

“Time to Get Unstuck”

I Peter 1:13-2:3

Series: Hope Rising Week 2. Pure Hope

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“I triple dog dare you.” With that immortal challenge, Schwartz dares Flick to touch his tongue to the ice cold light pole...and it sticks. When Flick discovers his tongue is stuck with a bond as strong as gorilla glue, the bell rings. All his classmates react like Pavlov’s dog and race back into the building leaving poor Flick desperately trying not to tear his tongue from the pole. You know the scene the holiday classic *A Christmas Story*. Here are some things you may not know.

- There was a small hole and a vacuum in the pole which pulled his tongue in.
- Flick was played by an actor named Schwartz
- There is a statue today in Hammond, Indiana – the home of author Jean Shepherd – which commemorates this famous triple dog dare.
- During the filming of this scene, the director called for a lunch break. The actors and crew disappeared literally leaving poor Flick stuck all alone.

Anyone feeling a little stuck like Flick? For most of last year you were stuck inside, unable to go out, be with people, see family. You may still feel stuck behind a computer screen on a zoom meeting or a virtual classroom. Yet there is another way to be stuck. One person asks, “Are you going to emerge from this pandemic as a hunk, a chunk or a drunk?” You might be a hunk from your home workout, a chunk because your 10,000 steps were to the fridge for a snack or a drunk because you have wine delivered to your doorstep. Exercise is good but the other two show we get attached to things which feel good but are not healthy. Here are more unhealthy trends fueled by the pandemic.

- **Revenge Shopping** – For some reason consumers think the best way to hit back against COVID is to fill up their shopping bags and max out their credit cards.
- **Explosion of Online Gambling** – According to a research firm Global Poker, the US has witnessed an increase of first-time online poker players by 255% since the coronavirus lockdowns began. I recently saw a news story reporting this shocking fact followed by three ads for online gaming.
- **Increase in Online Porn Use** – Being isolated, lonely, bored, stressed and anxious in front of a screen is causing a significant rise in the consumption of porn.
- **Alcohol Consumption is Up** – The Journal of the American Medical Association reports alcohol consumption among adults increased by 14% from 2019 to 2020. Women exhibited a 41% increase in alcohol consumption over a 2019 baseline.
- **Gun Sales Skyrocket** - More than 2 million guns were sold in January, an 80% jump and the third-highest monthly total on record.

Many of these articles report that fear, anxiety, stress, loneliness and isolation drive us to comfort ourselves in these ways. We get attached to them. Why? Well maybe someone triple dog dared us. Maybe we were simply curious. Maybe we got caught in the flow of the herd. The bell rang and it triggered a reaction that is not rational or helpful. We get stuck. And often, after others help you get stuck, they abandon you out in the cold.

Not all the trends are up. Here is another troubling statistic:

According to Gallup, the proportion of Americans who consider themselves members of a church, synagogue, or mosque has fallen below 50 percent for the first time since Gallup first asked the question in 1937. At that time, church membership was 73 percent.

This is no coincidence. Every one attaches to something. We are created to be attached to God, to have a relationship with our Creator. When people turn away from the Lord they don't stay unattached. They get drawn in and stuck to things here on earth.

The Apostle Peter saw this happening to new believers and tells them to wake up.

Therefore, with minds that are alert and fully sober, set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming. I Peter 1:13

Family and neighbors pressure these believers to give up their faith in Jesus. They triple dog dare them to turn away from Christ. They tempt them to return to the old practices they see everyone else indulging. Peter gives them a better pathway.

First: Get Unstuck. He tells them to wake up and sober up their minds. You can't think clearly if you are drowsy, drunk or drugged by the things of this world. Second: Set Your Hope on Grace – the Gift of Life, Love and Peace Jesus gives. This is Pure Hope. How do you get unstuck? **Break the Mold.** Peter continues,

As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy." I Peter 1:14-16

Peter says don't let the world squeeze you and conform you into its mold. After decades of preaching against the "dangers of the media," what did my daughter study? Advertising. She worked for the enemy! Kristin taught me the media is not evil and it's not the enemy. "Media" is the plural of "Medium" which is simply a go-between. It delivers something for someone. It's only as good or bad as the content it passes on. It's been that way since our ancestors first scratched pictures on stone. The only difference is the delivery system.

What does the Media do? It creates a *Mirage*. Much of what we see is an illusion. People and products in ads, movies, TV and the web are made up, dressed up, airbrushed, photoshopped and reconstructed. They promise far more than they deliver. I'm sorry to inform you, but if you drink this soda, drive that car or use the other shampoo you will not suddenly become cool, attractive or powerful. It's an illusion.

The best example of this is Hollywood itself. While I was out near L.A. getting my doctorate, Lisa and I visited Tinsel Town. We saw the stars on the walk of fame, captured a Star Wars Storm trooper, and met Samuel L. Jackson (a wax dummy). Yet we found a few blocks from Graumann's Chinese Theater, Hollywood Blvd. becomes a bunch of vacant stores, check cashing places and wig outlets. It truly is *tinsel* town – shiny stuff with no substance. A mirage.

The Media also **Moves** you. By that I mean it moves you past one ethical boundary after another. It has to. It cannot sell products, raise ratings, billboard numbers, box office sales or internet hits if it does not tempt, tease, entice or shock you. With so many other products, movies, music, shows, social media and websites to distract you, it must do this to stand out in the crowd. The combined effect of all this competition is a culture bent on breaking every boundary. It's not surprising there is more drinking, drugs, sex and violence in our society when we see it on the screen.

And the Media **Molds** you. It manipulates what you think about yourself and how you feel about yourself. An article from *Psychology Today* quotes Richard Hersh, former director of Harvard's Center for Moral Education as saying,

Parents and teachers have allowed children to be nurtured by television, the Internet, and their peers. Parents and teachers have abdicated mentoring and overly shelter them from life experiences to avoid pain and failure. They enter college "socially and emotionally fragile." The all-too-common results are anorexia and bulimia, depression, drinking and drug use, and attempts at suicide. Data shows that about 40 percent of college-age women have experienced an eating disorder.¹

Don't let the media tell you how you should look or feel about yourself. Don't let it tell you you're not smart enough, pretty enough, strong enough, thin enough, rich enough. Don't let it influence your actions, your behavior and your values. Don't listen when it says you should be strongly aggressive, sexually adventurous or selfishly materialistic. Break out of the media's mold, get unstuck.

Here's a secret they don't want you to know. You can always turn it off. There's a little button you can press. Do you know what it's called? The power button. You've got the power to turn it off. No one is forcing you to see the latest racy movie or raw crime show. No one is chaining you to video games or the internet. Press the power button, turn off those 2 dimensional illusions and start experiencing reality. Here's a radical idea: try a media fast. Turn off your phone for a day. Give up movies for a week. You'll start to see how powerful a pull it has when you give it up. What do you do during that time?

Live Differently Peter calls us obedient children of the Father. The word "obedient" also means "to listen." Listen to what your Heavenly Father says. He calls you holy. In His eyes you are pure, spotless, valued, beloved. You belong. Listen to what the Holy Spirit says about you in His Word. This will take effort. The Media allows to be a

¹ Hara E. Marano, "The Skinny Sweep-stakes", *Psychology Today* (January-February 2008), pp. 89-95.

passive consumer. Reading and feeding on God's Word takes effort but the effect is life changing. Download the 75 Day Prayer and Scripture Calendar and read the Book of Acts with us. You can still get into a Growth Group or Microchurch. Peter says this:

But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy." Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear. I Peter 1:15-17.

What does it mean to live a holy life? Simply this: You realize this world is not your home. You are a visitor. You are only passing through. You belong to God the Father. Don't let the media tell you this world is all there is, so grab as much of it as you can before you die. You don't need to push, rush, race, buy, accumulate or achieve like the rest of the world. You can live a life of joy, peace, and grace. This world is not your home. The Kingdom of heaven is. So while you're here, why not start living heaven?

A missionary couple returned on a steamship to New York harbor after years of service caring for the poor and preaching the Word. Also onboard was a famous dignitary who received a grand welcome. While bands played and speeches proclaimed the glory of this famous personage, the humble missionaries made their way off the ocean liner with no fanfare to a small apartment in the city. Feeling discouraged and unappreciated after so many years of faithful service they prayed to God and asked why they did not receive such a grand welcome home. The Lord replied to them, "You're not home yet."

As we Live Differently, Peter also tells us to **Love Deeply**

Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart. Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. I Peter 1:22, 2:1

As you feed on God's Word and put it into practice, the Holy Spirit will purify your life. You will be able to love more deeply, from the depths of your heart. When you let God clean evil, ill will, lying, hypocrisy, envy and slander out of your heart, then pure, genuine, holy love can flow. It's not a love that is fake, a cover up, manipulative, or deceptive. It gives without expecting anything in return. It forgives, heals, restores and reconciles. Deeply love your family, friends, neighbors, even opponents with a love they can't get from the world. Don't leave them out in the cold. Help them get unstuck.

Here's how to love deeply from the heart. During our 75 Day Celebration we arranged for many mission projects which will allow you to love our community. You can share God's love through Habitat for Humanity, Bucks County Opportunity Council, a neighborhood Food Drive, the Interfaith Food Alliance, Adopt a Highway, Trenton Area Soup Kitchen, Donation of Diapers with the Masters Place. Invite someone who doesn't know Jesus to join you in sharing God's love.

And here's an amazing way to love deeply. In celebration of our 75th Anniversary our elders are asking the Woodside community to give \$75,000 to Family Promise as seed money for a community center in Lower Bucks which can house and help homeless

families. The elders committed \$50,000 from our reserves and they are asking us to bring it up to \$75,000 and beyond. Family Promise has a wonderful track record of helping families move from homelessness to self-sufficiency. 100% of what you give will go to this cause. Why do we do this? So these families won't be stuck – stuck in a cycle of poverty, hopelessness, and despair. It's time for them to get unstuck

Why do we love deeply? Because you and I are loved deeply – more deeply than we can possibly imagine. Peter writes,

For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.
I Peter 1:18-19

Don't let the world tell you you're not good enough, beautiful enough, smart enough, strong enough, rich enough. In God's eyes, Peter says, you are more valuable than all the silver and gold in the world. The Father set you free with the most priceless commodity in the universe: the precious blood of His Beloved Son.

Like some of you, I recently received my first Covid shot. The minute I got stuck I felt I was unstuck – I started to feel free. I could foresee a time when I would not be stuck inside, stuck on zoom, stuck with social distance, stuck behind a mask. I feel deeply grateful for hard work and sacrifice of everyone on the chain who made this possible - from the scientists to the pharmacist who stuck me. I felt relieved, released, renewed.

And then it hit me. I received my first covid shot on April 2, 2021 at 1:51 in the afternoon – it was Good Friday during the painful dark hours when Jesus was on the Cross. If I felt such great gratitude and relief for a shot that saved me from possible death, how much deeper is my gratitude and joy for His sacrifice of love which saved me from sin and certain death – spiritual and eternal death. Because of His great love for us, Jesus was stuck on the cross – with nails and spears – so you and I could be unstuck forever.