

Dear Church,

I've been thinking a lot about you lately and praying for you earnestly as we navigate the future together. I know this past year has been difficult for many of you, but I really believe that going through challenging times only serves to make us stronger and better prepared for anything that lies ahead!

One of my greatest concerns for you is that you would not be deceived by the spirit of this world. The more I read the Bible, the more I see a recurring theme throughout the New Testament where every writer seems to have this same concern for the church. When the Apostle Paul writes his letters to the churches, he seems very convinced that this will be the Christian's greatest challenge in the coming days. The Apostle Peter seems almost obsessed with this subject as he writes over and over again about false prophets and their goal to deceive, if possible, even the very elect of Christ. And then we see Jesus speaking about what it will be like right before He comes back, and He also seems to emphasize that the number one way people will fall away is through deception. Just remember that deception can come in many packages, even from people you like and trust. That's why it will be so important to know what the Bible says to keep you anchored. Don't be someone who feeds on conspiracy theories or is constantly following self-proclaimed prophets when the words they've spoken in the past have not come to pass. Make sure that whatever you listen to is backed up by Scripture instead of just an impression someone says they have.

As a pastor and spiritual father who loves you, I want to encourage you to hold fast to the truth of God's Word even as it becomes more unpopular in the days ahead! Keep yourself rooted and grounded in love, especially when it comes to interacting with people who hold different views than your own. Always do your best to operate with a heart of reconciliation, reconciling people to God as well as people to each other. As Jesus said, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you. God is counting on you to be the catalyst that changes the world! Just remember that from the moment you came into the earth, you were created to make a difference. Don't ever buy into the lie that you're a victim. You were always created to live as an overcomer regardless of what life throws at you! Never let your race, your economic condition, your education, or even your past failures limit what God wants to do through you. God believes in you and so do I!

When you wake up each day, remind yourself that if God is for you, who can be against you? Every day is an opportunity to let your light shine in a dark world. Constantly keep a heart of thankfulness and generosity, and ask God each day: "Who do you want me to add value to?" As I close, I want to remind you what the Apostle Peter said to everyone who is a part of the church in 1 Peter 2:9 NIV.

"BUT YOU ARE A CHOSEN PEOPLE, A ROYAL PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, GOD'S SPECIAL POSSESSION, THAT YOU MAY DECLARE THE PRAISES OF HIM WHO CALLED YOU OUT OF DARKNESS INTO HIS WONDERFUL LIGHT."

With all the love I have to give,

Your friend and pastor
Dennis Rouse