

HOW TO HANDLE SUFFERING:
BY HUMBLY DOING GOOD
I Peter 5:6-11

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The pastor of a congregation preached an unusually short sermon one Sunday. As he came to the conclusion, he offered this explanation for the brevity of it all. "We have a new dog at our house," explained the pastor. "The dog is prone to get into things and chew them up. Last night the dog got hold of my sermon and chewed up the last several pages." The congregation seemed to understand the plight of the pastor. In fact, one visitor to the church shook the preacher's hand after service and said, "If that dog of yours ever has pups, let me know. I'd like to buy one for my pastor."

When Peter came to the conclusion of his little letter to the churches in Asia Minor he was brief and to the point. Like any good writer he summarizes his main points on how to handle suffering and says goodbye in the name of Christ. In this final sermon on how to handle suffering, we find a few more tips from Peter on how to deal with trouble.

BE HUMBLE

Humble yourselves therefore under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time (I Peter 5:6).

To be humble is to understand we are the created, not the Creator. That's a critical view of life. It's Mother's Day and one of the great responsibilities of parenting is helping our children understand they are special without being convinced they are superior. There is a difference between positive self-esteem and arrogance. All children begin life self-centered. When you are a baby it's all about me — my needs, my wants, my desires. It's all about 'me' when you are a child. Some of you are discovering that it's somewhat the same with teens. So the task of every parent is to help our sons and daughters embrace "belonging to the universe" without having to be the "center of the universe." That is a tremendous thing to learn. How to be a part of the universe without having to be the center of the universe.

Teddy Roosevelt's love for the outdoors is well documented. He is responsible for many of our nation's parks and monuments. The story I like most about President Roosevelt is how he often took diplomatic guests out on the back lawn of the White House at the end of the day to sit and watch the stars. After sitting there for a while, Mr. Roosevelt would say "Gentlemen, I believe we are small enough now. Let us go to bed." Too bad world leaders can no longer see the stars from the White House. To be humble is to know that we are the created, not the Creator of the universe.

To be humble is to be constantly respectful of others.

What do you communicate when you enter a room — Here I am, or How can I be of help? What do you convey when you carry on a conversation — Are your words full of affirmation or anger, gossip or goodness, compassion or conflict? When you talk with friends, do you run people down or build people up? What are your normal, ordinary conversations like?

Or maybe the most important question of all, how do you live your life? Do you live it seeking to serve or seeking to be served? Peter had the lesson driven home dramatically that night in the Upper Room when Jesus stooped to wash Peter's feet. It was almost more than Peter could stand. It was surely something he would never forget, his Master on His knees washing Peter's feet. So should it come as any surprise to us that this old apostle would say to struggling Christians in Asia Minor *Humble yourselves under God's mighty hand, that he may exalt you in due time.* Humble yourselves. It is how to handle trouble.

BE CAREFREE

Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. We have a lot of mothers here today. You need to hear this. This is one of the great texts of the Bible. You need to tuck it away in your heart and down in your soul. There is going to come a night or a day when you are going to need it. You will need to pull it out of the depths of your being. Cast all your cares on Christ. Jim Moore in one of his books says "We are all stressed up with no place to blow." A plaque in a bookstore says, "Why pray when you can worry?" A Greek proverb states, "The bow that is always bent will soon break!"

The National Mental Health Association released some startling statistics a few years ago. Twenty-five percent of all Americans suffer from mild to moderate depression, anxiety, loneliness and other symptoms related primarily to stress. Four out of five adult family members see a need for less stress in their daily lives. One-half of all diseases including ulcers, high blood pressure, and cancer can have stress related origins. Unmanaged stress is a major factor in homicides, suicides, child abuse, spouse abuse, and aggravated assaults. Americans are spending 64.9 billion dollars a year trying to deal with the stress in their lives.

What can we do? WE CAN RUN — get away, take a break, take a pill, get drunk, do drugs, divorce, quit work.

WE CAN REPRESS IT — suck it up, push it down, deny its existence, freeze our feelings, isolate our emotions, bottle it up, bury it deep and it will come back to haunt us.

WE CAN RELEASE IT TO THE LORD — I think one of the great texts in all the Bible is what Jesus said in Matthew 11:28. *Come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me for I am humble and gentle in heart and you will find rest for your souls.* Bring your burdens to the Lord and leave them here. Or as the writer of Proverbs said,

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge God and God will direct your paths (Proverbs 3:5).

Cast all your cares on Christ. Why? BECAUSE HE CARES FOR YOU!

The God who put the planets in place and flung the stars in space, who causes the sun to shine by day and the moon to glow at night — that God cares about you. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of Luther, and Bonhoeffer, and King, the God of the ages and the God of now, cares about you and me. If He cares for a sparrow that are two for a penny, how much more does He care for you? Cast all your anxieties on Him because He cares for you. His eye is on the sparrow — you are worth more than sparrows.

We need to be reminded of that from time to time. A nurse once asked esteemed Scottish preacher James Stewart, “What is the answer to those questions which suffering persons ask when all the family members go home? Questions about pain, immortality, ‘Will I be well,’ ‘Does God care?’ Why me?” Dr. Stewart looked at the nurse kindly and said, “You are the answer because you are the one who is there.” The one who is nearby loving, caring, listening becomes the voice of God in the valley of despair. Cast all your cares on Him because He cares for you.

BE ALERT — *Discipline yourselves, keep alert. Like a roaring lion, your adversary the devil prowls around looking for someone to devour (I Peter 5:8).*

Tyron Inbody opens his book on The Transforming God, an Interpretation of Suffering and Evil with these words: EVIL IS BACK. Well, Mr. Inbody, I never knew he went away. It seems to me that it’s always been here. Isn’t it interesting that Peter draws the analogy of a roaring lion as the voice of evil among us.

It made me think of Scar, Mufasa’s jealous brother in the wonderful Broadway play The Lion King. Scar and his hyena deputies are constantly scouring the country looking for someone to devour. Scar is intent to tell lies, spread rumors, destroy confidence, even kill his own kin in the fruitless pursuit of power. So, Scar convinces Simba, the young cub of Mufasa, that Simba is responsible for his father’s tragic death. With his heart filled with sorrow and his mind gripped with guilt, Simba wanders off to live a purposeless life with the wart hogs until a priestly baboon by the name of Rafiki knocks him to his senses.

Our battle is not merely against our own moral lapses, or the woes of ecological hazards, or world-wide economic shifts or any of the “isms” of church or state. Our struggle is not just against flesh and blood but with principalities and powers and the spiritual forces of evil in heavenly places. Be alert. It’s tough out there. It’s not going to be easy.

Be Alert. One of the finest shows I have ever seen was at the Mirage Hotel in Las Vegas where Siegfried and Roy put together a magic and animal act that thrilled

packed houses night after night. They performed together for years. Then one night, not long ago, Roy, stepping into the spotlight, accidentally slipped. The action startled his 600 pound co-star tiger. The tiger attacked Roy and dragged him off the stage like a piece of meat. That night Roy Horn lost his career and almost lost his life. When asked what happened he gave this simple answer — “I slipped.”

Ring out the old, ring in the new,
Another day is through.
Someone slipped and fell.
Was that someone you?

Be watchful. Be alert. Live on the edge. Life is tough out there.

BE STRONG IN THE FAITH — *Stand firm in the faith because you know that your brothers and sisters in all the world are undergoing the same kind of suffering (I Peter 5:9).*

Andrew Jackson said, “One person with courage makes a majority.”

Courage is expressed in a variety of ways. Courage is the power to endure in unchangeable situations of life. Courage is the ability to give a reason for the hope that lies within us. Courage is seeing a wrong and trying to right it. Courage is standing up for liberty and justice for all. Stand firm.

To stand firm is Jesus not fledging in the face of a cross. To stand firm is early Christians not recanting under threats from Rome. To stand firm is the Church today recovering its real purpose for being. To stand firm is Christianity not becoming a pawn of modern day politics. Stand firm in the faith regardless of the circumstances of life. Or as Robert Schuller likes to say, “When the going gets tough, the tough get going!”

Amen.

