# When You Don’t Fit In

## Decision Making & God’s Will

By Brent Aucoin

**Bible Text:** 1 Peter 2:4-12

**Preached On:** Sunday, July 7, 2013

### Faith Church

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Greetings from the other side of the river. I am Pastor Brent Aucoin and I serve as the Pastor of Soul Care and Seminary Ministries and currently I’m overseeing the launch of Faith Church West. We call it that name “Faith Church West” for a reason because we’re all one body, Faith Church, just meeting in two different locations and I get to speak with you today and Rob is actually on the other side of the river and mourning with the rest of the folks over there because of the loss last night to Notre Dame, but there is a God in heaven and he’s still on the throne.

This morning we are continuing our series on decision making in the will of God, particularly in the midst of trials. The Apostle Peter was writing to a group of non-Jewish new believers living in today what is called modern Turkey. Theses non-Jewish believers were beginning to face very fiery trials from their Jewish countrymen for accepting Jesus of Nazareth as their long awaited Messiah. Jews didn’t quite agree with that except a particular group of Jews who formed the early church. They were facing persecution also at the hands of the Roman Empire, beginning persecution. We can begin to grasp similarities in what they faced by thinking through a modern day crisis. Reports have emerged out of Syria and Egypt that certain groups have turned on Christians, even as we speak, burning down their church buildings and in extreme cases, threatening death if they do not convert to Islam. Can you even imagine being in that kind of situation? Where would your mind turn? Where would your heart turn?

While you today may not be facing death for your Christian faith, you may be facing something else that may, at this moment, seem every bit of a trial. We don’t want to minimize or compare people’s trials. God has given us each trial that is unique for our own selves. I want you to think through a trial that you have had recently, maybe that you’re experiencing even right now. For example, consider a health diagnosis. Trey mentioned many of the folks that are struggling right now. He also did mention Wilna Fuller’s sister died yesterday, so be thinking and praying for her but consider a trial. It dominates what we think many times, it dominates our quiet moments, it consumes us when we’re all alone. That’s all we think about and maybe we begin to think, “Everybody else has health, but I don’t.”

Consider struggles in relationships. No one wants to think of themselves as unwanted or even un desirable. Consider the spouse who has had their spouse leave them. “Everybody else has a happy marriage, why don’t I?” The child in school who is always picked on. “Everybody else is accepted, what about me?” The young person struggling to find a mate or a date.

Pastor Green is telling a story over on the West Side right now about a high school story. I would only tell this because he put it in the sermon. Pastor Green and I wrote this sermon together. We have to agree on the notes because we’re preaching the same thing so he put this story in there, otherwise I wouldn’t tell it. When he was in high school, he asked a girl to go to the prom with him. The girl declined, not because she was washing her hair on Saturday night, but because she would rather go alone than go with Rob. Ouch. Then she brought back pictures from that and showed Rob. Oh, my word. “Everybody has a date but what about me?” You know, “Everybody else has \_\_\_\_\_\_.”

In trial, often our mind and heart begins to align our thinking with what everybody else has that we don’t. When those trials come, they can make us feel very alone, very isolated and very discouraged like we don’t fit in, like we’re not aligned quite right with what everybody has. Today in Scripture, if that’s your situation, there are answers, there are answers. Please say, “There are answers.”

Please turn if you will to page 181 in the back section in the New Testament. 1 Peter 2:4-12. We’re going to dig into this passage. One of my favorites in Scripture. Most often I go to verse 9-12 when I’m counseling, but this week I had a fresh start on the passages that preceded it and we’ll probably spend most of our time on the passages 4-11ish.

1 Peter 2:4, “And coming to Him,” Jesus, “as to a living stone,” that’s the first time we see stone mentioned. I’m going to count them for us as we go through. “Coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected,” first time we see the concept of rejected here, “by men, but is choice and precious,” we’ll see those two words again and again in this passage, “choice and precious in the sight of God and you also, as living stones,” second time we see the stone concept, “are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” There are two issues that Peter has brought up right now: who is Jesus and who are you. Who is Jesus and who are you. In the midst of trials, both concepts couched in terms of stones, chosen and precious. Peter comes back to those two things over and over again in the remaining parts of these verses. Those are really the only two concepts in these verses: who is Jesus and who are you.

“For this is contained in Scripture: ‘BEHOLD, I LAY IN ZION A CHOICE,” second time we’ve heard that word, “A CHOICE STONE,” third time we’ve heard stone, “A PRECIOUS CORNER stone,” we see that again, “AND HE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED.’ This precious,” third time we’ve seen that concept, “This precious value, then, is for you who believe; but for those who disbelieve, ‘THE STONE,” fourth time, “WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED,” second time we’ve seen that concept, “THIS BECAME THE VERY CORNER stone,’ fifth time, and, ‘A STONE,” sixth time, “OF STUMBLING AND A ROCK,” seventh time, “OF OFFENSE’; for they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this doom they were also appointed. But you are A CHOSEN,” third time we’ve seen that concept of chosen, “RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God's OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for you once were NOT A PEOPLE, but now you are THE PEOPLE OF GOD; you had NOT RECEIVED MERCY, but now you have RECEIVED MERCY. Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul.” In the midst of trial when you’re wanting all of those things that give us comfort. “Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.”

This morning, this week, this life, when you are struggling with trial, believer, and you get that tunnel vision that begins to shrink your vision down to what everybody else has that you don’t, that’s been robbed from you in the midst of trial, we tend to forget three concepts: with what are we aligning our direction in life; the things that we have lost; who are we in the midst of trial and what is our purpose.

In trial, we’ve got to remember these three truths. The first one is this: remember the identity of Jesus Christ. Remember the identity of Jesus Christ. Peter is passionately trying to illustrate who Jesus is by using the term seven times and I counted them for you, about stones and rocks. Jesus is the living stone, he is the cornerstone. What is that imagery all about? What do rocks signify? Something you throw at somebody when you’re little, is that what it is? I’m saying that because there is a childhood suppressed memory that I have in regard to that. No, it’s not that. Get this imagery down: the imagery here is of a choice stone that is set in a foundation and our foundations are quite like the foundations that they had over in Israel. They built with stones. We build with stones, a little gravel mixed in with mud and dirt called concrete. They built with stones so the imagery here is of a choice, hand-cut stone that is set in the corner somewhere and once you set it in the corner, guess what? It sets the alignment for the entire rest of the structure. It sustains it, it sets the direction, it stabilizes that structure. Its proper placement stabilizes, sustains and sets the direction for the rest of the entire structure.

That imagery is actually drawn from the Old Testament and draws to mind one hand-cut stone of the Jewish temple in Jerusalem that was placed at the foundation of God’s temple where God dwelt. That temple, with the cornerstone in place, set the direction for that beautiful temple, Solomon’s temple, and then all of the other hand-cut stones found their places around that one to build a beautiful building. By the way, that temple with those massive hand-cut stones, was thought to be untouchable, indestructible, like the unsinkable Titanic. But what can happen to earthly stones? An earthquake can shatter them as God shakes the foundations of the earth. An earthquake can shatter those stones and crumble them. Ultimately a Roman army destroyed the second temple, the Babylonians destroyed the first one. That foundation, that building was ultimately destroyed not once, but twice.

And God comes along and says in the Old Testament, Behold, I lay in Zion not a physical building with an inanimate stone foundation but a person, pointing to Jesus Christ who is the living stone, actively sustaining the foundation of life and the cornerstone setting the direction of how to build in trials. So, what does all this mean? Jesus is the intermolecular force holding the atoms together and setting the direction of their movement. Jesus is the gravitational force holding the planets in their orbits and setting the direction of their movement. He is the breathe of life keeping your heart beating and setting the direction of your life. He is the one orchestrating all events. That trial is not a surprise to him because the universe is sustained and is set in direction by him, the cornerstone. He is the foundation of all and the cornerstone setting its direction. He is the only foundation that actively sustains all.

And I don’t think that point quite captures all of it. I wrote that point on Tuesday and as I began reflecting on this message, there is more. Not just the only foundation that actively sustains all, but write this down as well: the only foundation that stabilizes you in trial. The only foundation that stabilizes you in trial. The only foundation that stabilizes you in trial is a stone, a living stone. And this one as well: the only foundation that sets the direction of your course in trial. The only foundation that sets the direction, a cornerstone that sets the direction of the entire rest of the building. Jesus Christ is the one who begins to set the direction of your life in trial.

Do we realize what this means? I know I don’t always. Why are trials, trials? Are they not trials because our typical foundations do not provide stabilizing influences in our life? Are they not trials because our typical foundations do not properly set our direction for handling trials? The foundations that we so often build upon, what are they? We build our lives around things such as health, wealth, relationships, power, prestige, the pleasures of this life and it’s easy to do that here in America. And when the earthquake of trial comes, those earthly cornerstones crack, shatter and break and we fear and we despair. We worry about getting back the things that we lost in the midst of trials.

Now, think with me on this for just a moment: if Jesus Christ is the one who is my cornerstone, the one who is my stabilizing foundation setting the direction of my life and my eternity, in the trial it doesn’t matter if I lose health now because he’s setting my direction along the lines of eternal life. What can trials take away from me when I have eternal life? That’s the direction he’s building me. In a trial, it doesn’t matter if I lose possessions, resources, because he is setting my direction along the lines of glories and treasures in heaven. That’s the direction he’s building me. In a trial it doesn’t matter if I lose the praise of men because he is setting my direction along the line of sharing his praise that he has in God with us. He is building me along the direction of exalting and vindicating me in him in front of the entire universe. Well, why do I long for the praise of man? In a trial it doesn’t matter if I lose influence now because he is setting my direction, cornerstone, along the lines of co-reigning with him some day in his Kingdom.

If you are taking refuge in Jesus Christ, the living stone, the cornerstone of the universe, then what does it matter right now that you lose temporal pleasures when he is building you along the lines of so much more? There is no other that is able to build you along those lines. Trials, like earthquakes, shake our dependence upon those earthly cornerstones of pleasures, possessions, praise of man, that cannot last and will most certainly disappoint and they will evaporate. But according to verse 6, none who believe in Jesus Christ, the cornerstone, will ever be disappointed. You won’t be disappointed if he is setting the direction of your life because he was the only – say “only” with me – he was the only person who did not disappoint God the Father.

You say, “Well, how does that relate to what we’re talking about, Brent?” In trial, when everything seems to be out of place, there is one who is exactly in place. Jesus Christ, the cornerstone, he was the choice and precious one in the sight of God. In verse 4 it says that. In verse 6, “Behold, I lay a choice and precious stone in Zion.” In verse 7, because Jesus is choice and precious, then it is a precious value for us to align ourselves with that cornerstone, that was precious about Jesus to God the Father.

The life of Christ was aligned with God’s purpose in the universe, to glorify himself. Jesus Christ was all about, regardless of what he lost, regardless of whatever trial was happening to him and he had significant ones, more than any of us, we’ll talk about that in just a moment, he had his life aligned with the glory of God. Everything else was secondary to that. Even when he did his miracles, it wasn’t to pump up his own name but he said, “Jesus answered, it was neither that this man sinned nor his parents but it was so that the works of God might be displayed in him.” And Jesus did the works but it was all pointing to God the Father.

Jesus Christ aligned himself single-mindedly to love God and others, glorify God, no matter what possessions he lost. Remember, he didn’t even have a house and how many of us have a house or a shelter? We do. He didn’t even have that. No matter if a family member abandoned him, he aligned himself with the glory of God for his purpose. No matter if a family member abandoned him. No matter if he lost a dear friend. Remember, Lazarus, he lost and he cried but he also glorified God in the midst of that trial. No matter if his life was threatened and put in danger, which we know it was. Jesus was the only one consistently, without fail, that glorified God in his life in the midst of trials and this is a claim that no one else can make. Romans 3:23, “All of us have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God,” which Jesus Christ was all about and all the time, in every way, followed that. So, in that way, friends, that’s who you want to align yourself with: the only one who never disappointed God in the midst of trials.

So, my Faith friends, please remember the identity of Jesus not only as a living stone, the cornerstone, that sustains and stabilizes and aligns us, but also the one who never disappointed God the Father and as such: the only dividing line between the faithful and the faithless. You say, “What does that mean?” As the only one who never disappointed God and always pleased God. You know, my friends, he is the only way. He is the only way of handling trials that matter. The only. The only. You say, “Brent, only?” Yes, the only way and that’s why Peter uses the imagery right here of not just a cornerstone but a stone that you trip over. Jesus becomes, because he is the only way, his way of life is the only way that matters ever in any kind of trial, therefore, he becomes the dividing line, the stumbling block. You either trip over Jesus or you trip into him and become a part of him. And that’s why Peter uses that stone imagery. Not just cornerstone, but a stumbling stone and this is consistent with Acts 4:12, “There is no other name by which salvation is proclaimed.” It’s only in Jesus Christ.

In John 20:30-31, “Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that you may believe,” in only one name, “that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.” Jesus is the dividing line. He is either your cornerstone by which your life is aligned or you will stumble over him. You either trip into his building, beautiful building that it is, or you’ll trip over him and if you consistently do, be crushed by that stone.

Those who stumble over the stone and ultimately are crushed are mentioned also in verse 8, “to this they were appointed.” I know that is a very hard statement. God is orchestrating all of this. But there is a dividing line: you’re either with Jesus or against Jesus. In trial, you’re aligning yourself with him or you’re showing that you’re not. Peter also makes it clear, “the Lord is not slow about his promise as some count slowness but is patient toward all of us not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.

So, friends, the end of the matter is this: the choices have been laid out for us very clearly. God has a precious way of alignment with life, one cornerstone with which to align ourselves in the midst of trials, this choice and precious, to receive all the glories and riches of in the blessed presence of our Creator. Jesus Christ is enjoying that right now. He is the Creator. We can align ourselves with that. Jesus’ way of life ushered him into all of that and remember, he was the one who had the greatest trial of anyone, bearing the weight of all of our sins, yours and mine, upon him. In the middle of the greatest trial on earth, he still glorified his God.

You can align yourself with that. Begin to learn from his ways or you can reject. You can reject, and God doesn’t want that, as Peter also said. But if you do, you are appointed to that. You may go aligning yourself with earthly cornerstones like the pursuit of possessions, praise, power, pleasures, which are gone when you die. You’re not going to take them with you anyway. And your opportunity to trip into Jesus will then be lost as well because you tripped over him all of your life.

Folks, today is the day. If you don’t know Jesus Christ as your Savior, today is the day. Trip into him and not over him and accept him. His way of life, his way of salvation is more than anything that we’re clamoring for in the midst of trials. If you don’t know him today, see Pastor Trey, see me right after this and we will help you trip into Jesus.

Secondly, we’ve got to remember and not forget this: remember and do not forget not only who Jesus is but who you are in the midst of trials. When the pressures come, trials begin to show the earthly cornerstones by which we have aligned ourselves. Another way of saying this is that we always, always, always act out of our perceived identity, who we believe we are, what we deserve, what we’ve lost, what we want. Trials pressure us to our core beliefs about this world and who we are in this world and what we are living for. We act and behave out of those essential beliefs. Who I perceive I am affects my behavior.

To the cancer patient, I’m Joe Cancer, I’m living for health. To the person who has been told their whole life that they will never amount to anything, I am Sue Loser, maybe living for the praise of man. To the person who can’t get a date, I am Fred Unwanted. By the way, Rob is married now, you know that. He eventually did get a date. To the person who can’t pass a class, I am Brad Stupid. There was a time, I hadn’t had much problem with academics over my life but in the last two years pursuing my Ph.D., I failed two comprehensive exams and Rob didn’t, I did. He got his Ph.D. a lot quicker than I did. Brent, you’re a loser, you’re a failure. Who am I in the midst of all of this.

Often our identity has been aligned by our past, our prestigious positions, our popularity among the crowd, our possessions, our progeny. Listen to Peter’s words again and they are so precious, they are so precious. Verse 9, “you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, so that you may proclaimthe excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness and into His marvelous light; for you were once not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.” Peter is using Old Testament imagery here from God’s dealing with Israel and applying them in a marvelous way to New Testament believers.

In Exodus, he called Israel “kingdom of priests” and in Isaiah 43, he said I’m going to create a people who will declare my praises. This group of people, I’m going to do something who will declare and they’re going to be my special possessions. Peter applies those concepts to us, the church, in a marvelous way.

Who are you, believer? Who are you, believer, when you’re aligned with Christ? You are selected. Oh, my goodness, you are selected. You are selected like Jesus: chosen, precious. You are selected also as another stone in the building. God chose you. God chose Christ, the cornerstone, and then he chose you as an additional living stone in him. When you are chosen by the God of the universe, that changes everything.

When I read this, I am often reminded of kick ball games in school. Do you remember those? I hated those. I hated those because I wasn’t very athletic. And when you’re not on a team and there are two team captains right there and they’re picking, what is the thought that goes through your mind? Please pick me. Please pick me. If I knew what the captain’s were thinking they were probably saying, “I don’t even wish Brent was here. He’s not very athletic.” That is not what happens in the family of God. In the family of God, God chose you to be on his cosmic team. That is such of more value than any kind of clique, group, athletic team that you could be on here.

If you’re feeling that way this morning, beat up by various trials and circumstance, you are selected by the God of the universe if you are aligned with the cornerstone. You are selected. You are being built into a Christ-centered community. O beautiful phrases here, that we probably don’t have time to develop as much as I would like. This section could be its own sermon and I’ve preached on this, the royal priest hood, those who represent God. You represent God to the world. A holy nation called out for a distinct purpose. Holy means totally unlike anything else, uncommon. You are here with an uncommon purpose. Not to pursue what the rest of the world is pursuing, to do something different, holy, set apart. A people for God’s own possession meaning you are with God, you are not alone. So, you have value in Christ, you have significance in Christ and you are not alone no matter what. Peter uses the term “spiritual household” back in, I think it was verse 5. Spiritual household begins to summarize all of this.

Many scholars also believe that Peter has Joshua 4 in mind when he penned those words. In Joshua 4, the nation of Israel is finally ready to cross the Jordan River after 40 years in the wilderness, taking possession of the land that God had promised them. However, there was one major trial in front of them: they couldn’t cross the flooded Jordan River. But God, dwelling in the midst of his Kingdom of priests, his special possession, his holy nation that had a different purpose, he wanted to show the world what he was all about with his people and the trials of that floodwater parted and his people walked through on dry ground. God had commanded the priests to the Ark of the Covenant which represented the presence of God in their midst to step into the trials of those floodwater and at that moment, God stops the flow of that river and the people walk across on dry ground.

When the people had crossed that dry riverbed, God commanded Israel to pick up 12 stones for the 12 tribes of Israel. And the text says in Joshua 4, “He said to the sons of Israel, When your children ask their fathers in time to come saying what are these stones, then you shall inform your children saying, Israel crossed this Jordan on dry ground for the Lord your God dried up the waters of the Jordan before you until you had crossed just as the Lord your God had done to the Red Sea which he dried up before us until we had crossed that all the peoples of earth may know that the hand of the Lord is mighty so that you may fear the Lord your God forever.”

I find it fascinating that God would choose, in Peter, to talk of us as living stones built up into a spiritual household. We are not just rocks sticking out of the ground. We are living, breathing, moving human beings that together form the church. A spiritual house that stands the trials of life with the praises of God in our lips. It’s almost like God wants our children and generations and the people around us to ask, “God, what is the deal with that church? Living stones, just like in the Old Testament. What is the deal with those 12 rocks?” And then we have the opportunity to talk to them about the living stone and what you are being groomed into: stones around him to build up into a beautiful building.

So, the first truth we need to remember in the times of trial is: who is Jesus. Remember, who is Jesus. The second one: who you are. And the third one is this: live out your purpose. Live out your purpose. Remember to live out your purpose, having aligned yourself with the cornerstone who sets your direction. And remembering who you are: selected and God is building you up into a cosmic Christ-centered community. Remember to live it out.

Here’s what I think the imagery is, again, in 1 Peter. Peter captures here a beautiful building with which the early believers were familiar, a temple. I mentioned that to you before. The temple where God’s presence dwelled and where sacrifices were offered and incense aroma was going up, soothing smells within the midst of that temple. Likewise, the imagery is similar with that church: the building is built and aligned with the grand cornerstone, Jesus, and in stack with other beautiful stones, choice and selected, that is believers.

And in that building where God dwells, there is sweet aroma as well. Not physical sacrifices but Peter calls them in the spiritual house, spiritual sacrifices. What is that? Your purpose. We are to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God. What are spiritual sacrifices? What does that mean? Well, you just keep reading. That’s the term he mentioned first but then he goes on to talk about what they are. He says this in verse 9: as a result of knowing who Jesus is, your cornerstone, and who you are in Jesus, that leads to a precious people who proclaim God’s praises.

We have the privilege of waking up every morning remembering who Jesus is, who I am, I have been called out of darkness, I have been set in the foundation of Jesus, aligning myself with the best way of life ever and every morning, no matter what, every morning that I wake up and I’m not under God’s wrath in hell, is a day to praise God. And I find as many ways as I possibly can to declare his praises because I’m not focusing on the things of this world that I’m losing in the midst of trials, that I can’t keep anyway. But I have Jesus and that’s all that matters. Starting in your heart.

“Abstain from the fleshly lusts.” Why does Peter ultimately mention lust here? He’s not talking about sexual although it could be, but lust in trials. In trials we begin to clamor after all the things that we have lost. Abstain from those things because you have Jesus. So much coming to you than those things. That’s why he says, “Beloved, I urge you to abstain from fleshly lust.” Similar with Romans 12, “therefore, I urge you brethren by the mercies of God to present your bodies not as physical sacrifices but as living in holy sacrifices acceptable to God which is your spiritual services of worship.” Paul mentions spiritual sacrifices, so does Peter. And then he goes on to say, “do not be conformed to this world, the things that they’re lusting after, but be transformed in your mind” to lust after one thing, Jesus Christ.

Finally, not only in your heart but in your behavior. If our heart is right then it comes out in our behavior. Verse 12, “Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.”

Friends, if you know, in trial, who Jesus is, your living rock, your cornerstone, if you remember who you are, selected just like Jesus was, being built into a Christ-centered cosmic community for God’s glory, and then you remember your purpose to offer praises on a daily basis. There is always something to be thankful for as long as we’re in Jesus Christ who has rescued us from darkness. What happens is, around us people begin to wonder, What is that church all about? What do they have that’s more important than possessions, pleasure, praise of man? That is something I want. And unbelievers can look at that and begin to glorify God in heaven as well.

There is examples of that all around here and I’m so thankful for Pastor Viars’ leadership in regard to allowing this church to be a community-based church. Neighbors around Faith West beginning to say, “I don’t know what all the fuss and the derision has been about these people. There’s something different about these people.” Read Pastor Viars’ blog on that about two weeks ago when he said our neighbors rise up to defend us. That’s a living example of what this is talking about.

If you don’t know Christ today, will you trip into the cornerstone? If not, you’re be tripping over him. Please come and see us.

Let’s pray.

*Father God, we thank you for this text. Thank you, Father, for the significance of the rock imagery, Father, and how meaningful that is to give us a picture of exactly the kind of nature that Jesus Christ has. Help us to remember in Christ who we are and remember our purpose in this world. We ask you to help confirm these things in our hearts so that we may live them out in behavior and that, ultimately, Father, others may be drawn to you, the Rock of Ages. We pray these things in Christ’s name. Amen.*