

A case for bad choices #2
"Caught by grace"
September 25, 2016
Courage Church, Detroit, MI

If you would please open your bibles with me to 1 Peter 1:5 -

Today we are continuing through our mini series "a case for bad choices" - really, throughout this entire series we are wrestling with something that Peter says in 1 Peter 5... he says "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."

and the word that really stuck out to me as I was studying this passage, was the last thing that Peter says will happen in this passage, and that is "that God will establish you."

and the word establish there is the Greek word *themelioō* (the melly-ah-mo) and it means to "lay the foundation or to make stable." It is the same word that the writer of Hebrews uses when writing "you, Lord, laid the foundation of the earth, in the beginning."

and so last week we talked about what happened in the beginning... how if you read Genesis 1:2 in Hebrew, what you actually get is that God created life out of chaos.

There was chaos. And God looked at that and said "I can do something with this."

Now, so often in our lives, when things feel like they are total chaos... and they feel like they are just a mess...

and we don't know where to go from there and we don't understand why something like this would happen to us and we don't understand why God is calling us to do something for the Kingdom of heaven that comes at such a great cost to our comfort...

But in the same way that God was able to create life out chaos...

those are typically the defining moments in our lives... the ones in which God and the world are watching and asking is this question:

What are they going to make out of this?

How are they going to respond?

Everything about the way your life plays out here on this earth has to do with the way that you respond to your circumstances...

the way that you respond to what you are handed... they way that you respond to the things that God puts on your heart. The way that you respond when God brings someone into your life.

In Deuteronomy 8:2, it talks about how God led the Israelites into the wilderness for those 40 years, to humble them and to *test* them... So that He would *know* what was in their hearts and *if* they would keep his commandments.

and of course, we know, time and time again, they failed the test. But yet God still recklessly pursued them with all the love and grace available in the universe... and eventually he led them into the promised land when he felt like the pruning process had run its course, and they were actually ready to enter.

So God sometimes allows things to happen to us... circumstances that we don't always know how to manage... and He brings people into our lives, to see if we respond in a way that is worthy of the call that He has placed on our lives.

and I really believe that. I believe God wants to do great things through you... but truthfully, I think that sometimes right in the middle of God working on our lives, and preparing us for what we are going to do... we get freaked out when we hit a wall or we face a challenge, and we think to ourselves...

This must not be what I am supposed to do. Because its not coming naturally. But that is so opposite from the stories we read about in the bible.

From what I see in the bible, everyone who stepped out in faith, is caught by grace.

I believe that God has called a lot of people to do great things... a lot of the same things, even. Its no secret, that when I talk to others about Detroit, so many of the things on their hearts are the things on my heart... But the ones that He uses are the ones who respond.

and its not always about pain. Sometimes its just about people. Sometimes its a question of, "are you willing to sacrifice your comfort to see the Kingdom move forward?"

"Are you willing to see other people through the same eyes that you were seen through, and with the same grace that you were given?"

I am going to tell you a story about one of the greatest influences on my entire life. It is actually a couple. They came into my life in one of those moments... when I stepped out in faith, and was caught by grace.

Their names are Kenny and Debra Jones.

Now listen...

if this couple was not the way that they are... I quite possibly would not be the way that I am. Hopefully this helps you understand me a little better. Because people all the time tell me I am crazy. You did what? You are doing what?

I get that a lot.

Well this is where I learned it.

I met Kenny when I was 18 years old. And just to give you an idea of the kind of 18 year old I was... this was the circumstances that surrounded me meeting Kenny.

Our band was on tour, in Southern California. We had just played at a youth group there, and Kenny was one of the volunteers in that youth group. He wasn't the youth pastor, or the point of contact, so I didn't meet him right away.

And we all went out to dinner, just at Del Taco, after the service... and we are all in line at Del Taco getting ready to order our food...

and I am hungry!

So I go up, and I order first. I don't remember what I ordered, some sort of combo meal... I spent around 5 dollars. Which, when you are an 18 year old traveling musician living off of how many CDs you can panhandle at the mall each day, 5 dollars is a big deal.

and you know that verse that says "the first shall be last?" well it couldn't have been any more true than it was that night.

Because the moment I got done paying, Kenny walks in, and announces to our band that he wants to treat us tonight!

Its all on him!

So the other guys all go to the same cash register and are ordering on one big order for Kenny to pay for.

but I already paid for mine.

So I kind of ease my way to Kenny...

and I say to him...

"I already paid. Maybe you could just pay me the 5 dollars that I spent?"

I mean, he was planning on spending it, right?

He laughed at me. Then he got out his wallet, and handed me five dollars.

and thus began a friendship that distance and years has had no affect on.

During that season of our lives, we were spending a lot of time in Southern California, trying to shop our record to labels, and build a stronger fan base there...

and we were kind of bouncing around place to place... but then Kenny and his wife Debra, who at the time had three kids (now they have five) - invited us to come live at their house while we were in California. and we ended up staying for months...

and then the next year, we called them up, and asked if we could come again... and they said yes. and that time, we stayed for even more months.

6 of us the first trip. 7 of us the second year and we constantly had visitors who would come stay for a week at time... 18-20 years old... piling into this really small house with this couple trying to raise their kids while dealing with us... all our stuff everywhere... all our ramen noodles taking up all of their cabinets and their stove burners all the time.

Dirty clothes left all over the house. We tried to pitch in around the house but the truth is we hardly did much at all to help.

and as time went by, their family grew even more... and as time went by, our families grew... we began to all start getting married, and have kids... but we just kept going back there, and going back there. And every single time they opened up their home for an indefinite amount of time to us. There was never a timeline. There was never a "you can stay for a couple of days or even a couple of weeks."

Even when Dawn and I got married, and we moved permanently to California... where do you think we stayed?

We lived with Kenny and Debra until we could get our footing in Los Angeles and get our own place.

They taught me about patience... because they showed so much of it toward me. They taught me about grace... About hospitality. about what it looks like to entertain strangers, and how in entertaining strangers you could actually be making friends that will stay with you for the rest of your life.

And when we were there... they didn't just deal with us... they pastored us. They prophesied over us. They encouraged us and loved us and treated us like we were their family. They fed us and had meals with us and counseled us.

and I remember, during the second year we were there... we ended up staying, around five months I believe... and at almost the beginning of our stay, Kenny got laid off from his job.

and Debra was a stay at home mom. And no money was coming in. And we didn't have anything to offer them. But they never asked us to leave. Or even to pitch in on a bill. Or to pay rent. They just went out of their way to make us feel the love, and not the stress that they had to of been going through and that we were no doubt piling onto.

They went on to eventually get jobs as youth pastors, and now get to do the same thing that they always did anyways, but they get to do it for a living.

and now, when Dawn and I are having an issue... they are always one of the first ones we reach out to. I always wonder... "I bet Kenny and Debra went through something like this... they will know what to do."

and usually, its the truth.

They are just absolutely fantastic people who taught me how to treat people. I literally felt like I was a part of their family. They would check on us when we were touring... they would call us with encouragements when they felt like God had put something about us on their heart...

See, they understood something. Something that I didn't in those days. Because I was so so thankful for what they did for us, because it made it possible for *me* to do what God had put on my heart to do.

But as an 18 year old kid, I never even comprehended what it cost *them*.

But what they understood is that they are a *piece* in a much bigger picture. A conduit of what God is trying to do through *many* lives... and because they allowed themselves to be *that*, their fingerprints are all over the work being done in the Kingdom of God, and truthfully there are thousands and thousands of lives that have been reached through the lives that they have touched that they will never even meet this side of heaven.

But it cost them something.

So even though the cost seemed substantial in the moment, it was minimal for the amount of return that would come from the investment.

The kingdom of God is a big picture, filled with a lot of small stories.

Filled with a lot of people like Kenny and Debra who do their best to live the words of Jesus out to every person that they meet, but quite possibly go through their entire lives not realizing the impact on many, that they have had.

But it would have been so easy for them to see *their* world as enough. Five kids, lots of bills... 100 more kids in the youth group...

But they realize that the reason that Jesus says the radical things that he says about love is because there is a bigger picture, and we don't see it all...

But love is what connects us to each other and to his plan for restoring all things.

There are things we can't see.

But the ones who know its there, and can act without seeing it, are the ones who change the world.

It is like what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13:12... we don't see it all. We just get a glimpse.

Lets look at it from verse 11-13, this is so good... - right before this he talks about love, and about how we prophecy in part, and we see in part. Then he says this:

When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. ¹² **For now we see in a mirror dimly**, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.

¹³ So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

But I thought about that a lot this week, and I decided to do a little digging because this verse is dropped right in the middle of 1 Corinthians 13... and everything about 1 Corinthians 13 is about love... and how it never fails... and how everything else could fail but if you still have love, then you win... and how everything else in your life could succeed but if you don't have love, you lose.

And Paul even ends the chapter by saying it... the greatest of these is love. But he drops this sort of toward the end, he talks about prophecy for a second which most people equate this line to that... which makes sense... and he says we prophecy in part. and we see in part... and the part we see is through a mirror, dimly.

Now, The literal for dimly is "a riddle OR an indirect image" it is the Greek word *ainigma* (i-knee-gma) αἰνίγματι.

And so, because *that* word opens up a world of possibilities... that we only see things in riddles right now, that is where most people spend their time studying when they study this verse. But as I thought about it... this word mirror kept sticking out to me.

Paul says: We see dimly, in a mirror.

The old King James says it like this: "we see through a glass darkly" - as in, we can barely see it... but glass is not an accurate translation here, and thankfully it was fixed in more modern translations with the word "mirror." But a lot of people still view this verse like you are looking out a window, not looking through a mirror.

But it is the Greek word "esoptron" ἔσοπτρον (eh soap tron) and it means mirror... and not even a mirror like you would think of today... mirrors in ancient days were not even made of glass like they are now... they were most often made of polished copper, bronze or silver.

Corinth, which is where the church was that Paul was writing to in this passage, was actually known for producing good quality bronze mirrors. (NIGTC) - so they would known right away what he was talking about.

It is not glass. It can not break and you can not see through it.

You couldn't even smash them to see what was beyond then. So everything about them was reflective... it wasn't always a great reflection, the art of mirrors has been perfected over the centuries... but nothing about them was clear, or transparent.

So the modern translation of mirror is much more accurate than the King James translation of "glass darkly"

because when we think of glass, we think of something we look through, onto something else... but this would not be the case with "esoptron" (eh soap tron) - if you were to look at it head on... you would see your head.

So we prophecy in part, and we see in part, and if the part that we see is through a mirror dimly, do you realize what that means?

We get a picture of ourselves. and Paul says even that picture is a dim one. Even that picture is a riddle.

This was a real "what if" moment for me this week... What Paul is not saying that we can barely see what God is doing in the world...

But that we can only see it in the way that it affects us... and even that view is dim.

Where am I going with this?

All we are seeing is the world from our own perspective. and we all know that that is ABSOLUTELY THE TRUTH... We see the world, For what it offers us. From what we have to gain and what we have to lose, and from what we have been taught, and fed, and trained to think.

You don't look in a mirror and see what is ahead of you... you see what is behind you. and you look into a mirror to see you.

and in life, that is the view we get... we get a view of everything behind us... and we get a view of ourselves, and what we want and what we think will make us happy and on the IMPACT that things will directly have ON US.

I mean think about Peter. We talked about this on Easter, I will share it again because I don't think that there is a greater story of God taking something bad and just totally rewriting the whole thing, than this...

Peter is a guy who walked on water with Jesus, and in the middle of his miracle he doubted. He is a guy that vowed to Jesus that he would NEVER deny him... yet Peter found himself next to a charcoal fire after Jesus was arrested, and THREE TIMES he denied even know Jesus.

He promised Jesus he would do something different... but in *that* moment, all he could see was himself.

"What would this do to me if I admit to the truth?"

So where love and loyalty for Jesus should have abound, denial took its place.

But what if what Paul is saying with this subtle verse, is that we need to be able to make decisions that are surrounded by love, based on what we can't see. Based on what is bigger than just us... based on not only what will affect me but what will affect the kingdom.

Because When I look in the mirror I see me. and when I look at my life, I see me.

and if every decision that we make is based on the way that we view the world, and the way that that decision will impact us and our place in the world... then it won't be out of love, it will be out of selfishness, and that is our natural bend. Naturally we want what is best for ourselves.

but The whole point of the gospel taking a hold of your life... is when other people look at my life... they should see Jesus.

But they won't see Jesus if all I see is me. I can't act very Christlike if I have an end goal of myself.

But the truth is, naturally, that is ALL WE SEE.

NOT ONLY THAT... but it says that you see in the mirror, dimly... or DARKLY. or in a RIDDLE.

So you can barely even see yourself in the reflection.

That causes problems both ways... some times we can't get over how great we are... and the rest of the time we can't get over how screwed up we are!

I imagine Peter, after that moment by the charcoal fire, thinking... That was my defining moment. I couldn't even profess Jesus to a little servant girl.

"I was intimated by a little girl!" (I envision the servant girl in that story being like a little bratty 10 year old who just pushed Peter around)

We live in our mistakes because we can't see the ways that God is working through them, and they stall us. And they debilitate us. And they separate us from love.

You have to make decisions in this world without even having a clear picture of what God is doing in YOUR LIFE. and the only hope you have, is love.

Err on the side of love. Always go that way. Always go in that direction.

The cure is love. No, we don't see clearly... thats why we love.

Jesus redeemed Peter's charcoal moment, with love. He took a moment that Peter thought he probably would never live down, and he rewrote it with love.

Do you guys remember this?

What happens after Jesus rises from the dead?

He performs an amazing miracle to reveal himself to Peter and the others...

then Jesus cooked breakfast for the disciples over a charcoal fire...

the same type of fire that Peter was sitting at three days earlier when he denied Jesus three times... and in a setting that was almost a replica of the first...

do you remember what Jesus asks Peter?

Simon, son of John... do you love me? and Peter says "yes Lord, you know that I love you" "Feed my lambs"

Simon, son of John... do you love me? "Yes Lord, you know that I love you." "Tend to my sheep"

Simon, son of John... do you love me?

and Peter is getting frustrated now... the bible says that when Jesus asked that third time, Peter grieved... because the first thing you think of when someone asks a question like that, is you think: Does He not know that I love Him?

But Jesus was doing something so much bigger.

"Yes Lord... you know everything. You know that I love you."

"Feed my sheep."

and Jesus took a mess that only he could redeem, and he did it. He recreated the same setting for Peter that would certainly be his source of shame for the rest of his life... and he rewrote the moment. and for every time that Peter denied Jesus, Jesus had Peter tell him that he loved him.

You have heard the verse "Love covers a multitude of sins?"

That is what Jesus does! He redeems people! The only memory that Peter should have had of a charcoal fire is the memory of him getting frustrated and telling the world that he didn't even know who Jesus was...

but after the resurrection Peter got the ultimately redeeming treatment, and now a charcoal fire represents the setting that Jesus, one by one, let love cover a multitude of sins that were done against him.

Love is always the best kind of memory.

and Paul says that it is the greatest of all things.

He begins the next chapter to the Corinthians by saying it again... he says:

"Pursue love."

Run after it.

Recklessly abandon yourself to the cause of love.

Live your life out of it, not out of what you see. Because love is the only thing that will get you past yourself.

and that is when you will be able to see people the way that Kenny and Debra saw me. Not as a burden. But as a seed into the future. As a friend, and as a member of the family.

But if you look at a person a certain way because of their past... or you look at *your* future with a skewed perception BECAUSE of YOUR PAST, what is going to happen is you will never let yourself get close enough to anyone to build community. You will miss moments that maybe YOU were designed to create, and you will never tell anyone about Jesus.

No, we don't know everything that other people are going through, especially if the only view we get of them is the view that affects US.

No, we don't see everything God is doing.

But what we have to see is that our role in it all is faith. And our role in it all is hope. and our role in it all is love.

and the greatest of these is love.

So if you have to make a decision in life without seeing the whole picture... if you have to make decisions in your life when all you can physically see is the way that it may affect you...

close your eyes. Forget about the mirror. And focus on love.

Who has God called you to love?

In what way has God called you to spread his love to the world?

Can you see it?

We have been doing this class on Thursday nights at EQUIP about Hebrew word pictures, we wrapped it up this last Thursday but if you want to go back, our mobile app has all the sessions... and we are going to do it again in a couple of months for our discipleship school students so will open that up to you as well...

But the last picture that we studied on Thursday was the word picture for "vision" - and I want to share with you what I shared on Thursday because I feel like it fits so well with what we are talking about.

The word vision is the word *chaza*

and the word picture is:

a the fence (chet), the picture of what looks like a hammer or an axe (zayin) which means to cut, or to cut off.

and the letter "hey" which means the or to reveal or what comes from...

So the ancient illustration you get for vision is:

WHAT IS REVEALED WHEN YOU CUT THROUGH THE FENCE.

Vision comes when you see past the barriers. When you can see past all the things that everybody else sees, and they let get in the way of what they are supposed to do.

it is like I said earlier, God puts the same types of things on a lot of peoples hearts... Because God has something he wants to do in our city... and there are lots of different facets and pieces to it all...

God puts the same things on a lot of peoples hearts. The problem is, most people hit a wall... and suddenly that wall is all that they see.

And so they turn around.

But a person of vision won't turn around when they reach the fence.

They'll figure out... How do we cut through this?

How do we cut through a city where homes are barely mortgageable... where median income is so low... where crime is so high... How do we cut through this?

Don't turn around when you hit the fence!

Fences divide the visionaries from the quitters. And there have been times when the fence has caused me to turn around, but I don't want to live like that anymore.

My whole life has been a journey of doing things that didn't make sense in the natural. and I still feel like I hit fences every day... but I am determined to cut through them.

And every step of the way, God has brought people like Kenny and Debra into the picture, to make sure that I get where God told me to go. So I keep going. And the provision keeps coming.

He brought me Pastors, and mentors, and leaders, and family, and friends who treated me like family... and who helped me to understand why I am on this journey in the first place... and it is for love.

and each step of the journey has been a reminder that if God is for me, then who can be against me? and no, the journey hasn't been a walk in the park, but I wouldn't change a single thing about it.

and it made me who I am today.

We have some new friends who just moved here to Detroit from Alaska. Most of you have probably met them, you can't really miss them because there are ten of them... Jake and Jerusha moved to Detroit, with 8 kids...

because God told them to go.

and just to show you how amazing God is... listen to this...

God put it on their hearts a couple of years ago to get here. They felt like God was saying, "I am about to do something amazing in Detroit, and if you want to be a part of it you need to get there."

but again, they had no jobs... they had no direction, they didn't know anyone in the city... They just felt like God was saying go.

The place that they had grown up, Anchorage, Alaska... it didn't feel like home anymore....

So they were telling me, they went out and bought a giant blank canvas, they wrote Detroit on it, and they put it on their wall. And didn't know what that meant really, but they knew they had to do something.

Now... again, its just so amazing how God works. I swear, if that is not obvious to you, then I don't know what will be.

Because they stepped out. They got in their van, and they came. With no clue where to go, or who to reach out to. And somehow, they stumbled onto our video on Facebook, with Jimmy painting the blank canvas.

and it took them back to their canvas...hanging in Alaska. reminding them every day that though Alaska was where they lived, their destiny lied somewhere else.

and in a way that only God can do... He took something that we created for one thing... to try and get students into our discipleship school...

and he used it for another thing. To bring a great new like-minded family here to do life with in Detroit.

and so they came to Courage Church, and the rest is history.

They stepped out in faith, and were caught by grace.

Because of love. Because God birthed a love in their hearts for a place that they had never been... but knew that they had a role in changing.

and when I saw them, and I started to hear their story, I just sort of sat there thinking... this sounds like our story. With a lot more kids. and the truth is, you don't meet a lot of people like that. People willing to uproot the life that they have always known, to step into the unknown.

I don't know many single people willing to do that, much less families of ten.

and for me to sit back now and watch the way that God has taken care of them, in so many of the same ways as he has taken care of us in all of our journey's, it just makes it so obvious that God is no respecter of persons... he shows no partiality. What he will do for one he will do for another.

That is why I have such a hard time when people give *practical* reasons for not doing the things that God has called them too. Because most of the time, calling doesn't look good on paper. It doesn't look like security. Most of the time, "calling" doesn't come with a 401K plan.

but God takes care of the people who trust him enough to do what He says.

Because we put God to the test when we follow what he puts in our hearts.

And I think he likes that.

I am going to close with this scripture.

Its a really great scripture.

and just a little bit of context before we read it...

Its found in Deuteronomy, right at the end. Joshua is about the lead the Israelites into the promised land... Moses is passing the mantle on to Joshua.

Because for 40 years after escaping Egypt, Israel had wandered in the dessert. They turned to God and then turned away from God. God gave them the ten commandments which was the terms for their marriage... and then of course, they broken the terms of their marriage... they cheated on God... and he went back for them again and again and again.

He relentlessly pursued the ones who betrayed him and cheated on him...

and then we finally get to this place, when Israel, after all of these years, is about to enter the promised land. But its not going to be a cake walk. It is going to take stepping out. It is going to take taking a really huge step...

in fact, when Moses sent 12 spies ahead of time to scope out Jericho and report what it would take to actually defeat them...

10 of the 12 spies literally came back and said "it can not be done."

So that is the report that Israel has to work with going into this thing.

Not only that, but Moses, who had lead them the whole entire time...

was passing the mantle on to Joshua.

So the only leader that Israel had known, was not going to lead them into the promised land. He wasn't going to be with them in the battle. He wouldn't be there, at all.

So Moses leaves them with this song that he told them all to memorize.

and its a pretty long song, and we don't have time to study the whole thing... but there is one section that I want to focus on this morning... verse 9-12:

But the Lord's portion is his people, Jacob his allotted heritage.

"He found him in a desert land, and in the howling waste of the wilderness; he encircled him, he cared for him, he kept him as the apple of his eye.

- Like an eagle that stirs up its nest, that flutters over its young, spreading out its wings, catching them, bearing them on its pinions,
- the Lord alone guided him, no foreign god was with him.

This is the idea here.

When an eagle believes that it offspring is ready to fly, she will stir up the nest. She will do something that makes it so that the baby bird has to get out of the nest, and has to fly, because, if it is not forced to move, it could stay comfortable in the nest forever...

The Mother eagle could just keep bringing the baby food... she could take care of it, and let it stay in the nest its whole life...

But eagles know that there is a wide world out there, and they have the upper hand on it because they have the ability to fly. Eagles are not meant to stay in nests. They are meant to see the world from a perspective that only a select few creatures are blessed to get to see.

And so the mother stirs up the nest, and it forces the baby eagle to move, and to fly...

but when that baby eagle begins to fly, its mother flies takes flight, right below it, to catch it if it falls.

and if it does fall... the Mother will not take it back to the nest. If it lands somewhere... the eagle will not take it back to the nest. The Eagle will bring food to where to eaglet has landed, but it will not help it go backwards.

And eventually, it will stir it up again, and cause it to go farther, and farther, until it can fly on its own.

Think about your life...

Think about where you have gotten comfortable.

Think about where your love has grown cold.

Think about the things that God put in your heart... that maybe you didn't do.

Can you trace back to a moment when you were being stirred to move in the direction of your dreams? And maybe you stepped out, and you went all in...

or maybe you resisted. and you didn't move because you were so scared that you would fall.

But would you be more willing to fly, if you knew that the God of the universe was flying right below you, waiting... to catch you, just in case you fall?

Comfort kills the gospel in our lives. It kills our love.

and if we base every decision on the affect that it will have on us... then we will never have an affect on this world. We will never open our homes... we will never follow our dreams. And that is not the type of life that you were created for...

Jesus didn't die so that you could look at yourself in the mirror.

He died because of love.

And because of it, you get to live.

So you should live because of love.

Let love stir you to something more today. Let it stir you to take a step.

And I know most of us, we disqualified ourselves because of a moment... some moment, somewhere, at some time where we think we blew it so bad and now God can't use us... And so since *that* moment we haven't even been able to move. We want do something for Jesus... but we feel paralyzed by our past.

Just think about Peter. Peter had returned to the old life... he went back to being a fisherman. Until Jesus recreated the worst scene that Peter ever was a part of, just so He could redeem it, with love.

Because Jesus didn't want Peter to spend his days fishing... Jesus wanted Peter to feed His sheep. And He built the entire church on that guy.

And Jesus has a plan for your life too. And for every person that he puts in your path. We are all on a journey together. We all have parts to play. and you may not know who you are helping when you help them... and you may not know where you are going when you step out...

But grace will catch you if you fall.