

“Trusting When It’s Dark”

1 Peter 5:6-12

February 18, 2007

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There are times when life feels so hopeless.

- When you are “let go” at work because of your faith, you can’t find a job and you don’t know how you will support your family.
- When your relationship with Jesus so alienates your spouse that she leaves, taking your children.
- When as a Christian living in Sudan you can’t stop the murderous raids that take place on your village night after night – one of your children has already been abducted and your husband, murdered.
- When the best that medical science has to offer is not enough and your condition is “terminal.”
- When the alternating in-your-face verbal abuse and absolute shutting-you-out silent treatment by non-Christian family members is wearing you down.
- When your family is falling apart and you are helpless to stop it.

Usually we are able to **DO** something about life’s circumstances.

- We get the right medicine.
- We get the right advice.
- We find another job.
- We live under the protection of a civil society and trustworthy law enforcement.

Or we see God intervene in miraculous ways

- to heal our bodies,
- to convert an unbelieving spouse,
- to provide unexpected income,
- to change the attitudes of those around us.

We pray “give us this day our daily bread” and we have enough.

We pray “if it is your will, take this cup, this experience, from me” and he does.

As did King Hezekiah, we ask the Lord to deliver us from the enemy and he delivers us. (2 Kings 19-20)

But what about when God doesn't?

In our study of 1 Peter, which we bring to a close today, the Apostle has been writing to a people under great pressure.

In their case it has been persecution because of their faith in Jesus.

They are being slandered, abused, ostracized, and in other ways treated unjustly.

Likely many had lost their jobs, their homes, their reputations, and even in some cases their own families.

And eventually some would lose their lives, **because** of their commitment to Jesus.

They are suffering terribly.

Peter loves them deeply.

He's a great distance away with no way to get to them.

And he knows that even if he were there he couldn't change their circumstances.

What does he say to them?

What do you say to Sudanese, Indian, Pakistani, Chinese or Indonesian Christians for whom there is no reason to believe that the persecution will change?

What do you say to the Christian whose unbelieving spouse has deserted the family and isn't coming back?

For that matter what do you say to men and women in our church who have little reason to believe they will recover from their fatal illnesses?

Or others who have been living with intense physical or emotional pain seemingly forever with no end in sight?

Peter has something to say!

In a moment we will look at how he ends his letter but for now look again at how he begins it.

Please stand for the reading of God's Word.

1 Peter 1:3-9 "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade--kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith--of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire--may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

Strikingly absent from these words are any requests of God to change their circumstances.

Peter doesn't spend his time pleading with God to change others, but for God to change the Christians.

Most of all he is God's instrument to help them see things altogether differently than they are tempted to.

He tells them to focus on what is the most important, the most true, the most lasting.

He tells them to trust themselves to their God.

Now look with me at how Peter ends the letter in 1 Peter 5:6-12.

Please notice the great similarity to the beginning of the letter.

1 Peter 5:6-12 "Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. ⁷ Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. ⁸ Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. ⁹ Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know

that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.¹⁰ And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.¹¹ To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.¹² With the help of Silas, whom I regard as a faithful brother, I have written to you briefly, encouraging you and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand fast in it.

Pray

Peter ends his letter with where I wish to begin: **1 Peter 5:12** “I have written to you briefly, encouraging you and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand fast in it.”

Knowing their circumstances, their suffering and anguish he says he wants to encourage them.

How does he do it? What does he say?

He says, I know your circumstances argue against it, but you must believe that God cares about you and has a future for you – trust him.

Is that all he says? “I know life is hard but remember God loves you?”

When you are in the middle of it, it doesn't feel as if God loves you.

When the sky is as brass and every direction you look is dark, it is hard to believe there is a future.

What does trust look like at those times?

To answer that let's go back to where Peter begins:

1 Peter 5:6-7 “Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.”

When things go badly for us, I mean really badly, the kind of badly we sense is beyond our control, we have three options:

- We can trust ourselves that we can still somehow find a way out of the situation.
- We can trust others or fate to somehow come through in time.
- Or we can entrust ourselves to God's care.

The last of those three is usually the hardest for us.

When, for example, we get sick we first of all assume we can get over it on our own.

Secondly we might humble ourselves to go to a doctor to get help.

Only when all other remedies fail do we ask God for help.

We have more faith in doctors and ourselves because we have already determined that the only outcome acceptable to us is our good health and we aren't certain God always has **that** outcome in mind.

I'm not suggesting we don't take care of ourselves or that we don't go to doctors, but I am saying we are called on first to entrust ourselves to God's care – trusting in his definition of "care."

It is interesting to me that Peter says the key to this is to "humble ourselves..."

Pride is the opposite of humility.

It is pride that must be conquered for us to submit.

- Pride says I know better than God what I need and when I need it.
- Pride says I can trust myself and even others before I can trust God.
- Pride thinks of trusting as too weak.

Trust suggests that the wisdom and ability of someone else is greater than my own.

Pride has no need of grace.

Humility alone can receive it.

The place to begin to live life Christianly in the face of suffering is to trust God.

It means to submit myself to God's care **and his definition** of "care."

But isn't that just fatalism?

I think it would be worse than fatalism if we didn't know something about God.

Fatalism at least sounds like I have a 50/50 chance.

I don't know what the odds are with God until I know something about him.

What if he is powerless or worse yet, evil?

Peter says in **1 Peter 5:6-7** "**Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand...**"

As to God's power, Peter refers to a common expression in the Bible -"God's mighty hand."

It is used of God's hand of judgment **and** of God's hand of deliverance.

- God's "hand" was behind the judgments on Egypt and behind the deliverance of Israel.
- God's "hand" was on Israel in judgment and he used the wicked Assyrians to do it.
- And God was behind the sufferings of Jesus on earth.

As we have already seen in 1 Peter, God is behind the sufferings of the people to whom Peter is writing.

That doesn't make God the author of evil and suffering but it does make him the manager of it.

Peter is reminding them of a central truth of all Scripture: God **is** in control.

The power of God is working in all the experiences of all his people, accomplishing all his loving purposes.

Sometimes God delivers, sometimes he protects, sometimes he disciplines, and sometimes he tests but **always he is in control.**

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Trusting God is not fatalism because fatalism means we've been left open to whatever.

Faith means we intentionally place ourselves in the hands of a sovereign God.

Isaiah 46:8-11 "Remember this, fix it in mind, take it to heart... Remember the former things, those of long ago; I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me. I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please. From the east I summon a bird of prey; from a far-off land, a man to fulfill my purpose. What I have said, that will I bring about; what I have planned, that will I do."

Two opposite and equal forces – good and evil – with the outcome uncertain, as some suppose, do not control the circumstances of life.
No! God alone is sovereign!

Oh yes, he is powerful **but is he good?**

1 Peter 5:6-7 "Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you."

Listen again to Jesus in well known words but so essential to our lives especially in crisis:

Matthew 6:25-33 "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? ²⁷ Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? ²⁸ "And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. ²⁹ Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in his entire splendor was dressed like one of these. ³⁰ If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? ³¹ So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' ³² For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. ³³ But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

This is another reason why I'm "Calvinistic"/"Reformed" in my theology.

I believe God's love is very particular.

He didn't just put things into motion and hope that some people would become Christians and remain faithful to the end.

As Peter wrote earlier in this letter God chose ME, he died for ME, he sent his Spirit to give spiritual life to MY spirit.

He indwells ME, he has said that nothing can snatch ME out of his hand; he said that whether I am still alive or have died when Jesus comes again, I will be given a new body that will live with Jesus forever.

My God cares for me and, my Christian friend, He cares for YOU!

Fate or God - what's the difference?

The difference is huge.

The endgame of fate is uncertain.

The outcome with God is absolutely guaranteed.

God is the sovereign One who cares for you and Peter says, "Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time..."

"Lift you up in due time."

Isn't it true that it's the "in due time" that bothers us?

As one wag said, "Instant gratification tests my patience."

We not only want what we want, we want it now.

Warren Weirsbe said, "One of the evidences of our pride is our impatience with God." GC 60-48 "Fundamental

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And it is partly because we consider this time, this present time that we can see, life here and now, as more valuable to us than a later time that we can't see.

We're afraid if we don't have it now, we will never get it.

But God considers the time of his choosing to be of even greater worth than the present.

Can we not wait? Can we not trust him?

And so Peter says, **1 Peter 5: 7** “**Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.**”

Casting our anxieties on God is the truest expression of humbling ourselves before God.

Out of our pride of superior knowledge of what is best for us there are, as one man wrote, “Two possibilities: one is that we feel a false security based on our own imagined power and shrewdness to avert catastrophe. The other is that we realize that we cannot guarantee our security, and so we feel anxious.

(John Piper from sermon: “Are you Humble Enough to be Carefree?” November 20, 1984)

Anxiety comes in degrees:

- We have sufficient concern about having food and shelter that we are motivated to get up and go to work. That’s healthy.
- We have a built-in fearful reaction to an oncoming car, so we jump out of the way. That’s healthy.
- But there is also a fear about those things over which we truly have no control but we act as if we do.

Fearfully anxious but prideful unable to leave it with God, we push ahead to try to make something happen.

And we live in the grip of the anxiety that produces.

God says trust him and roll those anxieties over onto him.

Little children have an awesome ability to trust us that way.

They can be greatly frightened until they see a parent they trust.

Then as if a switch were flipped, they cease striving and worrying and rest completely in what to them is the all-powerful ability and benevolent care of their parent.

Though Peter doesn't explicitly say it, it seems from other passages of Scripture that **prayer is the primary expression** of casting our anxieties on God.

The Apostle Paul wrote in Philippians 4:6 "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God."

Prayer is our way of **acting out** our belief – by praying we are:

- acknowledging God's reality,
- we are acknowledging that he cares and
- we are acknowledging his ability to do what is best in our situation.

Eugene Peterson calls prayer a "subversive activity."

We are **tempted** to believe that what is obvious is all we get.

But prayer is an act of defiance against the obvious. Prayer boldly believes that God is greater than our circumstances. Eugene Peterson in *Where Your Treasure Is* quoted in *The Contemplative Pastor*, 10.

When I pray it means I recognize that it is not me, it's not others and it's not my circumstances that are in control, it is my God.

I dare to cast all my anxiety on him because he cares for me.

Please notice next that Peter doesn't try to minimize the situation; he doesn't suggest that what you are facing isn't hard.

In fact he "ups the ante" by reminding us that behind much of what we face in life is something more sinister than we imagined.

1 Peter 5:8-9 "Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings."

There is an enemy.

Take the opposition seriously; it is deadly.

From the serpent in Genesis to the dragon in Revelation, the Bible is clear that the enemy behind all enemies, the evil behind all evil is a person, the devil himself – called Satan.

The point is not that others aren't responsible for their actions as if they were mere puppets whose strings were being pulled by the devil.

The point is that the enemy of your soul is stronger than you imagined.

Don't mistake temptation as insignificant.

Don't think that opposition is dealt with easily.

Be self-controlled, clear headed, alert, and aware.

But notice we aren't told here to resist him by fighting with him, arguing with him, praying against him, or in any other way engaging him.

In this text, Satan comes into and fades from view very quickly because Peter here is not concerned with describing active warfare against Satan but is content with describing the believer's trust in God.

We are told to resist the devil how?

By standing firm in the faith.

How did Jesus resist Satan in both the wilderness and in the garden of Gethsemane?

He did it by rehearsing the truth and trusting God.

Our greatest resistance against evil is trust in God.

The Apostle John said "Greater is he who is in you than he who is in the world."

Stand firm by continuing to trust God in spite of any opposition or temptation that may come our way.

And finally Peter comes to the great promise that he has presented from the very beginning of his letter:

1 Peter 5:10-11 “**And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen**

Remember how he said this at the beginning:

1 Peter 1:3-6 God “has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade--kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.”

In the hardest moments or months of life, what we hang on to is **not** hope for a quick fix.

What we hang on to is **Jesus and his promise** that this is not all there is.

With all the certainty of God himself and his sovereign love, there is a future that is ours.

He has promised and I believe him.

Someone wrote, “Resources for living life today are found in the knowledge of the ultimate end.” (Jobes, *1 Peter*, 317)

What you believe about the future shapes what you do today.

Another said, “A personal relationship with Jesus Christ means that our existence, and the universe itself, rests, not on impersonal laws or on inexorable principles, but on a person. The gospel does not say merely that in the final analysis the **universe** is friendly toward us; it says that the **God** of the universe loves us... We trust in the One who upholds us even when we are too worried or depressed or excited to trust him. The ultimate foundation of our existence (and our future) is personal.” (Earl Palmer, *Integrity in a World of Pretense*, 132)

1 Peter 5:12 “I have written to you briefly, encouraging you and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand fast in it.”

The current issue of *The Atlantic Monthly* (March, 2007) has a fascinating account of the Philippine government stalking one of Asia's most wanted terrorists, Abu Sabaya.

Almost incidental to the story are Martin and Gracia Burnham, New Tribes missionaries.

On May 27, 2001 Abu Sabaya and his band of terrorists boarded a 35-foot speedboat and crossed 300 miles of open water to attack a beach resort on the Philippine peninsula of Palawan.

The Burnhams had chosen to take a few days just for themselves, left the children with friends and relaxed at that same beach resort.

Before dawn the attackers broke into their cottage, dragged them out and stuffed them into the boat for the 300-mile trip back across the Sulu Sea AND into a year-long ordeal as hostages.

Gracia Burnham's book *In the Presence of My Enemies* captures the story but more importantly captures the essence of trust – trust in God.

The story doesn't have what the world would call a "happy ending."

Please watch as Gracia Burnham describes her experience.

Four-minute video of Gracia Burnham recalling some of the events told at length in her book *In the Presence of My Enemies*.

For an excellent discussion of the relationship of a sovereign loving to our suffering, please see D.A. Carson's "How Long O Lord" chapters on line at www.sgc.org. Click on "Sound Living" and "Special Topics."