

GLENWOOD COMMUNITY CHURCH

October 18, 2020

What the Gospel Grows

*I Peter 1:22-2:3*

Ben Cunningham

[music: "My Jesus I Love Thee"]

*Erik Buchterkirchen:*

Hi everyone, good morning. My name's Erik, I'm the director of young adult ministries, and it is so wonderful to have you here today as we gather to worship Jesus and challenge and encourage and equip one another to become more like Christ. Hello to everyone who is online right now; we're glad that you're tuning in with us and are able to just see and worship with us this morning.

I've got a couple of things that would like to tell you guys about that are really exciting. I've got some presents down here that I'd like to show everybody. It is that time of year again at Glenwood; we have Operation Christmas Child that's taking place. Take one of these shoeboxes; fill it up with things inside; it's going to be a lot of fun this year. So we'll be doing this for the next two weeks, and then November 1st--that's when we need these boxes back. So November 1st, that's the date that you need to remember to bring them back. And as you take a box this morning, there's a few different ways you can handle the shipping cost. The first way is just to take a shipping donation envelope, if you can use one of the stick-on labels over there at the table. Or - get this - you can pay online, and there's an added bonus to this because, when you do so, then you are able to track and see where your box is going, so it might be some fun for you to do as a family together.

Next big thing: how many of you guys love doing dishes? Yes! Okay. I actually do, like, if you invite me to go over to your house and do your dishes--don't tempt me. But, someone in our congregation made these really handy scrubby things, and look oh! They're color coded, wow! If you're color blinded, I'm sorry. But, anyways. These things, when you're doing the dishes, it's a great reminder to pray for the people and the kids who are receiving these boxes. And they'll be available for anyone who wants to make a donation specifically to the Greatest Journey discipleship program. So go ahead and pick up one of these, and when you're doing your dishes, it's a great reminder for us to be able to pray while we do them. What a great activity to do.

If you have any questions, Scott and Molly Carlson will be in the foyer after the service, and you can also visit our website for more information, that's [Glenwoodcc.org](http://Glenwoodcc.org). I'm going to go ahead and pray for our service this morning, so why don't you bow with me in prayer.

Great heavenly Father, King of the universe, we come before You humbly this morning to worship You, to learn from Your Word, to experience the community that You've blessed us with here together. Father, we pray as we open our Scriptures that You would speak to us, that we would hear from You, that we would understand the wisdom that You have ingrained into the Scripture, that we would understand what it means to be a holy people, that we would understand what it means to love one another fervently. Father, we pray for Ben Cunningham as he comes up and shares this word. May he speak Your words and not his. And Father may we take those words in and go out and bless other people with the knowledge that we have learned. May we use our transformed lives and our hearts to impact the world for Your kingdom. Jesus, we confess that we have sinned in our thought, word, and deed, and we need You. Daily in our lives, we need You. Protect us from all things, Father, from the virus, from all hatred, malice, slander, envy. Father, draw our hearts towards You this morning. We pray that You would be with us and that Your kingdom would come and reign here on the earth. In Your name I pray. Amen.

*Ben Rico:*

Amen. Would you please stand as we sing and worship to our Great God who is Everlasting, who reigns supreme over His creation and draws His people to Himself in Jesus' name.

[music: "How Great Thou Art"]

[music: "Here is Love, Vast as the Ocean"]

*Ben Cunningham:*

In light of that, let's pray.

Father, this morning we rejoice that the law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. Your testimonies, Lord, are sure, and they make wise the simple. Your precepts, Lord, they are right, and our hearts rejoice. Your commandments, God, are pure, enlightening our eyes. The fear of You is clean, enduring forever. Your rules are true and righteous altogether. Oh God, help us to desire Your Word like gold. You say that it's sweeter also than the honey and drippings of the honeycomb, and by them Your servants are warned, and in keeping them there is great reward. Thank You, Father, for Your generosity that is displayed to us in the giving and the illumination of Your Word. Help us now. I pray this in Jesus' name and for His sake. Amen.

Helping things to grow means knowing something about how they grow. My wife and I look at the garden in our backyard and scratch our heads and think sometimes, "Should the plant be that color?" or "Does it need more water or less water?" "Is it a seasonal plant?" We were terrible gardeners, as it was, in the

controlled climates of California. And now we have all four seasons, and we are hopeless here for a little while. We also have four young human beings growing in our house, and our kids, and we're overseeing the process of that growth. And honestly there are times that we scratch our heads and try to discern which battles to lovingly fight. How do we encourage them without puffing them up? How do we mix discipline and joy together in a way that reflects God's community? How can we value preparing them for academics alongside preparing them to meet Jesus? And each of these examples, we have a backdrop of what growth and maturity ought to look like. Right? The plant comes with that little tag, which helps some of us to know what it should look like and what to do to care for it. And we have the Lord Jesus, who's the template of human thriving.

Last week, we saw that there is a family resemblance between the children of God and God the Father, that God has comprehensively saved us, and that includes being made holy like Him. Do you remember that, last week? But what does this holiness look like in practice? What are those who have been born again to a living hope--what do they do next? What kind of diet do they have? What kind of first steps do they take? How do they grow, is the question. And we're going to grow spiritually, we need to know something about how it takes place, how it's measured, how it's nourished. Peter's been writing to people who are in very unsettled times. Life is a bit tilted, it's out of whack. And for them, life in Rome presented complications every day in how to be faithful to Jesus. There were spiritual diversions, and painful circumstances, and new challenges that were competing to keep their focus. So what was it that they needed to focus on in order to grow in Christ? How could they drown out all that noise and find true lasting spiritual nourishment even in the midst of craziness? Well Peter tells us, "Here's what to stay focused on. Here's where nourishment can be found." And it's not in a place that we expect.

Open your Bibles to I Peter. We're going to be in 1:22-2:3. Short little section. You might be thinking, "How could you talk for thirty minutes about such a short little section?" I will find a way, okay? Here's what God's word says to us in this short

but significant part of Scripture. *"Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart, for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable, but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God. For, 'All flesh is like grass, and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls off, but the word of the Lord endures forever.'*

Our outline is pretty simple this morning because Peter gives us two commands. And these commands are kind of surrounded by a lot of phrases that might obscure what they are, and so here's our two points, or these two basic commands. In verses 22-25, we have the command to *"fervently love one another."* Well, Peter's talked about that. The second command is in 2:1-3, when the verb comes, *"long for the pure milk."* That's the second command. So Peter's telling us, essentially, if you want to grow in Christ, stay focused on loving and longing. Loving and longing. And we'll take them in order.

The first command is basically, *"As holy children, love your siblings,"* is what he's saying. Well, look at the command first, then we'll look at the words around it. The command is to *"fervently love one another from the heart."* Peter calls these believers to a deep, God-given willingness to offer ourselves and extend ourselves for the good of other people, or in other words, to love fervently. There's three aspects to this love.

You'll notice that it's, *"fervently love one another,"* speaking of those inside the church. There's a unique way that we love one another as the body of Christ, as brothers and sisters in Christ in the family of Christ. Did you know that in the world of the New Testament, the closest possible family bond was not necessarily viewed as in the context of a marriage, but in the context of siblings or of blood relatives.

One NT scholar said that blood runs deeper than romantic love in the New Testament. So when we throw out terms like brother and sister, and we say that we're the family of God, we're saying something very profound and something incredible that God has created this reality, this community called the church that we get to be a part of.

And the love within the church is distinct and is different from the love that we find in the world. We see that it's "*fervent*," or it's eager, it's earnest, it's continuous, it's active. This is not a love that waits for invitation. It's not not a love that's guided by requirements. It's a love that's proactive and eager. Can you remember the last time that you were compelled to love? Where you couldn't *not* do something to help something who you knew was in need. There's an inner sense of joy in sharing the responsibility, of extending ourselves to other people for their good. It's not a savior complex, it's a savior reflex, to intervene in the lives of people, to help our spiritual family.

Peter also says that this love is not only fervent, but it's sincere, it's from the heart. It's a deep, it's a heartfelt commitment to the good of others. It's not for show; it's not for credit; it's not for stickers or brownie points or things like that. So this love is not a tepid kind of, wave-at-a-distance, facebook friend kind of thing. This is a different deal. This is a unique, God-like love. It's a love that keeps you up at night. It's a love that moves you to say something. It's a love that takes action, and prays, and calls you to reconfigure your budget, and it urges you to pick up the phone. This is an active love.

Now, why should the church love this way, according to what Peter commands? Well, he grounds this command in something that comes before and something that comes after. Let's look at 23-25, because it's here that Peter points to their past as a reason that they should love in this kind of way. He says, "*For you have been born again not of seed that is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God.*" You can probably recall the born again language that was earlier in chapter 1, right, "*Born again to a living hope.*" We see it here

again as a reason to fervently love fellow Christians. Well, what Peter is saying is that the perishable seed is the perishable life that you received from your earthly family when you were born. Your earthly birth has earthly limits, right? But spiritual birth is different. When someone is born again, God grants them the kind of life that He has, eternal life, or as one author said, "The eternal Word creates eternal life." And that happens through the channel of this Gospel, this good news message that God relays to us.

And He goes on in verses 24 and 25, as he quotes from Isaiah 40, showing us how this word is the vehicle by which God creates this birth. Isaiah 40 was a text that was meant to comfort people in exile in the Old Testament. It spoke to a similar type of situation, and it comforted them in the same way by talking about the certainty of God's promise and how sure it was. And so Peter grabs that and says "This is the enduring word." Whether it's in Isaiah, or whether in the Gospel that the apostles preached, or whether in the letter that he's writing, this is a consistent, enduring, steady, lasting Word of God that brings spiritual renewal to God's people. So you think, "Well, how is this a reason to love other people? It seems it's just talking about what Scripture is." Well, your love, Peter says, ought to last because you've been giving everlasting life from an everlasting God through an everlasting Word. So it'd be really odd if, in the church, our love quits after a couple of tries, when that's our heritage, that's how we have been born again, is through a Word that's alive and active. Our love is to reflect His, is essentially what he's saying.

Peter not only looks to their past in verses 23-25 in the nature of the word and its role, but he also kind of fast forwards a little bit in their spiritual life in verse 22, at the start, when he says, "*Since you been in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren.*" So not only did they have these roots that are everlasting, but they have been continually submitting themselves to the word and being cleansed by and purified by this word. And Peter says if you do that long enough, you're on a trajectory that will lead to loving other people. Like, there's not two tracks. There's not a holiness track that never intersects with the track of loving other people. These things are combined because they both find their root in

the character of God. And so being holy and submitting the truth is resulting in what he calls, in the Greek, the *philadelphia*, or a brotherly affection that's starting to take root, and it's kind of like the cousin of this fervent love he's talking about.

So he's saying holiness is going to lead to love, the pursuit of holiness has love as its destination. This is how God's word works, right? Even the book like Leviticus, where last week we saw, "*You shall be holy, for I am holy.*" But then what does that look like in the book of Leviticus? Well, how do we relate to the sojourner and the stranger and to one another within this community of Israel? It results in love. That's where holiness is going. That's why love is described as the fulfillment of the law in Romans 13 and other places. That's why the greatest commandment is to "*Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength,*" and there's the second that's like it: Loving one another.

So this isn't rocket science, right? Love each other, okay. But think about the implications of the way that Peter describes this. First, I'd like to encourage you, and then I'd like to exhort you.

There was a time, earlier in my life, our family was going through a difficult time, and people in our church dropped groceries off on the front porch. And we needed those groceries. And as a kid, I realized I didn't really have a category for what was going on there. I knew that we went to church, and I knew that it mattered, and I liked to harass the Sunday school teacher every week, and there was great things about church as a kid that I just looked for--but I didn't really understand this part of it. And I can remember, like, opening up the different groceries and seeing things that we wouldn't normally buy, right? The good cereal, not the cereal that was watered down and diluted with all the store bought cereal, so what you got, just a teeny-bit--it was like the good stuff. And I just remember as a kid thinning this is the craziest thing. I hardly know these people, and I'm eating their Cocoa Krispies at my table, like, what is this all about? And it really struck me, when I thought about how to illustrate it, is that's the first place my mind went, the very



tangible, practical, expression of God's love. 'Cause it smacked of God, right, it reflected Him.

And I've seen that even in the short time we've been here going on at Glenwood, that God's imperishable seed is present and active and noticeable in ways in this body. It's funny, we met with life group leaders, my wife and I, for the most part, and we'd come back from meetings and we'd walk in, and we'd have the typical "how'd it go" kind of conversation with our kids, and our kids eventually would say, "Let me guess, they're really neat people," because they're just kind of sick of hearing the same thing. And we've heard of incredible things. People making caskets for a friend's spouse who's nearing the end. People meeting up in parking lots just see each other's faces as they talk on their cell phones, sitting in the back of their cars. Financial generosity, encouraging notes, serving those who are overwhelmed with grief in our body. Radical hospitality to refugees. A lot of people in this church knew my kids' names when we started here, which told me that they had already been praying for us, people I didn't even know. The imperishable seed of God's Word is revealed in the love between people and the church. And praise God that's present here, and I'm thankful for those tangible illustrations that are very real.

And I also feel the need just to kind of exhort us a little bit, because one of the things that drops off with bizarre circumstances and the craziness that's going on out there, is that fervently loving one another can kind of slip down that priority list, right? Because we have so many other things to adjust to and think about. And we're tempted to collapse inward, I feel like, just kind of focus and care for ourselves and to fixate on what's ours and what's rightfully ours. And so whether it be masking or social issues, or whatever it is, we're tempted to relocate the basis of our love to other more temporary things, like political interest, or whatever tomorrow's issue is going to be - right, they just kind of keep rolling at us. But Peter calls us to be watchful of the spiritual forces that are salivating at the possibility that the church would move it's basis for sacrificial love to anything other than Jesus Christ. Glenwood, our love will last as long as its source. And if we live

and grow and make choices based on this enduring word, our love will endure. But if we relocate the basis of our love to lesser things, then it will become selective and short-lived, and shriveled.

And so, let's ask ourselves, how might God be calling you to love, in an enduring way, the family here at Glenwood? What would that look like? Is it restoring relationships? It is just overcoming the inertia of trying to figure out, "I don't know how to school my kids yet, and I can't think about anything else," which I know what that feels like. Is it needing to rethink how we reach out because the way we normally did that through ministries is different now, and it might not be doing the same thing and in the same way, and so we have to be creative about that, and we have to be more proactive than before. See, the great thing about having God's love as our basis as a church is that we always have a reason to be grateful, and we always have room to grow, right? And so we can do both of those things simultaneously. Or as Paul says, may this be said of our church, when he says, I Thessalonians 4:9, "*Now concerning brotherly love, you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another.*" What a great thing to pray for our church. So the first command is, "As holy children, love your siblings."

The second command is in chapter 2, and Peter says, "*As newborn children, crave spiritual nourishment.*" Crave spiritual nourishment. Verses 1-3 all hang together. It's one sentence in the original language - and some translations kind of chop it up - but it's one idea, and it all hangs on this main verb, "*long for the pure milk.*" And so we're going to investigate a little bit and dig into what is this milk that Peter's talking about? And that'll help us understand what he's calling us to in Chapter 2. The most obvious place to start is the start of verse 2 when he says it's like newborn babies. It's a word picture of this deep craving that infants have. Right, you're sitting on the plane and you know if there's a hungry baby on the plane, because they cry and they carry on and they do whatever they need to do to get sustenance. And it's appropriate for a child to do this. So Peter's not chastising them, saying, "Well, you're less mature spiritually. I'm going to describe you as a

newborn." He's saying that the kind of eagerness that a newborn has, you ought to have too. That's the kind of craving, that's the kind of desire that we should have for spiritual nourishment.

Now, he gives us a contrast, he says it's *not* like this. In verse 1, he says, "*Therefore putting aside all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander.*" That's like, anti-milk, okay. And to long for pure spiritual milk means to put off or to get rid of or put away these unloving and unholy attitudes towards other people. So things like malice, where you kind of secretly desire the harm of another person. Or deceit, where you make misleading statements or you're using half-truths, or you sort of represent what happened. Or hypocrisy, where what's going on on the outside is just not in sync with what's truly going on internally. Or envy, when you're secretly longing for what others have. Or blatant slander, where you kind of just take people down with your words. What do all these words have in common? Well, they all destroy relationships; they all undermine this love that Peter's been talking about and this holiness that we've been called to. They're toxins to spiritual growth. So Peter's saying if you want to grow, part of growing is treating people in a certain way and putting off those things. I mean, two of these terms are literally the Greek opposites of what he's talking about. Like *deceit* is the opposite of *pure* milk, and *hypocrisy* is the opposite of *sincere*, in verse 22, is like this is the exact opposite stuff.

So, it's like a newborn baby; it's not like these things; and it leads to, we see at the end of verse 2, that "*by it you may grow in respect to salvation.*" That these are spiritual nutrients, that the end result is growth. There's not a dead-end for this snack, right? There's a goal in mind, and that's spiritual growth. So it leads to that. We also see where this longing for, or this longing for milk, started, in verse 3 he says, "*if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord.*" So this craving is possible because they've already tasted it. This is a quotation from Psalm 34, where he says, "*Taste and see that the Lord is good.*" But he's talking about milk; he's talking about taste, so he's going to hone in on that. He's saying, "Your craving this is dependent on you understanding this about the Lord already." So it's built on that

fact. You don't hunger for food that you've never had, right? You long for things you've already tasted and seen. And so Peter's saying that's where it starts, in the kindness of the Lord.

One last descriptor here, when it says, "*long for the pure milk of the word*" in the NASB translation. The NASB is actually making an interpretive decision. They are thinking that a Greek word, *logikos*, has to do with the word of God, which you could certainly make a case for that. Right? Earlier we were talking about the word of God. But the word *logikos* actually means, "being true to the nature of something," that two things match up, or need to match up. Some translators use the word "spiritual" to describe that. But there's easier ways to do that, like Peter does in just a few verses later when he talks about living stones being built into a spiritual house. He uses what you'd expect to use there for the word "spiritual." So what does Peter have in mind? Well, he has the idea of being nutritious. That the cravings that we have is for a milk that's actually going to cause the growth that we're looking to have. He's saying the person who's eager to grow needs a certain kind of a diet, and this diet is made up of certain things that cause growth, the very things he's been talking about: holiness and love. That's kind of the formula, if you will, that he uses to say, "This is the kind of milk that you ought to crave." So their craving for growth corresponds to the kind of milk that will actually make them grow, right? Lot of people crave for spiritual growth and drink the wrong stuff, right? You have neighbors and coworkers and family members who are thirsting and hungering, but they're in exactly the wrong aisle of the store, right? And so Peter is saying there's a correspondence between this longing and having the right stuff.

Do you remember what it was like when you understood something new about God? Maybe it was a book that you read, or maybe it was a chapter of the Bible that just revolutionized the way that you worshiped or the way that you lived, or whatever it was. There's these moments along the life of a Christian where God just seems to grow us in leaps and bounds, or turn on the light and we see things, and all of a sudden we understand that the implications of sovereignty in our life, or we

understand the nature of our sin, or we understand the joy of repentance and not just the gloom of it. I can remember reading *Mere Christianity* for the first time - it was this old beat up copy that I cling to - where, just reading this and realizing that the Bible and Spiritual things are actually based on reality. There's actually cohesiveness to what this faith is. This isn't just something I have to check out intellectually to do. This is something that makes sense of the world. This is something that puts pieces together. And I remember lying on my bed reading this thinking, "This is new information, and this makes me want to read more. It makes me want to love God more and to pursue Him more." And it just kind of leads to other things. Have you ever had anything like that? This is what Peter is describing, this craving, this hunger, this desire, this attitude that's pursuing relentlessly to know more about God, because He's infinitely interesting. Now, I don't have you remember those memories just to try to imitate them, right? But just to remind you that God is desirable, that our spiritual cravings are satisfied in Him. So Peter commands, "*As newborn infants, crave spiritual nourishment.*"

What would this look like? What could this look like? Isn't it interesting that God commands craving here? That a lot of spiritual growth actually starts with a hunger, or a desire, or something that He places within us. One of the many themes that have come out of conversations with people during Covid is that, I think, we're all just tempted towards a spiritual apathy in life right now, right? And you can just kind of hit cruise control, and pastors aren't going to bug you 'cause you're doing it online, or friends you don't see as often who normally, kind of, stimulates faith in you or--we can just kind of grow apathetic during this time. Maybe it felt like this novelty of Covid, when it first hit--I remember thinking the first couple weeks, like, "I could do this," you know? Like, this is just different, and it kind of allows more connection for our family, and all this stuff that was. It was like a retreat almost. And I don't mean to make it sound great, but it was just different. But then, seven months later, it doesn't feel like a retreat anymore, right? It gets old, and it gets wearing, and it's hard to know how to kind of keep moving and kind of get out of the mud in some ways. And what a timely and helpful word! In all of its simplicity from Peter, to say, "You want to know what to focus on when there's a thousand

things that could distract you? You want to know what will lead to spiritual growth? Extend yourself in love to other people, and you're in for spiritual growth in a specific way."

This will help us, I think, out of the wilderness of whatever this last seven months have been for you. This is where nourishment can be found. And the world's digging up grubs, they're searching for water, and we have an opportunity as the people of God to say, "This is where nourishment can always, always be found." But it's not in the spot that you think, right? This is not intuitive stuff. It's not in self-preservation, or self-fulfillment. It's in obedience to Jesus and extending ourselves and growing in holiness. This is how we're sustained in exile. But this is very counterintuitive. It's like, when you want rest, and you think, "I want rest; I want to be replenished, so I'm just going to put my feet up as high as I can get them for as long as I possibly can," right? Or "I am going to dive into whatever's in the fridge in a way that I'm going to regret in two hours." Or "I'm going to go; I'm going to splurge the mall, I'm going to get that thing I've al--" And we chase replenishment only to find that it's empty. And instead, the strain of exercise, or the way that we invest in other relationships, or the time of prayer that doesn't initially seem all that appealing, or the opportunity to forget yourself and just serve someone else by filling up a shoebox or helping someone who's hungry, and those are actually the things that replenish us and help us. It's really weird, to be honest with you, but it's what Peter is saying is the mechanism, it's the means for how growth happens. Self is often a cracked cistern, and Peter is telling us to find nourishment where it can be found.

Now, what would this potentially look like? Well, obviously we can't get super specific with this, but just some ideas to stir us. Maybe this text would challenge you to pursue a new way of growing spiritually in this time of Covid. Prayerfully pursue that. Maybe God is revealing deficits in you like He is in me during this Covid time. Maybe things around the house are a little testier than normal, and, like, working through some anger and looking at what Scripture says about that might be helpful thing. Maybe it's repenting of turning to the world for rest. Maybe

it's building in rhythms of services that would be profitable to just remember other people. Maybe it's having a long conversation with a trusted friend about, "Hey, here's how I want to grow. Would you pray for me in that? How would you like to grow?" and talk about that. Maybe it's leading your family or your marriage in a spiritual way that's different or new. Or maybe you don't feel any hunger at all, and it's just, "God, give me hunger. Help me to want You." Wherever it is, the Holy Spirit, I think, would mightily bless that smallest step of faith or that smallest sense of conviction or that smallest ounce of willingness, because He's gracious in that way. May God stir in us new hungers and desires for holiness and may we keep imitating His love.

Now, these things have their source in Jesus, right, holiness and love. And this is possibly because of the Gospel, and it has a home in the person of Christ. And if you're not a Christian here this morning, I would advise you to not try to obey these commands initially without the help of God, because you won't be able to do it. This is supernatural stuff, and you need to understand saving grace before you understand sanctifying grace. The fervent and sincere love of God has appeared in Jesus the Son, right? No one has craved the will of the Father like the Son. No one has loved the imperfect Church like the Son has. And because He rose again, we know that God's rescue is real and that it's available. We know that His salvation includes the grace to help us to love the imperfect body of Christ here at Glenwood. And this salvation includes the resources to satisfy the spiritual hungers that we bring to Him in prayer or that we discuss with one another. God's word has remade us; the Son has been exchanged for us; and now the spirit stands ready to help us. So let's ask Him. Let's pray.

Lord Jesus, we thank You for keeping things simple. At times like this where there's lots going on, there's lots of distraction, You tell us to fervently love one another and to crave spiritual nourishment. Thank You, Father, for Your willingness to supply what is needed for those things. God, when we look at what would be demanded to fervently love, we know that our resources lack. And God, for many here who are feeling just the wilderness of these last seven months, we pray that,

God, You would lead them to water, that You provide manna and sustenance. And God, help us to trust You when we feel like we have a better solution and we are coming up with our own way of finding replenishment and rest and growth. And help us to trust You. We thank You for the ways that Your imperishable seed is visible in this body. I thank You for this body. I thank You for what You're doing in the midst of it, even in the midst of a challenging season. God, would You help us to help one another. Help us to interact over these things, and to start to deepen our relationships in this way so that we can grow in the way that You intend. We love You and we thank you. And in Jesus' name, amen.

*Ben Rico:*

Amen. Would you please stand as we sing, as we praise our great God, as we look at the race set before us, as we put on Christ to finish well that race so that we can show the love that He has shown us to others and communicate His goodness as well. Let us look to Christ the Everlasting.

[music: "Yet Not I But Through Christ in Me"]

Amen. Go in peace.