

INTRODUCTION:

A. *Illus.*: Our friend, Doug Cummings, has written a little e-book about personal safety. He's got all kinds of good suggestions. I jotted some down:

- *Awareness is being alert to your surroundings at all times. Intuition is when the hair on the back of your neck stands on end.*
- *Always know where you are—know your location.*
- *Make it a habit to know where the exits are in every building you enter.*

I don't want to read any more lest I give away the ending. But we're all more aware than ever that we live in dangerous times. *"If you see something say something."*

B. Did you know that you are in spiritual danger—all the time? *Illus.*: I read a story years ago about a family that was hiking in the California mountains. Took a picture of dad along the trail. When they got home and looked at the picture they were shocked to see a mountain lion on the branch just above him. It's like that for us. *"Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour."* **As Christians you and I face unique dangers and we need to know how to protect ourselves and one another spiritually.**

C. 1 Peter was written to Christians under intense pressure. The word *suffer*, in one form or another, appears 17 times. He said his readers had *"suffered grief in all kinds of trials."* Despite that, in the same breath he told them that *"through faith"* they were *"shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time."* Peter doesn't tell us how to avoid suffering because that's not possible and because suffering isn't really a threat to us. It is actually the crucible where our faith becomes pure gold. But Christians under pressure—any kind of pressure—are spiritually vulnerable.

D. We're vulnerable, of course, in good times as well as bad times. So whether you're under pressure right now or not, I

want to show you Peter's last word on personal and church safety. **Turn to 1 Peter 5**. The chapter begins with Peter reminding elders to be good shepherds and then he tells the young to be submissive to their elders. Then talk of submission leads naturally to the subject of humility.

Vv.5b-7...

I. TO BE SAFE BE HUMBLE (5:5b-7)

Illus.: Do you remember that famous Pogo cartoon strip where Pogo and his buddy are looking over all the pollution in the forest and he says, "*Yep son, we have met the enemy and he is us.*" Well, for Christians our pride often makes us our own worst enemy—and makes us terribly dangerous to our church. Almost none of us think we are dangerously proud but don't fool yourself. "*We have met the enemy and he is us.*"

A. It's interesting that Peter warns against pride in a letter about Christian suffering because you might think that suffering reduces people; humiliates them with indignity. But often pressure provokes pride. Stress provokes Christians to clamor for attention, to snipe at other believers, to push to the front of the line. We tend to excuse our bad behavior by saying, "I've been under a lot of stress lately." Remember, Peter knew pride's poison first-hand. "*Even if I have to die with you,*" Peter had crowed to Jesus at the Last Supper, "*I will never disown you!*" Pressure and suffering rarely brings out the best in people.'

B. Peter says, "All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another." Wrap ourselves in the habit of regarding other before ourselves. **Humility is a relationship virtue**. We don't really know how humble we are to we run into someone who pushes on our pride—someone to whom we ought to submit or someone who is presumptuous or insensitive or unloving. Humility is a kind of surrender, a backing down from me-first, from one-upmanship, from do-you-know-who-I-am. And that is the **protective clothing** we are all to wear to church. Humility protects others from our contagious and toxic pride.

C. This is vital for our church, not just because we ought to be nice to each other, but because God steps into this. Peter quotes one of the great biblical principles, from Prov 3:34, “*God opposes the proud, but gives favor [grace] to the humble.*” So the picture here is of a church being persecuted—going through “fiery trials”—and then some folks refuse to wear humility to church and now, on top of all their other troubles, God himself opposes them because nothing is more diabolical than pride. Proud believers dishonor him and hurt others. And the proud inevitably make fools of themselves. God opposes them by withholding his grace, by undermining their proud plans. Their lives become fruitless, dry and brittle.

On the other hand, “*God gives favor [grace] to the humble.*” God gives **advantages** to those who wear humility. He gives **peace** even though terrible things are happening. He gives **love** even though people are nasty to you. He gives **provision** even though you have nothing. He gives **wisdom** even though you do not know what to say. He gives **joy** even when you weep and **strength** even when you are weak.

D. It isn’t just that we must be humble with one another, v.6 says, “*Humble yourselves, therefore, under Gods mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.*” You don’t have to be persecuted for this to apply to you. Hardships and sorrows often seem unjust to us. And they may be. Jesus’ suffering was certainly unjust. But this verse tells us that God **palms** all these things in the lives of believers. He puts his hand over them and us. In other words, he takes what is meant for evil and turns it to his purposes for our good. So Peter told these believers to “*entrust themselves to him who judges justly.*” This is the same idea. **Nothing ever touches us that is not under God’s mighty hand.** God may not remove the suffering but we must humbly trust and obey him, patiently waiting till the time is right for him to lift us up. There are two **special encouragements** here:

1. God will lift us up in due time. This isn't a picture of God carrying your limp body out of the flood, but of God putting a crown on a pauper. V.10 says God "*called you to his eternal glory in Christ.*" That's what we will be lifted to when we humble ourselves under God's mighty hand. We will never regret trusting God once we've seen what he has prepared for us. We will never regret our suffering once we see how precious golden faith really is. We will never regret humility once we see the glory God has reserved for us.
2. V.7 is beloved: "Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you." The grammar of this verse actually connects it to the phrase before, like this: "*Humble yourselves under God's mighty hand... **having cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.***" Part of humbling ourselves is casting our anxieties on him. We can surrender ourselves to God because we surrender our anxieties to him.

But that is easier said than done. We want to throw our burdens on the Lord but they can stick to our hands like cellophane. Some seem to be embedded in our minds. Paul gives a very clear process in **Phil 4:6-8**:

- "*The Lord is near...*" – First get that in your head. Read Scripture. Sing a hymn. Till you are anchored to this truth: "*The Lord is near... and he cares for you.*"
- "*Do not be anxious about anything...*" So get your anxieties—all of them—out on the table before God. Name them.
- "*Do not be anxious... but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.*" Take your anxieties, one by one, and pray it to God, petition God for what your soul most needs. Take your time. And with each request add thanksgiving—for the pertinent promises of God, for what you know of his love, for his past graces to you. Wrap your prayer in thanksgiving.

- *And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*” That’s a promise. That process of prayer is how we cast our burdens on the Lord. Once they are bundled, bound by God’s love and promises, and wrapped in bright thanksgiving, we will be able to humbly trust them to God. In return his peace, which is beyond explaining, will guard our hearts and minds like a sentinel because we are in Christ Jesus.

So to be safe when you’re under pressure be humble.

It’s not surprising that Peter’s warning about pride would lead to his warning about the devil. Pride is the devil’s playground. And it is his hunting ground. **Vv.8-9...**

II. TO BE SAFE, WATCH! AND RESIST THE DEVIL (5:8-9)

- A. “Be alert and of sober mind” because we are always being stalked—especially when we are under pressure. Satan’s stalking usually comes from his whispered lies—twists of the truth and lies about God, as he did with Eve, from accusations against you on the basis of your sins and weaknesses, and from temptations to disobey God in order to feel better somehow.
- B. We’re not only to be vigilant but we take the offensive: “Resist him.” Oppose him. And we do that by *“standing firm in the faith.”* When we sense spiritual danger find Bible ground to stand on. Call out to Jesus. Be sure that you are not engaged in sinful thinking or behavior. This whole letter has been telling believers under pressure how to stand firm in the faith. Standing firm in the faith takes effort and concentration. Keep grounding yourself in Scripture. Pray as the Lord taught us to pray. Do not minimize the importance of church life. In this letter, **Peter has had two main emphases:**
 1. Stand firm in the wonderful, priceless truth of the gospel. 1 Peter 1:3-9... When we start losing our grip on these wonders we become vulnerable to the devil’s lies and twisted half-truths.

2. Stand firm on holiness—on living godly lives. **1 Peter 2:11-12... 3:8-9...** When we sin we stop praying and when we stop praying it's like putting on a blindfold. You'll never see the devil coming.

We don't have to see the stalking enemy. We need to stand firm in the faith—our feet planted solidly on gospel truth and on holy living. That is the usual way that Christians stand against the devil. Plus we have the assurance that “*through faith*” we are “*shielded by God's power until the coming of our salvation.*” God shields us.

- C. Peter adds this word of encouragement in v.9, “*because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings.*” Earlier Peter reminded us of who we are as believers: “*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. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.*” We are the most favored people in the human race. But part of our heritage *now* is to be rejected and suffer just as Jesus our Lord was rejected and suffered. As Peter wrote, “*if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.*” Later he wrote, “*If you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.*”

CONCLUSION

We know that there are Christian brothers and sisters around the world who suffer much more than we do. But we each face our pressures and struggles and when we do we must be humble before one another and God, and be alert to the schemes of the evil one, standing our ground on our faith's truths and holy living.

Illus.: Recently I read a book by **Makoto Fujimura** titled *Silence and Beauty* where I learned about Martyrs' Hill in

Nagasaki, Japan. There's this huge monument there now. In the 1500s Catholic missionaries to Japan had seen hundreds of thousands convert to Christianity. But then in 1597 a terrible persecution broke out that devastated the Christian community.

The first great blow happened there on Martyr's Hill. "Twenty-six men plus three children were paraded some 480 miles through the January snows from Kyoto to this hill to be crucified. Some were native Japanese Christians and some were European priests. Among the Japanese were two boys: 12 and 13-years old. It was the magistrates' logic that it would embarrass the Christians to be taunted throughout their journey and that would discourage other Christians from holding fast to their faith. Some bled as they walked; their ears or noses had been cut off in Kyoto....

When they arrived at the hill in Nagasaki, crosses were already lined up. The 26 were chained and tied to the crosses and then lanced to death while a large crowd watched and while one of the Japanese men preached to the crowd from his cross. As the story goes, when the condemned Christians arrived at that hill, one of the two boys said, "Show me my cross." The then other echoed, "Show me mine."

Those are our people. There is humility. There is the field of the devil's defeat. There are believers whom God has lifted up to glory.

Peter wraps up this section by promising, "*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.*"