

## Committing Ourselves to the Plan

*God's Plan for Stewardship*

By Steve Viars

sermonaudio.com

**Bible Text:** 1 Peter 5:8-14

**Preached On:** Sunday, November 24, 2013

### **Faith Church**

5526 State Road 26 E

Lafayette, IN 47905

**Website:** <http://www.faithlafayette.org/church>

**Online Sermons:** <http://www.sermonaudio.com/faithlafayette>

**Lucas:** Good morning. I'm Lucas and this is my wife, Bella. I'm one of the interns here. About ten years ago I had to move from my small hometown to the big city of Sao Paulo, Brazil where I would pursue my law degree, following in the steps of my father. In those years, I visited some churches there and saw that the leaders were not being good stewards of the message of Christ. Instead, they were and still are, deceiving people by preaching a prosperity gospel and a god who is not angry against sin. I prayed for God to send more faithful workers to his harvest and then I realized his plan was to use me on that.

This calling grew up inside my heart each day and my desire to be a faithful minister of the word was increasing. Also, my church confirmed God's calling on me. Finally, God gifted me with a godly girl who, today, is my wife, Bella.

**Bella:** I always prayed for God to send me into ministry. I grew up seeing the transformation on my grandfather's life who later on become a pastor and together with my grandmother, planted a church in a southern state. My prayer was that God would give me a husband that would take me to work with him in ministry and God brought me to Lucas.

**Lucas:** So we married 2 ½ years ago having seminary on our minds as a first step of our ministry plan. We prayed for a whole year for God to lead us in where to take our preparation and it was then that Sasha Mendez, a graduate from Faith Bible Seminary, who was my college professor years ago, told me about Faith Seminary and how it was long-planned to be a school focused on an academics ministry practice and strong families. That was exactly what we were looking for but we had so many obstacles in our way. The Lord would have to act.

In July, 2012 we met Pastor Aucoin at the conference in Brazil and then we started the process of application. We were accepted in December last year but it was just the first step. Next, we started the complicated Visa process which involved lots of emails, money, time and translations. It was a long test that brought us to rely on our God alone.

One month before classes began, the Immigration Department asked for more documents and proofs. Each time they had asked before, they had taken 2-3 months to evaluate them. In that day, we thought it was over and that we wouldn't be able to come.

We had so many questions in our minds about our future but we prayed, thanking God for his promises that assure us that his will is always perfect. This church and the staff here were praying for us too. The following day, we received an email from the Immigration Department updating the status of our process and reporting the approval without presenting any further documentation. God just changed their minds over a single night. God gave us the "go" and a lesson of dependence that no matter how much we plan, we need his blessings desperately.

Today, here we are, assured that God wanted us here and having a chance to see so closely the fruits of a church that has planned to grow a ministry founded on the sufficiency of Scripture and focused on Jesus. We are very thankful to God for he is using this church to get us ready to bring this foundational principle to our home country, to all Brazilian people who are in need of a Savior.

**Pastor Viars:** Isn't that wonderful? Such a great delight and blessing to have a church-based seminary as one of the ministries of our church and to have Lucas and Bella as part of this cohort. What a delight to be able to participate in what God is doing around the world, so thank you for sharing with us and thank you for being part of our ministry team.

Well, we've all been impacted in one way or another by the tornadoes that roared through the Midwest last Sunday afternoon. I am thankful for the many from our church family who have reached out to friends and neighbors either individually or in some cases on some of the things that we've been doing, corporately to try to serve those in need. I hope we'll continue to pray for people who are affected all over the Midwest and also seek additional ways to serve in the coming days.

Several of you commented on Facebook that you and your family actually thought about what we had just studied in church last Sunday morning about we were to humble ourselves under the mighty or the protective hand of God. Some families even discussed that principle and went over that passage while the storms were approaching. This is our Deacon Chairman, Joe Blake's brother, Mike's, house. Mike and his wife, Janet, live over in Pendleton and Mike was actually sitting in a chair in his living room which is right under where that tree fell when that occurred. Humble yourself under the protective hand of God.

As is often the case when events like that occur, followers of Christ have all sorts of opportunities then to speak about the peace and the confidence that God gives in the middle of the storm. In fact, one of the first interviews I saw on CNN the next morning was of a dear man whose life and family were spared but whose home was just completely destroyed. Within 30 seconds, I could tell he was a Christian. Do you ever

listen to a man like that? Where it was just so very obvious? Or a woman as they speak? The news agencies were scrambling at that time of the day just to find anybody that they could interview. They just let this man go on and on about how he was processing what he had just experienced. He reported that he and his wife had said just before the storm hit, "Well, one of three things is about to happen: either we're going to walk away from this or we're going to be in the hospital, or we're going to be in heaven." And he said, "We were okay with any of those options."

Then he spoke about a Christian song that he and his family were singing as the tornadoes were raging and they even allowed him just to recite all of the words of that great Christian song. Then he said, "God apparently has a sense of humor." I thought, I wonder where that one's going? And he said, "We were looking for my wallet in all of these remains all over the place and I was kinda hoping to be able to at least find my wallet." He said, "One of my neighbors actually found it and brought it to me; found it under some stuff in the house." He said, "It had a fair amount of money in it. When I opened it up, there was \$1 left. Everything else had blown away to the wind." Or his neighbor stole it. But he went on to explain how thankful he was still to have things that really mattered. Isn't it amazing that a man and his wife can grow to the point of having security and peace even when storms are raging like that and, more so, isn't it amazing that their God, that our God, is powerful enough to make a lifestyle like that possible.

With that in mind, I want to invite you to open your Bible this morning to 1 Peter 5. That's on page 183 of the back section of the Bible under the chair in front of you if you need that.

I think many of us feel similar to getting to the end of a good novel or another book that you've been reading and on the one hand, it is satisfying to finish a story but on the other hand, it's kind of sad because reading that book had just been so delightful. Well, that's where we are today. We're completing this verse-by-verse study we've been doing all fall on the book of 1 Peter this morning. And we're calling this today "Committing Ourselves to the Plan." I'm attempting to bring several important themes together in our minds and actually bring us then to a point of decision and all of this is intended to help us be best prepared for our stewardship celebration that we're all going to enjoy this evening over at the Community Center at 5 o'clock.

Committing ourselves to the plan: what do we mean by that and how does 1 Peter 5 fit in to it? Well, some of that takes us back to the very beginning of this year. You remember back in January, if you were part of our church at that time, that we adopted the annual theme of "Planning to Grow." We said repeatedly that what we meant by that was we wanted to continue to discuss and refine and implement our discipleship process. Certainly that's part of planning to grow. And then organizing and launching our new cluster of ministries at Faith West. That was part of planning to grow for us this year. Then, working together as a church family to develop this next five year strategic ministry plan. So, all of that, under this heading of "Planning to Grow."

Another way of saying all of that is: we believe, do we not, in the value and the importance of planning whether we're talking about our personal lives, whether talking about our families, certainly our church. That's why a passage like Proverbs 6 fits in so well, "Go to the ant, O sluggard. Observe her ways and be wise which having no chief officer or ruler, prepares her food in the summer." She plans and "gathers her provision in the harvest. How long will you lie down, O sluggard? When will you arise from your sleep? A little sleep, a little slumber, A little folding of the hands to rest. Your poverty," if you allow that to happen, "will come in like a vagabond and your need like an armed man." So, nobody is telling us to do this. We chose to be like a bunch of ants because of our love for the Lord, because of our desire to progressively live in a way that pleases him and so we have been planning to grow in these key areas all year long.

Another key passage that we've used is sort of shorthand for all of this, is Proverbs 21:5. We believe this, "The plans of the diligent lead surely to abundance." That's a promise of God. That's a promise of God. So, we started all of that back in January and isn't it amazing, the year is almost over and so one of the things that we want to do tonight at our stewardship celebration is essentially hold ourselves accountable to ask ourselves how much progress was made in each one of these three emphases for the purpose of praising our God for allowing us to accomplish so much together as a church family. In fact, the entire stewardship celebration is going to be organized around that outline so that we can just corporately thank our Lord for what has been accomplished in those areas this year.

Also, this is the end of Stewardship Month today where we've been thinking about all that God entrusts to us and whether we're being increasingly faithful to the trust. So, I've been encouraging you and I hope this is your good friend by now, to take time with yourself and your family and look at this Commitment Brochure and just think about what God has entrusted to you and then what does the Lord want you to do next. I really do believe this: the Christian life is a series of small decisions. What is it that God wants me to do next? And then, it really does require a commitment. Well, today is an opportunity to finalize that commitment.

Then, as if we needed one more theme to kind of converge on today, there is this matter of this newly-minted five year strategic ministry plan. You say, "I haven't seen that yet." I know you haven't. You'll be able to see it tonight. It'll be on your chair when you come in tonight and this is what we've been working on together as a church family all year long. So, that's something else that we want to commit ourselves to because if Christ carries his coming and we have five more years to live and serve him, here are the ways we believe he wants us to focus on glorifying him in the days ahead and we want to make a public commitment about that. Do we not? Today, before the sun goes down or as the sun is going down, we want to make a public commitment to accomplishing that plan.

So with all of that in mind, I think the way the book of 1 Peter ends can help us get all of this done. 1 Peter 5, beginning in verse 6 just to kind of get a running start at where we are logically. Peter said,

“6 Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, 7 casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you. 8 Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. 9 But resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world. 10 After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you. 11 To Him be dominion forever and ever. Amen. 12 Through Silvanus, our faithful brother (for so I regard him), I have written to you briefly, exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it! 13 She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you greetings, and so does my son, Mark. 14 Greet one another with a kiss of love. Peace be to you all who are in Christ.”

We’re talking this morning about committing ourselves to the plan and from those great verses we just read, let’s think about three ways to have peace even when the storms are raging. They were raging then and to some degree or another in your life and mine, they’re raging now. Three ways to have peace when the storms are raging: first of all, by asking God for discernment. That man that I mentioned at the beginning who was interviewed on CNN, who did just a great job, first by handling the storm with his wife and his family so well and then speaking up for Christ so eloquently when he had the opportunity to do so. You had better believe that was not the first time he ever thought about how to handle trial. That was not the first time he had ever used God’s word to process an episode of suffering. You see, those were habits of discernment built up over a long period of time because the principles like the ones we’re talking about through this whole series and certainly what we just read about in these verses, they were just part of his DNA, they came out of his pores when he had the opportunity to speak. He had asked God for discernment.

How do you develop that? The text says you have to be of sober spirit. Be of sober spirit. The word “sober” is the Greek word “nepho” and perhaps this quote will help us understand. What does it mean to be sober? The writer says: “On a physical level sober, nepho, refers to self-control in relation to intoxication.” We all get that. But listen to this, “Here as in other New Testament usages, however, it has more of a metaphorical connotation. It includes: ordering and balancing life’s important issues which requires the discipline of mind and body that avoids the intoxicating allurements of the world.” You see, if this man and his family had been intoxicated with material possessions, he would’ve been devastated when they were lost. By the way, we certainly don’t want to minimize the significant loss that many of our friends and neighbors have experienced. I don’t want to do that for a second, but if you have a rational, sober, reasonable, appropriate relationship with material possessions you can rejoice in the things in heaven even when your material things are gone. And if you do that well because you’re so discerning, if you do that well because you’ve developed a sober balanced spirit, you may have an opportunity on a Monday morning to share that story with the world through a

secular news organization like CNN. Ken Collier from the Wild's Christian Camp used to say, "I don't believe in crying over things that can't cry back." That's what a sober spirit sounds like. I'm not, by the way, talking about sober, nor is the Bible, as in sad and somber. In fact, there can and should be great delight in the person of God in the salvation that we enjoy in him but we're talking about, avoiding the drunkenness that comes from organizing one's life around things that can't stand the test of time.

So, you're a discerning person by being sober and then the text goes on to say by being on the alert. There it is: think about how alert you were this past week. See, it's easy to become dull; it's easy to become complacent, especially if we're talking right now about our own pride and rebellion. That's why this humbling ourselves under the mighty protective hand of God is very much a daily discipline as is casting all your care upon him, believing by faith that he cares for you. That's why in this stewardship commitment, we've been encouraging you to make a decision if you need to, about the importance of the daily spiritual disciplines, daily time in the word and daily time in prayer. That's part of what keeps us alert. That's why it's important to be part of an adult Bible fellowship or a small group of some kind and that may be a decision that you need to make. You need to commit yourself to that aspect of the plan because that small group of people who can help you gather around and help you be discerning, can help you be sober, can help you be on the alert.

In fact, I would encourage you to use this verse as an opportunity to evaluate your sources of information. Are they helping you be sober? Are they helping you be on the alert? I would encourage you to think about the people you bring in your life, your closest relationships. I would encourage you to think about your forms of entertainment and I would ask you that as you just think about stewardship, you are a steward of that mind of yours, I am as well, I would encourage you to think about sources of information, sources of relationships, sources of entertainment and just ask you, "Is that helping you be sober? Is that helping you be discerning? Is that helping you be on the alert?"

Here's just a random example, I could give hundreds and hundreds but here's just one: some people surround themselves with people who love to complain so they get together and they complain about their spouses. And they complain about their children. And they complain about their jobs. And they complain about their furniture. And they complain about the President. And they complain about their church. And they complain about the culture. So, instead of having relationships that would encourage them to humble themselves under the mighty hand of God, they're grouching about whatever it is that they don't have and instead of casting their care upon him, they're holding on to those cares and reviewing them over and over and over. Instead of cultivating a heart of humility, they're cultivating a heart of pride and when that period of suffering comes, they're just not ready. There has been no discernment; there is no sober spirit; they haven't been alert; they've never committed themselves to the kind of plan that Peter is calling us to at the end of this book.

Why is this so important? Well, a lot of reasons but here's the one that Peter calls out in the text: because of the presence of our adversary. Peter says, "Be of sober spirit, be on

the alert.” Be committed to a plan of growth because, “Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. If you know Christ as Savior and Lord and I hope you do, if you’ve never trusted him we would encourage you to do that today, but if you know Christ as Savior and Lord, the adversary cannot steal your salvation. He cannot take that from you. We saw in the last couple of weeks that Jesus made it clear that if you’re saved, you are residing in his hand and then also in the Father’s hand. That’s a great place of security, even sealed by the Holy Spirit of God. John says, “Greater is he who is in you than he who is in the world,” etc. etc. But there’s no question about the fact that our adversary, the devil, would love to devour your life and devour your testimony through pride and worry. So, it’s very, very important to constantly be on the alert, to constantly be sober, to constantly be discerning, to constantly be evaluating: why am I doing what I’m doing right now and am I falling for the one who is prowling about seeking to devour me?

Some of you know, I’ve been trying to think through just how much our church should be involved in some of these present culture wars and even to the degree to which I should be personally involved. There is another editorial yet today on that particular issue and I’ve been having a lot of conversations about that with our staff and a lot of conversations about that with our deacons and with other people that I trust just to try to help me know how to navigate myself and us on issues like that. We always want to major on the majors. We don’t want to be about the latest skirmish, we want to focus on first of all, growing in Christ ourselves and then loving our neighbors enough that we try to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ here and around the world so that we don’t want to be involved in every last little skirmish that comes along. On the other hand, in a participatory democracy, do we have any responsibility to speak God’s word into a culture where everybody else is certainly bringing their beliefs and their gods into the public square?

Well, one of the questions about that involvement, whether we’re talking about us being involved individually or as a church is: what’s the motivation of the heart? Before you say that, before you write that, before you take that position, is it really just pride that wants to draw attention to one’s self? Or is really worry about the direction of our culture? Is it a lack of humbling one’s self under God’s sovereign hand trusting him to work out his plan how and when he chooses? And I’m asking myself that question because I understand this verse applies to me just like it applies to all of us and I would encourage you, I would encourage me to ask questions like that all the time of everything we’re saying and everything we’re doing because we want to be discerning. We want to have a sober spirit, we want to be on the alert because we recognize the presence of our adversary. In fact, you could ask yourself this question: what choice could you point to last week that led you to being more sober, that led you to be more on the alert because you really believe in the truthfulness of the section of Scripture that we’re talking about? I’m not talking about having some sort of a cowering fear about our adversary but I am talking about having the appropriate amount of understanding and respect for his presence.

I mentioned a couple of young men from our Christian high school who were interviewed a few weeks back about the influence of certain kinds of movies on a teenager's interest in attending church and the things of God and I loved what was quoted in the newspaper about what one of our young men said. He said, "Why would I watch and be entertained by the very thing my Savior had to die for?" In other words, I'm not going to dull my spiritual senses by entertaining myself with sin and opening myself up to the involvement or the impact of my adversary, the devil. There is somebody planning to grow right there. You see, that is stewardship talking right there. There is somebody who committed himself to the plan in the lives of one of our teenagers. Thank God for that, huh?

Well, what else does this text add? Also by seeking God for fortitude for all of this. We're not talking about pulling ourselves up by our own spiritual bootstraps. The text says "resist him." Resist our adversary, "firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world." You see, resisting our adversary, verse 9 says. We also have the promise of Scripture, here it is, "Submit yourself to God, resist the devil and he will flee from you." The exact same themes in James as we've been seeing in this latter chapter in the book of 1 Peter.

You realize, there will be people who will hear this message today and would honestly be able to say, "That has been happening to me this year." Not perfectly. In fact, that's one of the reasons that a number of people are going to want to attend our stewardship celebration tonight. Before they go off hither and yon to Grandma's house for Thanksgiving as a family, which is a great thing, they want to be sure in the church house they have an opportunity with their brothers and sisters in Christ to spend some time in Thanksgiving in part because of the personal victories they have seen this year. They've been planning to grow and by God's grace they have resisted the adversary, maybe more than ever before, and he has fled from them and now they want to, with their church family though their particular story may not be mentioned publicly, but they in their hearts, are going to be thanking God for that as part of the celebration because of the power of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ that made all of that possible this year.

Can I tell you one of the times that I especially have the privilege of thanking God for that? It's at the Lord's table. It's one of those times I wish everybody had the vantage that I have. I get the best seat in the house. You say, "Why would you say that?" Well, because I have the privilege of sitting behind our Communion Table which is an incredible privilege to be a pastor under the, Peter said, Great Shepherd. And I get to look out over the elements that signify the death, burial and resurrection of Christ and as I'm looking through those trays of elements, what am I seeing? A whole church family of changed lives. A sea of people, many whom are changing because what God is doing in and through them. A group of people and many practical cases who have been resisting the devil. They planned to grow, God gave them opportunities to grow, they resisted the devil and the devil has been fleeing from them. I could illustrate that in all sorts of ways too, but here's one of them: there will be a number who will be at our stewardship celebration tonight and the fact of the matter is, they're handling conflict in their home better than ever before. They've grown in that and as a result, they've been more



discerning. As a result, they've been more sober. As a result, they've been able to resist our adversary.

Listen in to a topic about that very issue, in fact, it's just before this one but it talks about handling conflict and where the devil fits in and where he doesn't. James 3:13, "Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom." Think about conflict in the home. "Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy." And there will be people who will be with us today as they thought about planning to grow this year and trusted God to help them plan to grow this year, that has been impacting even the way they're functioning in their home. And, again, not perfectly but you do you understand that we'll have people all around us who can say, "God's been giving me wisdom from above. Praise God! He has been giving me wisdom from above and so the way I'm trying to solve conflicts in the home, it's more pure. It's more peaceable. It's more gentle. I've been resisting the devil and he has fled from me and us. It's more reasonable. It's full of mercy and good fruits. It's unwavering. It's without hypocrisy." Persons like that will have some tears in their eyes tonight as we're celebrating Thanksgiving together because they planned to grow and God helped them to grow and now you better believe they're going to commit themselves to the next step in the plan. They're going to commit themselves to the next step in the plan.

Of course, let's be honest about it, for some they'll hear what I'm talking about right now and the fact of the matter is, they've given the devil a foothold in their life and they've given the devil a foothold in their family. The truth of the matter is: it's just ongoing drama, emotion-centered living, the Spirit of God has not been part of it. They have not grown this year. So, you just have jealousy and selfish ambition and disorder and every evil thing. Well, wherever you are on that spectrum, I hope you'll say, "Thank God for Stewardship Month. I want to run up to the pulpit right now and hug my pastor but it would probably be out of place." But thank God for Stewardship Month that we have an opportunity to just evaluate where we are and then make a plan and commit ourselves to that plan.

Peter goes on to say: being firm in your faith. It's the Greek word "stereos." Here's a little Greek quiz: what English word do you think we get from the Greek word "stereos?" Stereo. I'm sure other words, feel free to just blare out whatever you think but stereo which means "solid; balanced at both ends." And Peter talks about being firm in your faith. Not just stereo, balanced at both ends, but being firm in your faith which then connects this entire discussion to the Scripture because faith always has an object. For believers, "faith comes from hearing and hearing by the word of God." Think about how that ties so many of our themes together: what prepares you for times of suffering? Being firm, being balanced, stereos, in your faith. What helps you overcome pride? Being firm and balanced in your faith. What helps you overcome sinful worry? Being firm and

balanced in your faith. And that, too, explains so many of the stewardship commitments that we're making. We want to help our church do everything we can to assist everyone who is in our church now and also whom God might bring in the days ahead, to be increasingly firm and balanced in their faith.

That's what motivates men and women to volunteer for serving opportunities, they're trying to help others develop stereo. That's what motivates men and women to sacrificially give, to help all of us and others develop stereo. What's so exciting is that many of those ministries are producing fruit. For example, you look at many of our youth ministries and do you know what you see? Children and young people becoming firm in the faith. I mean, who would not be willing to invest time and resources if we have the opportunity to participate in that? And the amazing thing is, as you're being used to help somebody else become firm in their faith, God is simultaneously helping you become firmer in yours. That's just the way it works. Look at our school; look at Vision of Hope; listen to the testimonies that you heard today from interns in our seminary; think about Faith West; think about our counseling ministry; think about our college ministries; our ABFs; our small groups. Every direction you turn, men and women becoming firmer in their faith. And isn't that worth sacrificially giving to and isn't that worth committing yourself to the plan?

What's beautiful is being part of a family where that's happening around the world. Peter says, "Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world." We saw that this week throughout the Midwest, all sorts of opportunities that men and women had to be able to give a testimony for Christ because they had been standing firm in their faith, they had committed themselves to a plan, undoubtedly, over and over and over and when the time of suffering came, they were ready. To be able to see it around the community, around the state, around the world. Don't you love the fact that as we commit ourselves to a plan together as a church family in Lafayette, Indiana, that we can have an impact worldwide. Wow. To God be the glory for that, huh?

Some of you may remember that a couple of years ago we were involved in launching a brand new organization: it was called the Biblical Counseling Coalition. And we were working hard just to bring the key leaders and the key organizations that are involved in biblical counseling together into a coalition so that we could cross pollinate, so that we could share best practices, so that we could develop relationships and resources. The movement was a bit fractured and we wanted to see it get to a better place and so we launched that coalition. It's incredible. It really is incredible what the Lord is allowing us to do. That group has come together and published several books now. This was the first one that our group published together, forty different authors who took a stand leading pastors and counseling pastors in evangelical churches around our country. There is another book that we have written that is about to be published. We have a contract now for a third book that we're doing together but men and women from around the country who are working together in a coalition because that's what this text is talking about. When you're standing firm in your faith, you can have an impact, not just locally, but around the world.

We just had a board meeting with our Biblical Counseling Coalition group and one of the things that is interesting is, we're seeing groups of people who are standing firm in their faith starting Biblical Coalition-like groups in other countries and so we have decided that we're going to begin inviting them. We always have a leadership retreat early in December. It's one of the reasons that I'm gone in that particular week and we always have a leadership retreat in December. We've been bringing these leaders in from around the US and getting a lot done. Now we're going to be bringing selected individuals from around the world into our BCC group in order to have an impact in their countries as well. Isn't it amazing that as we plan to grow, as we commit ourselves to a plan, we have the opportunity to have an impact around the world?

There are some pictures I received this week and I'm not going to show them to you. I wish I could. I'm concerned that if they hit the internet, they could actually create danger. But they are of one of the men and leading churches that we've been working with in the country of Moldova in Eastern Europe and we've had the opportunity to go and teach them and just have a great privilege ministering to them. They showed us, sent me some pictures this week, of a ministry trip they recently completed to Iraq and they were able to go and teach principles of biblical counseling in Iraq. They wouldn't let me in that place, I can tell you that but they let our friends from Moldova in and how in the world they got that done, I'm not even sure I want to know because under torture, I'd probably tell. Here you have men and women around the world who are standing firm in their faith.

The text ends by talking about trusting God for hope. He said, "After you have suffered," for how long? "For a little while." There is that phrase and we've seen it throughout this book, "After you have suffered for a little while the God of all grace who called you to his eternal glory in Christ will himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you." We're not talking about doing this ourselves, we're talking about trusting our God to help us do that because of the temporary nature of suffering. Just a little while.

In fact, you've been looking at this plan as we've been working on it all year and you'll see it in its printed form tonight. You realize, we as a church family are committing ourselves to a 165 strategic initiatives spread out over a five year period of time, all of which involve some level of sacrificial serving on our church's part. That's one of the odd things about the way a few folks in our town like to criticize us. They like to say, "Well, you're just a successful business." Have you ever heard that? You're just a successful business and when I hear that, I want to say, "Really? If that's the case, we're the worst business in the world." Because, you understand, we supplement our ministries here and around the world with volunteers and resources and we're getting ready to ramp that up in a big way. This year we decided together that that's the way we hope to serve the Lord over the next five years and if there is some additional sacrifice that goes along with that, that's fine. If there is some additional suffering that goes along with that, that's fine. Why? Because we believe that this life that we are living on this earth in an attempt to glorify God and minister for him in comparison with eternity is just a little while. It's just a little while and then our pending glorification where Peter says, "The God of all

grace who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, he will himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you.”

Here is something to think about: what would you want to be doing if Christ returns some time in the next five years? Well, I hope you’d say “serving him, glorifying him, acting on the commitment that I made with our church family to accomplish the plan.” What I want to encourage you to be praying about even tonight as you would come to the celebration: first of all, I hope that you’ll ask, “Lord, please give us a humble heart.” I hope we will just be overwhelmed with a spirit of thanksgiving for all God has done. That’s one of the big purposes for what we’re doing tonight. But I hope also, as you just review these 165 different strategic initiatives, I want to encourage you to be looking for the ones that have your name on it. You say, “You who?” You, you. I want to encourage you to be looking for the ones that have...and don’t say, “Well, I’m too young.” Wrong. “I’m too old.” Wrong. “I’m too this...” No, no, no. I want to encourage you to be looking for the ones that have your name on it. I want to encourage you to begin thinking about how you can serve to help us accomplish that. Let’s all commit ourselves to the plan.

Will you stand with me, please?

*Father in heaven, thank you for even the possibility of being sober. Thank you for the possibility of being on the alert. Thank you for the possibility of resisting our adversary and believing he would have to then flee from us. We thank you that our sacrifice is just for a little while anyway and thank you for our pending glorification. And I praise you for all that you’ve done this year. I praise you for the privilege you’ve given us as a church family to plan, to think about what could happen in the next five years together and I pray that we would be the kind of people, regardless of any sacrifice or suffering that might be involved, I pray that we would be the kind of people who would commit ourselves to the plan and I pray that we would do that today. We ask this in Jesus’ name. Amen.*