

In Wallace Stegner's novel *Crossing to Safety*, there's a character named Sally Morgan. In the novel, Sally is dealing with polio and its debilitating consequences. At one point, the frustration overwhelms her and she cries, "I'm *tired* of hearing the Lord shapes the back to the burden." She was tired of the platitudes. Tired of the pain. Tired of other people projecting their philosophies of suffering onto her. Have you ever felt that way? Suffering is hard. Suffering is tiring. And in the midst of our suffering, the last thing we want is a platitude. "When life gives you lemons, make lemonade." "The Lord won't give you more than you can handle." "That which doesn't kill you makes you stronger." "The Lord shapes the back to the burden." When suffering comes, we don't want, we don't need *platitudes*.

The Apostle Peter is writing a letter to a suffering bunch. He describes them as "exiles scattered" (1:1). They may have had to "suffer grief" (1:6). They were "foreigners" (1:17). He instructs them, "Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing" (3:9). Why? Presumably because they needed that instruction! He acknowledges the "fiery ordeal" that has come on them (4:12).

We may not be going through the exact same ordeals as these Christians, but we certainly have our own various hardships: loved ones passing, diagnoses, infertility, job loss, no money, high gas prices, etc. It's hard out there! And we, like them, certainly don't want a platitude. We, like Sally, would be right to cry, "I'm *tired* of hearing the Lord shapes the back to the burden."

So, I'm not going to say that. But here's what I will say to it all: In our passage today, as we wrap up 1 Peter, Peter finishes by addressing Christian suffering *yet again*. Specifically, he has three insights for us. Not platitudes, *truth*.

Amidst It All: God's Mighty Hand

Peter writes, "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" (1 Peter 5:6-7).

Did you catch what Peter commands us to do amidst it all? He calls us to humble ourselves. And not just anywhere, but under a specific where: God's mighty hand!

Now that's a phrase! It's used all over the Bible.

- In the Exodus events (Exodus 3:19-20) – it's done with a mighty hand!

- In Israel's entering of the Promised Land (Josh. 4:23-24) – it's done with a mighty hand!
- By the prophets offering Israel consolation (Ezek. 20:33-34) – it's done with a mighty hand!

“God’s mighty hand” is strong! Here’s what God’s hand is like. I have a Styrofoam cup in my hand. It represents Egypt. Compared to God’s mighty hand? It’s *nothing*. What about the Canaanites? *Nothing*. Babylon? Nothing! God’s hand is God’s power! And God’s power can’t be thwarted!

It’s from this place Peter says, “Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.” In other words, *the way* we humble ourselves under God’s mighty hand is *by* casting all our anxieties on him who cares for us! It means we give him our stress, our worries, our burdens. It means we say, “God, I can’t. You can. I need your help.”

Peter knows something true about our God. He isn’t just the infinite Creator God who’s really powerful beyond compare and has a mighty hand! He’s also the infinite Creator God who’s really powerful beyond compare and has a mighty hand who also *cares for you*.

There’s a social media account called “Atheist Forum” and one post caught my eye. “CHRISTIANITY: Belief that one God created a universe...93 billion light yrs in diameter (1 light yr = approximately 6 trillion miles), consisting of over 200 billion galaxies, each containing an average of 200 billion stars, only to have a personal relationship with you.”

It’s made to look like Christian belief is ridiculous. But what’s funny is that this person’s assertion of what seems completely unbelievable is 100% right. That’s *exactly* what we believe!

It’s for this reason Peter tells us to humble ourselves under his mighty hand and to throw your anxieties onto him. Why? Because he cares for us! Maybe you need to hear that today. In case you do, let me say it straight: God cares for you. God loves you. You can bring your burdens to him. Amidst it all, God’s hand is there.

Against It All: The Devil

Once when I was on safari in Africa, we had the opportunity to see two cheetahs chase a herd of wildebeest. It was insane. The cheetahs were tactical, precise, and fast! It was amazing to see them trot out maybe 50 feet in front of our safari vehicle, to see them split up, and to see one chase the wildebeest into the jaws of the other! Unfortunately, they couldn’t make the kill. But anytime you do a safari, more likely than not here’s the kind of thing you’ll see. [View the online service to see the photo of a carcass.]

This is the kind of thing Peter wants us to have in mind when it comes to suffering: we have a predator, the devil, who is on the prowl. He stands against us all: against God, against God's church, against you, and against me! Look at verse 8: "Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour."

Notice this word: Satan wants to *devour* us. That word "devour" implies being "swallowed whole." Like what you do to a tablet of ibuprofen. Like what a python would do to a mouse.

How easy is it, when we go through times of trouble, to allow the devil to swallow us whole? In many ways it's easy to trust God, to obey God, to follow God, to love our neighbor when times are good. Isn't it hard though to, say, not be bitter, not be short with your spouse, not detach into slothfulness, not allow emotions to get the best of you, not chastise God?

This is why Peter tells us not to allow suffering or hardship to get the better of us, but instead to do two things: (1) be alert; and (2) be of sober mind.

Now, get this: Peter's commands to be alert and sober-minded are not only for individuals. They're plural commands. He's saying "you all" be alert, "you all" be sober-minded.

You want to know how the wildebeest best the Cheetahs? They do it through *collective vigilance*. They form massive herds, not only to confuse the predators, but also to keep an eye out for one another.

Friends, this is what Peter is calling us to! He continues: "Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings" (1 Peter 5:9).

In other words, you have an enemy, but you're not alone! *Collective vigilance!* At the very end of the letter, Peter says: "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. She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you her greetings, and so does my son Mark" (1 Peter 5:12-13).

You're not alone in the suffering. The devil is against us all, but you can stand firm. Look around this room for a moment. See these people? See your life group members? You can, with your brothers and sisters in the faith, resist the devil. That's what Peter wants us to see.

Above It All: God's Grace and Glory

You notice how we began? Notice how we're ending? With who? The Lord! Peter writes, "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" (1 Peter 5:10-11).

Do you realize, Christian, that the God of all grace has called you into his eternal glory in Christ? I mean, that's incredible! Let's play this reality out:

Imagine God called. Ring, ring. "Hello? Emerson speaking." "Emerson, God here." "*God?*" "Yeah, God." "What? No way. Dan, is that you? Are you pranking me?" "No, not Dan. Father, Son, and Spirit. Hey, listen, I have a proposition for you." "Seriously? I am not worthy! But, okay; shoot." "How would you like eternal glory in Christ??"

That would be *unbelievable*, wouldn't it?

In John 13, Jesus begins to tell his disciples that he is going to leave and go back to the Father. "My children, I will be with you only a little longer" (John 13:33). What? Jesus, don't go!

What's the deal? Well, we know that Jesus, in his incarnation, took on flesh, humbled himself and, though in the form of God, took the form of a servant. He veiled his glory. Instead of glory, an exalted status, Paul says, "he made himself nothing" and he "took the form of a slave." So, he's got to go and get his glory back! In John 17:5, he prays, "And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began."

Did Jesus have all glory? Yes! Is that glory seen now? No! So, he's got to go!

Do you want to know what Jesus says in the middle of all this—in between him saying to his disciples that he's got to go and saying to the Father, "Glorify me"? Jesus looks at his guys and says, "I've got to go! Not just for my glory, but to bring you into that glory!"

Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. (John 14:1-3)

Later in John 17:24, Jesus says, "Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world."

Guys, Peter heard all this from Jesus. It's this he's relaying to us, that God promises entrance into beholding the eternal glory of Christ for those who remain faithful until the end!

Notice the juxtaposition. How long will our sufferings last? A little while. How long is God's glory that we're invited into? Eternal. Because of God's mercy and grace, he not only takes your anxieties in the present, but he also promises to lift you up in the end.

Of course, there will be times in life that we feel like Sally, when we say, "I'm *tired* of hearing the Lord shape the back to the burden." But as Peter tells us:

- Amidst it all: God's mighty hand (and we can cast our anxieties on him!)
- Against it all: the devil (but we're not alone in the fight!)
- Above it all: God's grace and glory (and there's hope for the hurting!)

Recently, some dear friends of mine, members of this church, shared with me how they had gone through two miscarriages and how different the first was from the second. Take a listen.

When we lost our first baby years ago, we experienced that loss without fully submitting and humbling ourselves before the Lord. Life felt more under "our control" and we felt anger, confusion, loneliness and bitterness. The grief felt heavy and there was less hope.

But when we lost our sweet baby last summer [their second], it was a completely different experience. Although the grief was the same, and the sting of a sweet baby not making it to us earth-side was painful, our hearts were completely held by a loving father who was taking care of us and meeting all our needs. There wasn't one second that we felt alone. God sent his people to love us, bring us food, and pray for us. Our life group even showed up the day we found out about the loss and walked around the outside of our home praying. None of that would have happened without God's mighty and loving hand upon us. We knew that the Lord was hurting with us. We knew he was weeping with us as we wept. And we knew we could cast our sadness and our anxiety onto him because he cares for us. And through that came a deep peace that surpassed our understanding.

As I'm sitting here rocking our third baby boy, I'm deeply shaken by the faithfulness and goodness of God. His plans are always better, and it's an honor to humble myself under his mighty hand.

Isn't that incredible? Going through the loss of not one but two precious little children is unbelievably hard, deep suffering. As we know, Satan would love nothing more than to take advantage and multiply that suffering.

But I love this family's testimony. Again, "We knew that the Lord was hurting with us. We knew he was weeping with us as we wept. And we knew we could cast our sadness and our anxiety onto Him because He cares for us. And through that came a deep peace that surpassed our understanding."

Amidst it all: God's mighty hand.

Against it all: the devil.

Above it all: God's grace and glory.