

Christmas – The Stress Test
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...1570, you are wondering how in the world I can still make it up here to the pulpit. I'll save you the math, I'm 69, because some of you are already figuring that out in your mind, trying to guess how old I was when I graduated from seminary and started. So, I'll just save you that time and we can go right to the business then of teaching the word of God.

You'll see why, it's not that cold in here, but we might find use for that glove later in the service this morning. Would you begin this time with prayer with me? I'm going to ask you to pray for three people. Will you pray, number one, for yourself, pray that God will speak to your heart, and He will encourage your life, that He will challenge you, that He will convict you, and that you will be open to whatever He wants to do in your lives this morning? Secondly, would you pray for me? That I will be faithful to the word of God? Bob Somerville's opinion isn't worth any more than you paid for it in coming here this morning, but if I can put my finger on the text, and I can teach you from the word of God, then you are hearing from God the Father, through the Holy Spirit, through His word, and that will be worth it. So pray that I will stick to the text this morning. And then would you pray also for someone else you know this morning that is hurting? We are sinners who have become saints, holy ones, in Christ Jesus, and we still suffer. This life is full of suffering. In fact, the title of the message this morning is 'Christmas – The Stress Test'. That is the title of the message. I think you will see in a minute why it is legitimate to give Christmas that title, 'The Stress Test'. We'll be talking about that. So if you know of somebody this morning who is suffering, pray for them too. So pray for yourself, pray for me that I'll be faithful to the word, pray for someone else you know that is suffering. After we've taken a minute to pray silently, then I'll close that time of prayer. So let's pray together.

Our Father, take Your word, apply it to our lives as only You can do through the power of Your Spirit. We thank You now for what You're going to do in our lives because we've asked You to work. In the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, Amen.

'Christmas—The Stress Test'. Why would I call Christmas 'The Stress Test'? Well, you've got presents to buy, Christmas dinner to prepare, Christmas party at the office, or the shop, Christmas dinner at the church, Christmas program this evening at 5:00, practice at 4:00, practice at 5:00 or 5:30, whichever it was, I can't

remember now. You've got Christmas candies to make, you've got Angel Tree gifts to buy for children in other countries, you've got pies to make, gifts to buy for the family. "What in the world am I going to get for the boss at work?" Crowds at the UPS line, crowds in every line, Christmas music at the stores. We like that. That's nice. That's a good thing. Christmas gifts to wrap, Christmas service at the church, Christmas Eve service. Then you've got the Christmas program this afternoon, concerts at school, choral sings, and the list goes on and on, right? It ends up being one of the busiest seasons of the world, and suddenly it is Christmas evening, after Christmas Day, and we're thinking, "Have I even thought about Jesus? Because it's been such a life of stress since Thanksgiving. Where did the time go? What happened?"

But then, you know what? It's not just Christmas because then there is winter, and if you are farther north there is a lot more snow to shovel. They've had five feet of snow already in Buffalo, New York, you know? I got a picture from my cousin. She is standing in her driveway, she is behind, she is standing in the garage door that is up, and you can see her from here up, you know? She is 5'11" as a gal, so they've got three feet of snow, or three and a half feet right in the driveway. She's getting out the snow blower and I'm thinking, "Glad I don't live in Buffalo, New York. Go for it, Nancy!"

You know, but then it's spring, and you've got all the spring gardening, and all the spring stuff. Then it's summer, and it's hot and humid, and it's miserable around there. Then it is fall and you've got leaves to rake, and all the things that you've got to get ready for winter again next time. Then it is traffic in the morning, and why do they call it 'Rush Hour' when the traffic is moving the slowest it moves at any time of the day? You've got to get the kids off to school. You've got to get out of bed to do that. The pressure of homeschooling, or just getting the kids to public school, and then there are different pressures there. Then the company is downsizing and I lost my job, and my boss, he's a pain in the neck. I think he is demon-possessed. The neighbor's dog barks all night, or the coyotes are howling in the canyon, as one of my friends has to deal with.

Our son has just called from college and this gets really serious because he's decided that he has same-sex affections, and this is really stressful, and/or my daughter has cancer, or my wife has cancer, or our son has cancer, and our parents are getting up in years, and they require an awful lot of care. I live far away and that just complicates matters. Then like one of the men that we tell about in the book is really depressed because his brothers stole the family business with him. It reads like the story of Joseph with his brothers, now they didn't quite sell him into

slavery, but they stole the business from him, and he had invested, and everything he had was in that business. Now he is approaching retirement with no retirement, and things are looking a lot different than he expected them to. Or like the college student that I told you about in the morning Sunday school hour, she's 19 years old, an athlete, perfect condition, a spiritual young lady, but suddenly she is walking across campus, and she can't explain it, she's just busting out in tears, and she's depressed. You see, life can be a stress test.

What is stress? Well, Webster's says stress is *'physical, environmental, chemical, or emotional factors that cause bodily, or mental tension, and may be a factor in disease causation'*, which means actually, physical, mental, emotional, chemical stress can actually bring on diseases, physical diseases. So if you have enough stress over a period of time, and your immune system breaks down, and actually just having the neighbor's dog bark, and it happens that they're line is right next to your bedroom window, and this has disturbed your sleep for just a period of a couple of weeks, or maybe it's several months, or even a year, and you haven't had regular sleep, and your immune system can break down, and all kinds of things can go wrong. Stress is that feeling in the pit of your stomach when your son leaves for college, or your daughter moves out on her own, and gets her own apartment in a town that is far away. Maybe it is the feeling in the pit of your stomach when you go through a divorce, or a child spikes 104 degree fever, or a spouse dies, or you've got a toothache, and it just won't go away, and then you find out that it is actually cancer in your jaw. You know, the list could go on and on, every single one of us, every day, faces stress, from the morning commute until, and don't do this, until you watch the evening news right before you go to bed. That's the worst thing you can do right before you go to bed.

So we're going to look at a passage of Scripture, and I'll ask you if you will turn with me now to 1 Peter and Chapter 5. You've got your outline, and in your left-hand column of your outline you have the text right there, so you can just follow along there from the New American Standard, and the text is outlined for you there. So you have the text, but the background for this text is Peter speaking to the Elders. In Verse 5 he starts talking to everybody, but in Verses 1-4 he is actually directly addressing the Elders. Back in Chapter 1, Verse 6, Peter has said, in 1 Peter 1:6:

1 Peter 1:6 ~ In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials,

Actually the whole book of 1 Peter is about suffering, it's about stress, it's about the kind of stuff we face in life, and he tells you, "You're going to suffer when you do right. You are going to suffer when you do wrong, but you're going to do right and suffer, when you don't feel you should." In 1 Peter 4:12, Peter says:

1 Peter 4:12 ~ Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing,...

Life *is* a stress test, Peter tells us that. Those fiery ordeals come upon you for your testing, and don't be surprised and think:

1 Peter 4:12-13 ~ ...as though some strange thing were happening to you; 13 but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing,...

It sounds like Peter had studied the passages we talked about during the Sunday school hour this morning. When you're in the suffering, keep rejoicing so that at the revelation of Jesus Christ, in His glory, you will rejoice with Him then in all of His glory. 1 Peter 4:17 says:

1 Peter 4:17 ~ For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?

In other words, part of suffering is judgment, or there is discipline for our sin, and God is going to discipline, He's going to discipline in the last days, going to come a judgment on the church. It is going to start with the church and then come to the world. For Chapter 4, Verse 19 says:

1 Peter 4:19 ~ Therefore, those also who suffer according to the will of God shall entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right.

So when you suffer, keep doing what is right. Do the next right thing. When you are suffering and you don't know what to do, well, "What is something right that I could do?" Do the next right thing. Now Peter comes to Chapter 5, and He says, "Therefore, based on all I've told you about suffering, and how the church is going to suffer, and what I've encouraged you to do..."

1 Peter 5:1-4 ~ Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the

glory that is to be revealed, 2 shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, (That is, for money, for monetary reasons. Don't do it for that reason.) but with eagerness; 3 nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. 4 And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

Some of you here, leaders this morning, and Elders, there will be an unfading crown of glory for serving in that way, when the Chief Shepherd comes, and then, when He appears you will receive that unfading crown of glory. So Peter gives his advice to the Elders, "Look, Elders, it is going to be difficult, but I want you to lead the flock. I don't want you to do this out of some, in a sense, sense of duty, or just have to do it, but I want you to do this voluntarily for the joy that is set before you of receiving this unfading crown of glory, serve the flock with joy knowing how that ministers to them."

Barbara shared with me that one of the other ladies in the church came home from an ACBC Conference several years ago, and they took the outline that I gave in Sunday school, and they started encouraging and teaching it to others. Well you tell that kind of thing to a guy like me, and that's like saying 'sicem' to a dog. You know? That is just, oh that is exciting, and that's what it's all about. The purpose of this message this morning, or for any of Ty's messages, is not so you can go out and say, "I can tell you the five steps to take to handle stress in your life." The purpose is that you would go out, and after having looked in the word this morning, you would become obedient to that yourself, and you would actually be practicing that. James says, "You don't just come on Sunday morning and look into the mirror of the word, you do something about it."

How many of you looked in the mirror before you left the house this morning? Raise your right hand. That's my left hand, right hand. I can tell the difference, okay? How many of you then, who looked in the mirror this morning, before you left the house, how many of you did something about what you saw in the mirror? Raise your right hand. Most of you aren't being honest. Well, I don't know most of you, but at least a third of you didn't raise your hand either time, and the fact of the matter is, is there anybody who didn't look in the mirror? You raise your hand now. Okay, okay. We all looked in the mirror, we all did something about it. Paul, Peter, James, I know who I'm talking about, James, okay, James says, "That's the way it should be. You look in the mirror of the word, you ask God to speak to your

heart as you've asked Him this morning, and then you go home, and you decide what you're going to do about it.

See, I carry a card like this to church every Sunday morning. Did you notice that 3 X 5 card? It's all filled up. Did you notice this one? It's only got one on it. Okay, this one is from several weeks, this is from last Sunday morning. When you go out of this service, have you got something written down like this at the end of the service? Job 42 was the message. Now I know that you can do all things, that no purpose of yours can be thwarted. I must let God be God in my life. Job repents from his questioning God. You know, "Lord, help me to repent from questioning You." That is my application from last Sunday morning. I could read you all the ones on this card. So I have a goal every Sunday morning, take that card to church, write down one thing, go home, and practice that, pray that back to God. Trust me, I'm the B-Team this morning. The A-Team is over here. You get to hear this man teach the word of God.

Now, I've stayed with John and Connie Blackburn three or four times I think, since I've been coming down here to the Atlanta area. I've stayed with them three or four times. They always tell me what a great preacher Ty is. I mean, you know there is a little bit of prejudice there possibly, but you know we're staying with the Enters this time, and you know they say he is off the wall, and is great as a preacher, and how they are impacted by the word of God. That is what is supposed to be happening, that we take that word, and we apply it to our hearts. We ask God to work into our life the practice of the word. So Peter is telling them, "You know, you need to set a model before the people, and you do this by leading them by example." And he's going to talk about, what is he going to talk about down here? You've already read this morning. He's going to talk about what first? Humility, right? He's going to tell you to put on humility.

What does Peter refer to? He says, this is Peter, does he say, "This is Peter, the apostle?" Nope. He says, "I am Peter. I'm one of the fellow Elders. I'm an Elder along with you guys. Then I'm Peter who witnessed the suffering of Christ." Now if you think back to Peter's life, was his witness of the suffering of Christ one of his best hours? Uh-uh. He blew it. He's already practicing it, I think, as he teaches them about humility, he is mentioning what was one of his worst hours. When he failed to stand for Christ, but then he comes back and he stands for Christ, and he says, "Lead, don't loiter over the flock. Do this. Do this. Do this. No, you don't say, 'Read my lips,' you say, 'Look at my life.'" You know? "Be a witness." "No, watch me as I witness." "Be hospitable." "No, watch us as a family as we are hospitable." And so you are leading that way as an Elder.

Now, Peter is going to deal with some subject here, and I think he's dealing with stress. How do you handle stress? Well, first of all you have to get dressed to handle stress. So what do you put on to handle stress? Life is a stress test. "What am I going to wear to the party?" Well you know they always say, "I've got nothing to wear." Peter says, "Put on humility." Look at what he says in Verse 5:

1 Peter 5:5 ~ You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders;...

So we are to be in obedience to our elders. Younger men are encouraged to be in submission to the elders.

1 Peter 5:5-6 ~ ... and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE. 6 Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time,

So, stress is coming. It's Christmas, then winter, then spring, then summer, then fall. Life is going to keep coming at you. You have to get dressed, and you need to get dressed. You see, in the book we tell about, we tell about Spurgeon, we tell about Luther, we have the nine or ten stories of people like the ones I've mentioned this morning who find themselves in depression but they are Christians. I think Spurgeon was a Christian, I think Luther was a Christian, but they faced depression. Christians face depression. Everybody faces depression. From, "I've got the blues today," all the way to what the world calls '*clinical depression*', or the Puritans called '*melancholy*'. And you face trials, you face stress, you face these things, and Peter now says, "Get dressed and what you get dressed with is humility." You know, maybe in this analogy, you know, "Get dressed for it, put on the clothing of humility," maybe he is thinking about Jesus.

Maybe he is thinking about the night before Jesus went to the cross for us, and how He put the towel around Himself, and He washed the disciples' feet. You see, it is not pride, God is opposed to the proud. I mean, I don't know about you, but I don't really want to go up against God. I'll argue with you any time of the week, I shouldn't, but I'm sinfully willing to do it. But go against God? That is a no-win situation. I'm not going up against God. That's just silly to do that. But the proud, God is opposed to the proud. Who is the proud? The proud is the guy who thinks, "I don't need God. I can do this on my own. I can drive to work this morning on my own." You can't get to work this morning in Atlanta traffic without grumbling and complaining, and grumbling and complaining is a sin against God. You might not be able to get there without worrying about whether or not you're going to be

late, and miss that appointment, and worry is a sin against God. What you call some of those other drivers may be a sin against God, and we're just talking about getting to work on any given morning. But the proud person, he thinks he can do that. The proud person thinks he can live his life without being filled with the Holy Spirit, and the controlling of the Holy Spirit. He thinks he can tell other people what to do. He thinks his opinion is better than others when God has specifically said, "Do nothing from selfishness, or empty conceit, but in everything consider others as more important than yourself," and yet you think your opinion is right, and they are wrong, and you tell them so in no uncertain terms. You're a sinner. I'm a sinner. And we need God in every situation. But the proud man thinks that he can judge, and be the juror and prosecutor all at the same time. "I don't need to pray about this." Yes, you do! You don't know where you left your keys. God knows where the keys are. You know?

I can give you all kinds of testimonies about not being able to find my keys until I stopped and said, "Lord, I don't know where the keys are. You know where the keys are. Lord, in Your grace could You show me, or help me remember where I left them?" And suddenly, I'm able to remember where the keys are. Or sometimes, like my wife, we've been praying for a pair of brown shoes for about a week now, but we really, seriously said, "Lord, we're really, seriously now stopping to pray and ask You, 'Where are the shoes?'" She found them under the bed, but where she hadn't looked before, but then she remembered, you know, how they got there. Yeah, but they've been gone for a week now. We thought, "How did they get lost?" We only have a 1,000 square foot condo that we live in, you know? How did they get lost? It is amazing, we need Him! We need to clothe ourselves with humility.

You see, when I admit, "I can't do this on my own. I can't be the father I should be. I can't be the husband I should be. I can't be the employee that I should be. I can't be the advisor that I should be. I can't be the counselor I should be. I can't be the pastor I should be. I can't be the neighbor I should be. I can't do it. What can you do without Jesus? Jesus said, "Without Me you can do...?" Nothing. That's in the Greek, 'zippo', 'nada', 'zero'. "Without Me, you can do nothing," but if you ask Him, and you let Him abide in you, you can ask what you will and He'll do it. I can do all things through Christ who...? Strengthens me. Oh, that's amazing! But I've got to put my trust in Him. I've got to let Him work it out in my life.

Gloves. We told you there was a purpose for this. “Glove, I want you to encourage your friend.” “Glove, I’d like you to greet someone.” “Glove, would you warn your friend?” “Glove, could you show some care for your friend?” “Glove, would you greet your friend?” “Glove, would you encourage your friend?” “Glove, would you warn your friend?” “Glove, would you care for your friend?” Now the glove did nothing until the glove got empowered by something—my hand. Nice glove, huh? Okay. But you see, I can do nothing, but when Christ is living out His life in me, and I am humbly saying, “Lord, fill me with Your Spirit. Help me to show the love of Christ. Help me to show Your joy. Help me to demonstrate Your peace. Help me to demonstrate Your gentleness. Help me to demonstrate Your kindness. Help me to demonstrate Your goodness.” And empowered by the Holy Spirit with Jesus abiding in me, and His word abiding in me, and me asking in prayer. Well why would I do that? Well, look at what Peter says. It says:

1 Peter 5:5-7 ~ ... clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE. 6 Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, 7 casting all your anxiety on Him,...

Why?

1 Peter 5:7 ~ ... because He cares for you.

He cares for you! Humble yourself under God’s mighty hand, thank Him for that trial, thank Him by faith in obedience. Follow the command to give thanks in every circumstance, and then ask the Lord how He wants to use you, and He will empower you to do what seems like the impossible. Then at the right time, He says, He will exalt you. What if the men, well there were two men that Joseph helped, remember with the dreams? He told them, “One guy is going to get raised back to his position, and the other guy is going to get hung. That guy is not going to be able to help him.” But what if the guy who was raised back to his position at that time had remembered, and gone to Pharaoh at that time, if Joseph had been released then would he have been in prison when he was needed at the time the Pharaoh had his dream? See, God is going to lift you up at the right time, and you may not see that until you get to glory. You may not understand why that happened until you see Him face to face, but He will raise you up, and He will honor you at the right time. He does have an unfading crown of glory for the Elders who serve faithfully. He does have a crown of righteousness for all of you who are in Christ, and He does have rewards for all of you who serve Him in Christ.

You cast all your worries on Him. You turn every anxiety over to Him, and that demonstrates your humility, and you put it on Him. And why do you do that? Because He cares for you. How do you know that He cares for you? Because Christ has come in the flesh. We celebrate it at Christmas. Have you heard about the little boy whose dad was trying to teach him to close the door? And after telling him about 500 times that morning to close the door, he finally said to his son, “Joshua, what’s the matter with you? Can’t you close the door? Were you born in a barn?” And his son turned around, he was 3 years old, and he said, “No Daddy, I wasn’t born in a barn, but Jesus was.” And you know, Christ understands what you’re going through. In Hebrews 4, it says in Verse 14 and following:

Hebrews 4:14 ~ Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. 15 For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. 16 Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

You can cast every care on him, every worry, every fear, every anxiety, because He cares for you. That care is evidenced in the fact that He died on your behalf, that He became the propitiation for your sins. It’s evidenced in the intercession that He has right now. Jesus Christ is interceding at the throne of the Father, and when you sin and when you say, “Lord, that was sin,” and you confess it, Jesus is pleading His blood on your behalf, as it says in Hebrews 7:25, that He is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him. He always lives to make intercession for us. And in 1 John 2:1, it says:

1 John 2:1 ~ My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; 2 and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.

It’s evidenced in the Father giving His Son:

Romans 8:31 ~ What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? 32 He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?

How can you say, “Lord, You don’t know, You don’t understand, You don’t care,” when He gave His Son, and His Son gave up His rights as God and became a Man, and took the towel and humbled Himself, and became a servant to the other disciples, and then gave His life in our place. We have to practice casting our cares on Him. It sounds again like Philippians 4:6, where Paul says:

Philippians 4:6 ~ Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

You turn away from the anxiety. You cast that care on Him. He didn’t intend you to carry it. If you’re an Elder and you’re hearing all the cares and the concerns of the ministry of the body, He doesn’t intend for you to carry that. If you’re a counselor and you’re counseling a friend, you’re counseling another person, God doesn’t intend for you to carry that. You can’t handle it, but Christ in you, and you cast it back on Him, and you can handle it, because He lives in you. You say, “Well, but no one can do that.” But God says, “Do it,” and in Christ I can. 1 Thessalonians 5:17, how many of you would like to memorize a verse this morning? Okay, to memorize a verse this morning, just say this verse with me:

1 Thessalonians 5:17 ~ pray without ceasing;

Say it with me. Pray without ceasing. Now say it without looking. Pray without ceasing. You’ve memorized a verse this morning. All right, now try to practice that. Do you pray without ceasing? “I haven’t prayed about my attitude this morning during service. I haven’t prayed about my attitude with the family. I haven’t asked forgiveness for what I said to the family on the way to church in the car when I got so upset about the way the kids were acting up in the back seat.” Just fill in the blank. We pray without ceasing. It takes you the rest of your life to practice that, but you need to pray. “Lord, today help me to pray without ceasing, about everything.” When I see a beautiful sunset/sunrise/moonrise, pray. Thank God. Praise the Lord. When things aren’t going right, pray. And then you’ve got to resist your adversary, the devil. That’s point number three, and we’ve got to get trucking here if we’re going to work through this.

You’ve got to resist your adversary, the devil. You’ve got to be on the alert. You’ve got to recognize that the devil is your adversary. You have to be on the alert. You’ve got to stand watch. He is the devil, διάβολος (diabolos). He is the accuser of the brethren, the false accuser, the slanderer. He is the adversary. He’s your opponent. He’s the one that’s against you like in a lawsuit. He is your arch enemy. He is your arch rival. He is καταπίνω (katapino). That means his desire is

to drink you down. He's looking to devour you. He wants you to do a big gulp thing, and you just drink that whole glass of water right down all at once. It's like the raven. Have you watched any ravens? They get a little roadkill, and they peck something out of there, and then they do like this, and then they gulp, and then it all goes down. That's what Satan wants to do to you. He wants to devour you. He's like a roaring lion. He's like a prowling jackal. He's like a circling wolf. He's like a vulture circling above, and he is looking for those whom he can devour.

This is Sherlock Holmes versus Moriarty. This is Georgia Tech versus Georgia. It's USC versus UCLA, and Ohio versus Michigan. This is David versus Goliath, Israel versus Hamas, ISIS versus the world. It is Satan versus you. He is the diabolos. He is the accuser of the brethren.

So when Satan goes before God the Father, what does he do? God says, "Have you seen My servant Job? There isn't another guy like him on the whole face of the earth. He's the best example I've got." What does Satan say? Satan is the diabolos. He is the slanderer. He is the false accuser. "Ha! Does he serve You for no reason at all? You've given him all this stuff. Take away his stuff and he'll curse You to Your face." I'm paraphrasing a little bit, but that's what it said. So God allows him to be tested. Now, listen to what it says in the text as we read:

Job 1:12 ~ "All right, you may test him," the LORD said to Satan. "Do whatever you want with everything he possesses, but don't harm him physically." So Satan left the LORD's presence.

So remember this. He's a slanderer. He's like a roaring lion. He's prowling, but he's on a leash. He can only do what God allows him to do, and God will only allow him to do what will eventually be for your good.

So Satan left the LORD's presence.

Now listen to this:

Job 1:13 ~ One day when Job's sons and daughters were dining at the oldest brother's house, 14 a messenger arrived at Job's home with this news: "Your oxen were plowing, with the donkeys feeding beside them, 15 when the Sabeans raided us. They stole all the animals and killed all the farmhands. I am the only one who escaped to tell you."

16 While he was still speaking, another messenger arrived with this news: "The fire of God has fallen from heaven and burned up your sheep and all the shepherds. I am the only one who escaped to tell you." 17 While he was still speaking, a third messenger arrived with this news: "Three bands of Chaldean raiders have stolen your camels and killed your servants. I am the only one who escaped to tell you." 18 While he was still speaking, another messenger arrived with this news: "Your sons and daughters were feasting in their oldest brother's home.

19 Suddenly, a powerful wind swept in from the desert and hit the house on all sides. The house collapsed, and all your children are dead. I am the only one who escaped to tell you." 20 Job stood up and tore his robe in grief. Then he shaved his head and fell to the ground before God. 21 He said, "I came naked from my mother's womb, and I will be stripped of everything when I die. The LORD gave me everything I had, and the LORD has taken it away. Praise the name of the LORD!"

It takes less than two minutes to read this section. One man is coming while the other one is speaking, so he's speaking immediately after. You don't even have to say in between, "And while he was speaking another man came," because the guy came while he was speaking, and then he just starts giving the next message, and in less than two minutes, Job learned he had lost everything, but he doesn't sin. He worships. The Lord gives, the Lord takes away. Blessed be the Name of the Lord.

We can respond in that way, but your adversary the devil, that's what he would do to you if he got God's permission. So for most of us, it's not that bad. God hasn't allowed it, but God only allows what you can handle. He would destroy your joy in worshiping Him through this Christmas season. He'd like to keep you so busy doing so many things that you don't really worship the Lord. He'd like to destroy your joy in this worship service. He wants you to come with so many expectations about how powerful the message is going to be, how much you're going to be encouraged by everybody else saying hi to you, but why do you go to work? You go to worship. Come only to praise the Lord as He deserves, and come only to serve others as He gives you the opportunity to bless them, and then you'll find that you will be blessed in that process. But don't come with expectations. Come as one who is coming to serve, and come then to serve others.

You must resist your adversary the devil, number four, firm in your faith. It's not in your strength. It's firm in your faith that you resist him. Your faith is in God. You resist him firm in your faith. Look in the left hand column of your notes, at 1 Corinthians 10:13.

1 Corinthians 10:13 ~ No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.

You resist him firm in your faith. "Oh, this is overwhelming." No, it's not. God promised He would never give me a test that was greater than my ability to withstand in Him. So this isn't more than I can handle, but it sure seems like it. But God is faithful. I have to trust Him to be faithful. You're going through depression like I was going through depression. I went to church only because the Bible says, "Don't forsake the assembling of yourselves together." I didn't want to go to church. I didn't want to see people. I didn't really want to hear the message of the word, because everything that I would think of and I would think in my mind, "This ought to be encouraging, this ought to be uplifting, this ought to bring joy to my heart," but it didn't. It just brought conviction, because my feelings were totally nil. I didn't feel anything except lousy, depressed. I felt bad, but in terms of thinking, "That truth should come from my heart, but it doesn't. It just convicts me." I didn't even know if I was a believer, but you trust God and you do what's right. Mary said, "Well Bob, are you well enough from your back surgery that you can now go sit in church?" "Yes." "Well, then don't you think we should go, because it's the obedient thing to do?" "Yes." But I didn't want to answer people's questions. "How do you feel, Bob?" "I feel lousy. I feel depressed. I feel like God isn't there. I feel like dirt." Do people really want to hear that? Not usually, but you obey in obedience by faith, and God works eventually in His timing.

This was a nine month period from recognizing I was depressed in May, to it being at its worst point in August, til my being able to say my feelings were mostly back to normal the next February. That's not happening today or tomorrow. That's happening over a period of time. It's happening over a series of obey and do the next right thing no matter what you feel like. And this is what Peter is teaching us. You resist your adversary the devil. He is your adversary. He would like to gulp you down. He would like to do to you what he did to Job, and worse yet, because he gets another chance with Job and he does worse, right? He takes his health. He's sick from the top of his head to the bottom of his feet with boils, and he's

absolutely miserable, but he resists firm in his faith. And that's what we need to do. We resist him firm in our faith—be of sober spirit, be on the alert, he wants to devour you, but you resist him firm in your faith, and after you've suffered for a little while, the God of all grace who called you to His eternal glory in Christ will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you.

It doesn't seem like a little while. It seems like forever. Every day during the depression seemed like forever. Every night seemed like forever. I wasn't sleeping well. I didn't want to go to bed, because I knew what the night was going to be like, but I didn't want to get up in the morning, because I knew what the day was going to be like. It took me 20 minutes to decide what to put on in the morning, and then I'd put on the same thing I wore yesterday. My wife told me to just burn that shirt. "Just burn those pants. I don't ever want to see them again," because I just wore those day after day. But I would stand there for 20 minutes, because I couldn't make up my mind to do anything, working through that depression.

That's the way it was in that, but you resist him firm in your faith. It's only for a little while. If it lasts my entire life, if you study the life of Cowper, his bouts with depression lasted through his entire life. And if it lasts for your entire life, you're dealing with the depression or whatever stress you're facing. Joni Eareckson Tada has been dealing with being a quadriplegic since she was 17. She's in her 60's, and she is one of the most Godly women I have ever met. I have really never met anyone else as close to Jesus as that lady is, and it's because every day—this is what she told me when I was in my depression when I had a chance to talk to her. "Bob, in some ways it's a blessing, because I literally can't do anything, unless I get help. I can't eat, I can't scratch my nose, I can't do anything, so I know I need Jesus. So what am I going to do for the person that comes in my room to help get me dressed in the morning? I have to pray to Jesus and ask Him to give me strength to smile. Give me strength to greet that person with Your joy," because she can't get up and she can't raise her hand and say, "Hey, hi, how are you doing?" She can't do any of that on her own. She has to rely on Jesus, and it's or a little while. It's just for this life, and then look at what it says.

You resist the enemy, the adversary, the devil, firm in your faith, and you resist him firm in your faith, and you resist him knowing that others are suffering, and you resist him knowing that it's for a little while. And you look at what it says now. You resist him, and after you've suffered for a little while, the God of all grace who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you. To Him be dominion forever and ever, amen. Look at how he piles up the words together. Peter didn't have on his computer bold,

highlight, underline, italics, all in caps. If somebody texts you and it's all in caps, what are they doing? They're shouting at you, right? If it's all in caps, "LOL" they're going to laugh out loud. They're shouting at you. Peter is shouting at us as he ends this epistle, and what he's shouting is, look at what it says now again.

1 Peter 5:9 ~ But resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world.

You can look at Sam and Jane, and it looks like they've got the perfect home and the perfect children. Just scratch the surface. Sam and Jane are facing stress, stress measured out by God according to what they can handle, but they're facing it because life doesn't come without it.

1 Peter 5:9 ~ 1 Peter 5:9 ~ But resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world.

Everybody is going through it.

1 Peter 5:10 ~ After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you (personally) to His eternal glory in Christ,...

That God of all grace who called you personally to His eternal glory in Christ:

...will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you.

He's going to perfect you. That word means He's going to complete you thoroughly. He's going to adjust you, and prepare and restore you, and He's going to move you through to completion. He's going to confirm you. That word means He's going to turn you resolutely in the certain, right direction, and you'll be rooted in that direction and set fast. He's going to strengthen you. That word means to strengthen you, to confirm you, giving you spiritual power and knowledge. He's going to establish you. That word means He's going to lay a foundation for you. He's going to settle you. He's going to undergird you.

Peter is accomplishing emphasis by piling the words together. In Greek, in the original languages, in the original translations, it's all written in lowercase, and it's all written together, so you have to decide where each word ends. So when they wanted to make an emphasis, when they wanted to underline, bold, italics,

capitalize, what they did is piled up words together. So this God who is the God of grace, this God who called you personally, this God who called you to His personal glory in Christ Jesus, He Himself will perfect, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. He's going to do it. He's going to work in you. He's going to accomplish His purpose. He's going to stay with you until the end. He's with you til it's done. He's using these trials and tests to test you. So humble yourself under the hand of God, cast your worries on the Lord, resist your adversary the devil, resist him firm in your faith, and resist him based on the promises of God that He will perfect you. He will confirm you. He will strengthen you. He will see you through to your eternal glory that you've been called to in Christ Jesus, and it's going to happen.

Listen to this poem by Martha Snell Nicholson:

Treasures

*One by one He took them from me,
All the things I valued most,
Until I was empty-handed;
Every glittering toy was lost.*

*And I walked earth's highways, grieving
In my rags and poverty
Til I heard His voice inviting,
"Lift your empty hands to Me!"*

*So I held my hands toward heaven,
And He filled them with a store
Of His own transcendent riches,
Til they could contain no more.*

*And at last I comprehended
With my stupid mind and dull,
That God could not pour His riches
Into hands already full!*

When I was in the midst of the depression, a friend of mine Joe Bubar called. He's a pastor in Arroyo Grande, and I can remember where I was sitting and what I was doing when he called, and I can remember hearing his voice, and I can remember him saying, "Bob, it's not all over. You will preach again. You teach again. God

has a purpose in this. He's going to use it for His glory." I remember thinking, "That's great for you to say, Joe. That's what other people said to me. I know what the promises of God say, but it's not going to happen. I'm going to live out the rest of my life in my brother-in-law's basement. He's got a nice basement apartment, it's not really where I intended to spend my retirement, but that's where it's going to be, because he's a nice guy, and he's kind, and I won't be able to earn a living, so I'll be living in his basement. That's where I'm going to be." But you know what? Joe's mind was set on the promises of God, and God worked, and here I am teaching again, preaching again, doing what I thought I would never do again, because the promises of God are sure.

When Henry Wadsworth Longfellow heard the news that his son, a lieutenant in the Union Army, had been wounded, and he didn't really know his final condition, he wrote the words to this Christmas carol:

*I heard the bells on Christmas Day
Their old, familiar carols play,
and wild and sweet
The words repeat
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!*

*And thought how, as the day had come,
The belfries of all Christendom
Had rolled along
The unbroken song
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!*

*And in despair I bowed my head;
"There is no peace on earth," I said;
"For hate is strong,
And mocks the song
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!"*

*Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:
"God is not dead, nor doth He sleep;
The Wrong shall fail,
The Right prevail,
With peace on earth, good-will to men."*

The man that cried, “Tora! Tora! Tora!” and attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7th, Fuchida, became a Christian. God forgave him. And now the guy’s name goes right of my mind, but the man who wrote the book *Unbroken*, who was in a Japanese prison camp, but then came back home, came to Christ, and went back to Japan and expressed God’s forgiveness to the men that had imprisoned him and beaten him unmercifully. It’s a tremendous story if you want to get the book *Unbroken*. I understand the movie is also coming out, but that’s the power of the Gospel. It changes lives. But now, what will you do? Do you have five new points that you can argue theologically with a friend? No, you need to say, “Lord, how do You want me to put this into practice? What point here is for me this morning? What do I need to pray back to You asking You to change in my life as a result of His word this morning?”

Let’s join our hearts in prayer...

Father, by the power of Your Spirit, because we cannot do that on our own, enable us to humbly confess our sin and cast our burdens upon You. Enable us this morning to come to You and ask You for the strength for the stresses we are facing. Enable us to trust You and resist the devil, standing firm, knowing that You will confirm, and strengthen, and establish us, and at the right time, You will lift us up and draw us through that trial. And Lord, help us to be faithful until Jesus comes. If our trial is the nature of Joni Tada’s, help it to be said of us 40 years from now that no one had ever met anybody as holy in Jesus, because they were trusting in Jesus to do it. So strengthen us for the stress of life, and thank You that Your word prepares us for that, and empowers us through Your Spirit, to walk with You. In Jesus’ Name we pray, and all God’s people said, Amen.

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