so radical the way that they love each other, there's not a word for it. They sacrificed themselves for the good of those in their tribe. Agape. And a word is born. "We don't have a word for that." A word is born.

I want to create such a culture of hospitality here. Some of you are really good at it. The Bledsoes open their house, use their gifts, host, just always like this (JP holds his arms out), all the time. Ever since I got here, I see it. The Miars, their home is just a tool of ministry. "Youth here? Absolutely! Here's the keys. Come on!" Scott James always has an invitation. "Hey, come with me. Come do this." I could keep going. I could keep going, but if I'm honest with you, in full transparency, it can feel, in a way that has surprised me, like a minority of people. I think a lot of us are like this (JP pulls his arms with closed fists up to his chest), "Life's really busy! It's really chaotic, and we've got stuff going on!" And I'm just telling you, a hack is to take a deep breath and be like, "I don't care if the house is dirty. I don't care. Yeah, sure, we'll figure it out. Let's go!" It's not a 'busyness' problem, it's really not. It's usually a heart issue. We hold our stuff so tight. It's usually an 'approval of others' problem. A slave to the 'opinions of others' problem. This command was totally necessary. When Peter wrote this, Christians were getting kicked out of their homes, so people who hadn't met had to open their homes for these strangers. "Oh, you're followers of The Way? Sure! I mean, we don't have a bedroom, but we've got some floor space. Okay, family of five, come on! We'll figure it out." That's why he wrote this, because of the persecution they were undergoing by the government. He says, "Hey, just come in. We've got you! We'll figure it out."

So, today, if somebody's coming through, we've got extra space, or an extra house, or who knows what? It's just, "Sure! Absolutely!" (JP stands with arms open wide.) And can I tell you the truth? It's going to be an inconvenience!

There's an amazing ministry here, Together for Good, where you help single moms who have no other help. You say, "Well, yeah, we'll watch your kid." So, the other day, my friends got a call that the mother needed to go to the doctor at the last minute. "Hey, can you watch their child?" The first step is, "Man, that's an inconvenience." But then the second step is, "But she's way more inconvenienced than we will be. Absolutely!" Sure, man, it's going to be an inconvenience. That's the Christian life; inconveniencing yourself for others. And I'm not talking about people who can do stuff for you in return. I'm talking about stuff that no one will ever know. Some of you have texted and asked, "Why are there trucks back here?" (JP points to the back of the Harris Creek property.) We did tell you, but just as a reminder, we're building a parking lot. We're building a parking lot back there. You know why? Because somebody said, "Hey, you need a parking lot. I got you! I'll build it for you. I'll do it." I said, "Okay!" Isn't that cool? It's the Body of Christ. It's the Body of Christ *being* the Body of Christ.

"¹⁰ Each of you should ..." Look, look. Let me show you right here. Let's go to the text. **"Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to ... What? ... serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms."** You are stewards of God's grace. A steward is someone who possesses something that's not theirs. They manage someone else's possessions. God has entrusted money to you, smarts to you, education to you. He put you in the home that He put you in. He could have had you raised in a Third World country in the slum, but God, in His kindness and sovereignty towards you, said, "You, you're going to be raised here with this available to you." And your mindset is, "How do I take that grace and use it to bless others? To be a conduit, not a container. A pipe, not a pail. To get the grace of God wherever it needs to go." This is the essence of the Christian life.

"¹¹ If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen." We're faithful stewards of gifts, we're in charge of God's possessions, and we use those with the strength that God provides, to bring praise and glory to God. And we speak God's words and we serve with God's strength. And so, my third point is, we glorify God with our gifts.

3. *Glorify God with your gifts.*

There are two categories that flow out of this text: speaking and serving. I love how Tommy Nelson talks about this. He says there's about 12 gifts listed in the Scripture. Some have the gift of giving – generosity. Some have the gift of hospitality. Some have the gift of teaching. Some have the gift of prophesy. Some have the gift of mercy, or compassion. There's a list of about 12, and I don't think it's an exhaustive list. I really don't. I don't think it's an exhaustive list, but if you were to divide the list into Speaking and Serving, about five pertain to speaking, teaching, and seven pertain to serving, like with your hands. Everyone is going to lean in one of those directions. So, if I said, "Jesus is coming over tonight," let that sink in for a minute. "Jesus is coming over tonight." How many of you, your mind runs to, "Oh my! I need to get home and

clean up. I've got to put things away." How many of you would say that? (JP raises his hand while he looks around the room.) That's where my mind goes. "Oh, He's coming over? I've got to get home and clean up!" You don't have to be ashamed; this is a good thing. Raise your hand really high. Say, "Yep. I'm here. I want to go home and clean up." Okay, you're here. And then, how many of you, Jesus is coming over tonight, and you think, "Man, I've got a list of questions. I'm putting that down. (JP mimics writing.) I want to ask him a bunch of stuff." How many of you would fall into that category? (JP raises his hand again.) "I've got the list; I can't wait ..." You've got Serving and Speaking, Speaking and Serving. There are people that can't wait to do things. "I just want to rush in the gaps and fill in the gaps." And there are people who say, "I got to say stuff and learn stuff," and it's all intellectual.

In the Scripture, you have some sisters who represent these two camps very well. Do you know who they are? (JP waits for response.) Any time you see Martha in the text, she's doing stuff. She's serving. She's busy. And we think that that's negative. It's not! It's beautiful. She's using her gifts. Because of one story that has a negative inclination. It's beautiful and necessary for the Kingdom to thrive. And then, any time you see Mary represented in the text, she's speaking or sitting at Jesus's feet learning. She's always wanting to know, "How can I learn more? How can I fill my head and be disciplined and follow?" You have the two gifts represented here. The text that Peter presents to us, it kind of says, "You're to use your gifts," and he bifurcates the gifts into two categories: Speaking and Serving. "If you speak, speak as though you're speaking the very words of God. Don't waste your words. Use your words to build up. Use your words to build up." Listen, your spiritual gift, I promise you, is not criticism. I promise! It's not on the list. I said it's not an exhaustive list. That one doesn't even make the bigger list. Most of the time, a spirit of criticism comes from bad thinking. Fill your head with judgment and criticism and critical thinking, critical not in the problem-solving kind of way. So, how can I use my words to build up, to encourage, teach, exhort, admonish in a way that leaves people better than I found them? And then serving. Our home is one divided. Monica, my wife, her spiritual gifts are all around serving. She is always busy in the home. I get home (JP lets out a deep breath.), it's time to relax. She gets home, it's time to get busy. Late into the night, she's washing the dishes. I say, "It's too late to run the vacuum. No, no, no!" All the time, serving. My gifts, much less valuable, more philosophical in nature. "I'm going to sit here and think. I'm going to ponder on the things of God, and figure out how I can craft sentences, and word structures together with illustrations that teach people." So, you see both of those played out in our house. They're both necessary for the Kingdom of God to thrive. You need both of those gifts. If you find yourself in a season where you're exhausted, he says, "Serve with the strength of God, the power of God." I love Colossians 1:29 – It says it like this, **"To this end, I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me."** I strenuously contend with all of Jesus's energy, so if I am exhausted, am I surrendered? If I'm tired, am I making sure I'm doing this with the right heart, the right motive? Not for the approval of others, because that will wear you out. And there's some work that the Holy Spirit has to do there.

There's a lot of ways to identify your spiritual gifts. You can take a Spiritual Gift Test, and I used to do that any time someone would serve with us, we'd give them a Spiritual Gift Test to help them identify their gifts. You can do that. A quick Google is going to give you a lot, and

there's one out there called s.h.a.p.e. that I like. I wouldn't. I would not. I've really kind of turned my opinion on this. Here's what I've learned: In the Body of Christ, it's so beautiful the way the Holy Spirit works on this, if you just identify a need and you begin to meet that need, your spiritual gift is going to be illuminated and people will see it. For example, hypothetically speaking, there's a need in the church for Kid's Ministry, and you think, "Well, I'm not good with kids. I don't think that's my gift." But you start serving in Kids. Some of you, your hospitality is going to show up, and they say, "I'll host you guys. The leaders, y'all come to my house." And you realize, as you serve in Kid's Ministry, your spiritual gift is illuminated, and everyone sees it. Or you have the gift of teaching, and you're like (JP bends down.), "Hey, guys. Here we are!" You'll start teaching them. Or if it's the gift of evangelism, you'll say, "Hey, parents! How are you? It's so great to meet you. Is it your first time at Harris Creek? Hey, let me ask you a question. Between one and ten ..." Your spiritual gift will come through. "Well, my spiritual gift doesn't lend itself to the Parking Team." You jump on the Parking Team, and the entire Parking Team is going to see your spiritual gift. What happens is, you serve with them for about six months to twelve months, and you pull everybody aside and you say, "Hey, what do you think my spiritual gifts are?" and they'll be able to tell you with tremendous accuracy. If you've been in the church for a long time, ask your life group, "What do you think my spiritual gifts are?" They'll be able to tell you, if you can't. If you don't know what they are, they will be able to tell you what they are. They'll see them, and if you need a list, gotquestions.org has a great list. You can go there; you can look at the list of spiritual gifts and then you can speak that to others.

A couple of rules here. Do not neglect your gift. Don't put it on the bench. Do not resent your gift. Do not envy the gift of another to the detriment of yours. I see this all the time. "I wish mine was ..." Fill in the blank with something you deem of more value. What I see the Bible value the most is love. Use your gift to love others, and you'll see tremendous value. Use your gift to glorify God.

In summary,

1. We pray with perspective.
2. We love without lamenting, without grumbling, without complaining.
3. We use our gifts to glorify God. We glorify God with our gifts.

If you'll go back with me to being a high school student, or junior high, and sleeping late in the summertime. Hearing my dad's truck hit the Big Cattle Guard, and the startling nature of that. That I'd jump out of bed and try to put some clothes on, like I had been up. It was different. There were mornings where I woke up and I did what I was supposed to be doing, and those were different. There were days, when in the evenings Dad would say, "Hey, tomorrow I want you to mow the grass." And the next day I'd wake up with the sun, and I'd go get on the lawnmower and I'd begin to mow. And when I would do that, I wasn't looking for his return. If he comes back at any time, he's going to see me doing what it is I'm supposed to be doing. That's different. I'm not watching the Big Cattle Guard wondering, "When is Dad going to get home?" I'm not worried. I'm not concerned about it. I'm doing what it is I'm supposed to be

doing. I don't need a minute seventeen. He can come home at 10:30, he can come home at 11:00. He can surprise me at 9:00. I'm where I'm supposed to be. This is the application. This is the application of the message. Jesus is coming back. He's coming back. I hope it's today. I hope we don't do the second service. Let's go! Are you doing what you're supposed to be doing? How would you live different? I hope the answer to that tomorrow is, "I wouldn't. I'd run it back. I'd run yesterday back." That's the application. Let me pray.

Father, we love you. We're thankful for your Word, as I say every week, that does not return void, because you told us that, and I hold fast to those promises. So, Lord, when we do this, when we pray, I pray that we would pray with perspective that you're coming back. With a sense of urgency, I pray that you would save every human being in Waco, Texas before the sun sets. Lord, that your Holy Spirit would rush into their hearts, that you would turn their eyes toward you. I pray that you would meet every material need in Waco, Texas and beyond. I pray that you would use us to do that, that we would rush in the gaps. I pray that we would be a church with an abundance, that we would have more than what we need and that we would funnel the excess of what we have to places with needs. And that we would be a conduit, not a container; a pipe and not a pail. Father, I thank you for the hospitality and the generosity of those in the Body. I pray that you would multiply their kind. I pray that we would be radical in the way that we love without lamenting, not a heart of complaining or grumbling, but one that just loves. And I pray that we would audit the gifts that you've entrusted to us, and we would use them as agents of grace to serve those around us to strengthen your Body here at Harris Creek and beyond. Would you bring that to mind? We thank you, Lord, and we give you praise. In Jesus's name, amen.