

June 12, 2016

## Sojourners

### *This is the True Grace of God*

1 Peter 5:6 – 14

Peter ends this letter with a charge, *'This is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it'*. In other words, 'Everything I've written to you can be summed up in one word, grace'. The grace of God encompasses all that God has planned for us according to His eternal purpose in bringing many sons to glory. 'You've embraced this gospel of grace. You've trusted not in what you can do but in what God in Christ has done for you. Stand firm in that grace'. Because he says, *"God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."* You see, grace can only be given to the humble because only the humble will receive it. So Peter encourages us to humble ourselves under God's mighty hand, casting our worries and fears on Him, to be sober-minded and watchful, resisting the lies of Satan that seduce us away from His grace, knowing that God will ultimately restore, confirm, strengthen and establish us by His grace. 'Don't let go of the grace of God' he says.

No other religion talks about grace. Buddhists follow an eight-fold path to enlightenment. It's not a free ride, no one's there to help, there's no grace there. Hindus believe in karma; your actions continually affect the way the world will treat you; there is nothing that comes to you not set in motion by your actions; you get what you deserve. The Jewish religion obeys God's law in order to be acceptable to Him, and in Islam, Allah is a god of judgement not grace. In fact Muslims have a saying that Allah is as close as your jugular. You live to appease him or you die. But the Bible tells us that it is grace that saves us, grace that keeps us, grace will lead us home. Philip Yancy says, *"Grace means there is nothing we can do to make God love us more—no amount of spiritual calisthenics and renunciations, no amount of knowledge gained from seminaries, no amount of crusading on behalf of righteous causes. And grace means there is nothing we can do to make God love us less—no amount of racism or pride or pornography or adultery or even murder. Grace means that God already loves us as much an infinite God can possibly love."*<sup>1</sup>

**6** *Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time He may exalt you.* The command here is passive and means, 'Be humbled' – which indicates that we need to allow ourselves to be humbled under the mighty hand of God. That is, God's hand print is all over your suffering and your circumstances, and He is using this to accomplish His purpose in you. Instead of being resistant and proud you need to allow the circumstances to make you small and God big. Peter has already told his readers that suffering will come to faithful believers according to the will of God. He's told them not to be surprised when trouble comes, but to understand that it is in fact God's purifying fire in the life of His people. So when you find yourself in the middle of suffering, understand that it is God's hand, and not man's that is on you, and humble yourself under His hand. In other words, resist raging against God or your circumstances or your persecutors, and wait for God to vindicate you.

So how do we practically humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God? Verse 7 gives us the key: **7** *casting all your anxieties on Him, because He cares for you.* Anxiety happens because we are concerned about the outcome. It is the product of 'What if?' thinking. 'What if I am not noticed, appreciated, praised or rewarded? What if others look down on me? What if I don't get that promotion? What if I lose my job? What if God does not come through for me? What if I leave it in God's hands and He drops the ball?' But in order to put yourself under God's mighty hand, you have to leave the outcome in His hands. We have to entrust our souls to a faithful creator, *who cares for us*. This is the only safe place in the universe. If there is worrying to be done, let God do it. **Anxiety** here is a Greek word which Peter uses to express foolish or selfish concern or excessive worry caused by a lack of trust in God. Essentially we worry because things may not turn out in a manner satisfactory to us. We begin trusting in ourselves or others or things to control the outcome. And if we are trusting in ourselves or others or in things for good outcomes, we get anxious and worry, precisely because we and they are not trustworthy.

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1 Philip Yancy, What's So Amazing About Grace,

There were three young men in the ancient kingdom of Babylon, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, who faced this very real test in their day. When the king of Babylon ordered all his subjects to worship his image – these three guys said no. They so entrusted their souls to a faithful Creator who cared for them, that when they were faced with being thrown alive into the fire they could say without hesitation: *'O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to give you an answer concerning this. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king! But even if He does not, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image you have set up!'* Daniel 3:16-18. And we look at that story and say, 'What great faith! Look at that, God delivered them out of the fire. Their hair wasn't singed, their clothes didn't have those little burn holes in them, and they didn't even smell like smoke! God delivered them!'

But what happens when He doesn't? Where is our faith when we get thrown into the fire and the fire kills us? Can we still trust Him then? I want you to notice the response of these men to the king. *'...our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king! But even if He does not...'* The question was never one of – **is God able or willing?** – but of His purpose and plan in the first place. These boys said, 'God is bigger than you, O king – and whatever you do, whichever way it goes for us, whatever control you think you might have over the situation – God has more! **Whatever happens, we are under His hand – not yours!**' Jesus said in Matthew 10:28: *'Do not fear those who kill the body, but are unable to kill the soul...'* The worst that could happen is not that you would die – *'...but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.'*

So how do you solve this worry problem? You solve it by trusting His word – specifically the second half of verse 7: *because He cares for you.* Trust that He cares for you. Trust Him with your life, your family, your job. He cares about the things you worry about. In fact He allows those things to rise up in front of you like a mountain so that you will turn to Him and say, *'Lord, this is too big – I can't go over it; I can't go around it, I can't go through it – but Your word says that You care for me – and even though I see a mountain – You see the way through and I am casting all my anxiety on You – because You care that I make it through this!'* The promise is that He cares for you. That promise is not unsupported. It is connected to a command and the promise is meant to show you how to obey the command. **The command is, *Cast your anxiety on God.* The promise is, *God cares for you.*** Too often we trust God in the abstract – but He wants us to trust Him in the concrete things of life and say what Job said: *'I know that You can do all things, and no purpose of Yours can be thwarted.'* Job 42:2

**8 Be sober-minded.** Peter uses this word, **sober**, to warn the believers three times in this letter, and three times highlights the fact that this is important. The word paints a picture of someone who is calm and collected. It is a word that means you have good sense, good judgement, wisdom, and level-headedness in times of stress. It literally means to be sober as opposed to being drunk. Drunk people do not have good judgment or levelheadedness. Drunk people are not calm and collected. And Peter sees there are many things working against us to cloud our thinking, to encourage us to dissipate our energies in other directions, to intoxicate us with the pleasures and comforts of life, to medicate and desensitize us from the things of God, and to keep our minds busily engaged in all the anxieties and worries that life can offer, rather than God.

He knows there is the danger of being so drunk on the cares and concerns of this life that when faced with trouble and suffering, we cave. Our thinking, gets muddled and **we see suffering as loss instead of gain. We see humbling ourselves under God's mighty hand as losing everything instead of gaining everything.** And we end up missing His grace. In other words we miss God's provision for us to walk through everything with joy. To be sober-minded means that you are not ruled by your emotions. When things are difficult, when circumstances seem to be conspiring against us, we need to let our thoughts and attitudes and behavior be ruled by the truth of God's word and not our out-of-control emotions. We are supposed to trust the word of God that says behind all our suffering and trouble and trials, God is at work, because He cares that we are strengthened and not destroyed by them.

We need to be sober, because we need to be watchful. *Be watchful*, Peter says, because, *Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.* The word means be alert, as opposed to being unaware. One lexicon puts it like this, *'...to take heed lest through remission and indolence some destructive calamity suddenly overtake one.'* In other words, the Christian life is not for couch potatoes. We need to realize that Christians are called to a battle, not a life of ease.

We are called to a struggle, not soft pillows and soothing music. We've been called to warfare, not personal comfort; **because we have an adversary.** When Peter said that the devil is going about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour, he was not using hyperbole. The roaring is intended to frighten you out from the safe protection of God; and if you are not alert, you will be fearful and run away, instead of running to God. The word *devour* means to swallow up, consume, destroy. That has always been Satan's intent. He's not just trying to derail you, he's trying to destroy you. And I think Peter deliberately uses the picture of a lion to describe the devil and his activities because he's strong, stronger than you and me, and we need help with an adversary who is stronger.

So how do we get the help? I don't think it is any coincidence that Peter uses this combination of sober-mindedness and watchfulness to describe how we ought to be. I'm sure Peter was thinking of his Lord's words to him at a time of great trial, of great stress in the Garden of Gethsemane when He told the disciples '*Keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation.*' Jesus linked the idea of being alert with the necessity of prayer. In other words, we need to be watchful because we need to be praying. We won't get the help we need in trials and suffering if we don't move ourselves to prayer. In fact the trials and suffering will tempt us to quit. We'll be tempted to anesthetize and distract ourselves from our misery and worries and anxieties with the stuff of the world. But it won't take care of the anxieties of life, and it won't take care of the roaring lion.

In chapter four Peter reminded us of the times in which we live and says '*The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers.* 1 Peter 4:7 'Things are coming to a close and it is getting intense, so you need to be sober and self-controlled so that you can pray.' In other words, the more suffering threatens to make you anxious and worried, the more you need to pray. Paul told the Philippians, '*Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*' Philippians 4:6. Don't worry about anything – pray about everything.

What we need in these times is peace. It is peace that takes care of anxiety. In other words, if you're anxious and worried, you need to pray. I'll go one step further. If you're living in anxiety and worry, you're not praying. Because the promise is, 'If you pray, God will give you peace.' But on the whole, we don't like to pray – we want God to wave a magic wand and make it all go away. But His antidote for anxiety is prayer. When you find yourself anxious – pray. When worries fill your life – pray. When sorrows like sea billows roll – pray. Because prayer puts us in the proper position of humility before God – on our knees – on our face – in helpless but hopeful and joyful anticipation of the Lord of glory coming into your suffering, because He cares for you. It is by prayer that the mouth of the roaring lion is shut.

You see, Peter says that we need to be sober and watchful and on our knees in prayer, because there is a real adversary who looks like a devouring lion. And Peter says *Resist him, firm in your faith.* The word Peter uses here for *firm* in your faith is the same word used by Paul in 2 Timothy 2:19 when he says '*Nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands...*' It is a word that described the Greek army phalanx presenting a solid front against the enemy – with ranks and files of soldiers that were deep and close. And that phalanx was unbeatable and unstoppable when Alexander used it to conquer the world in his day. That is why it is so very vital that **you really believe that what you believe is really real.** If we do not have a real, solid, unyielding faith that is not subject to our fickle emotions, the changing tides of public opinion, the empty philosophies of the world, then we have no defense against the roaring, devouring lion. It is the rock-solid promises of God that are our shield and defense against the devil.

Peter says, *Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.* And my question is – how does knowing that we all are going through similar things help me resist the devil and stand firm in my faith? Is it just an issue of misery loves company? Is he saying that if I know you're having a tough time too I'll feel better about the suffering I'm going through? I don't think that is what he has in mind. I think Peter is saying at least **three things** here. **The first** is that there is a tendency in us to assume that what we experience of suffering is unique and different from anyone else. And to some extent that is true. But if we fixate on our personal experience then our focus begins to turn inward on ourselves, and we imagine that we are the only ones going through the wringer. Peter is letting them know that, '*Yes, you are suffering, and will suffer – but don't think you are alone in this thing – it is going on all over the world – you are really part of the larger plan of God for His kingdom – therefore don't be surprised or dismayed and discouraged by this.*'

**Secondly**, I think Peter is saying, *'These experiences are common to the people of God – they are altogether in the plan and purpose of God – so don't start a pity party when suffering happens.'* Rather resist the roaring lion, firm in your faith, because that is what Christians everywhere in the world, engaged in this battle, are doing. Don't look at the suffering and say 'Poor me – poor, poor, pitiful me – look at my suffering.' This is a call to encourage us to resist the devil together – and to remind each other that we are not in this thing alone. **And thirdly**, the Bible says that this suffering accomplishes something – it isn't random or vain – it's purposeful. God knows what He is doing, and He's very aware of what you are going through. He's not surprised or taken off guard by your suffering and trouble, but He is directing every loving moment of it.

Peter emphasized this in verse 10: ***10 And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.*** Here it is – the God of **ALL** grace – all grace, not just some grace – the God of **ALL** grace is going to do something. But first you will suffer for a little while. In other words, the suffering is part of your being called to His eternal glory. It is one of the stops on the glory road. But it is only for a little while. How long is that you might ask? I don't know exactly, but it's probably longer than a day – and way short of eternity. How long is a little while? That probably depends on who is asking. I remember one of the standard questions as a kid going on a trip with my parents in the car was, 'How much longer is it?' And they would answer, 'Not long.' Well, 'Not long' to them was a 3-hour trip – but for me that was an eternity. From their perspective 3 hours was a short time – from mine, it was forever. And that is the way it seems when we are suffering – from our perspective, it seems like a really, really long time. But from our Father's point of view – eternity – it's just a little while.

In Revelation 6:9-11 there is a description of a scene in heaven where John says, *'I saw underneath the altar, the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained; and they cried out with a loud voice saying, 'How long, O Lord, holy and true, wilt Thou refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?...and they were told that they should rest for a little while longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been, should be completed also.'* And I think this picture should tell at least two things: **that God has a plan for our suffering** – He is not just saying 'Wait for a little while' in an arbitrary and capricious manner. He has a purpose to accomplish and everything is timed down to the second. And secondly, **that we need to have God's view on time** – those souls under the altar go all the way back to righteous Abel – and humanly speaking, that is a long time, but it is not a long time for God, He says 'Rest a little while longer'.

And finally, through suffering, God promises four things will happen for those who are His: **restoration, confirmation, strengthening and establishing**. First He promises to **restore you**, the word is *katartizo*, which means to adjust you, to put into a proper condition with the goal of completion. **Jesus takes you just as you are – but He will not leave you in that condition** – His promise is to bring you all the way to glory. And it is in the fires of affliction that we get adjusted – our thinking is renewed and our heart is purified. Secondly He promises to **confirm you** – *sterizo*, that is He will set you firmly on the path and you can be secure in the knowledge that He has chosen you. It means that He will make good on His promise that all who believe in Him will never be disappointed. Thirdly He promises to **strengthen you** – *sthenoo*, which means He will make you strong. God does not anticipate that we should live this Christian life in our own strength – but by the strength with God Himself supplies.

Lastly, He promises to **establish you** – *themelioo*, which literally means to lay a foundation that is immovable, and fixed, and that cannot be moved, disturbed, or shaken by anything. This word is used in Matthew 7 where the Lord describes the man whose house is built on the rock. *'Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine, and acts upon them, may be compared to a wise man who built His house upon the rock. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and burst against that house, and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded [established] upon that rock.'* Matthew 7:24-25. Be assured, the rains will fall, the floods will come, the winds of affliction will howl around you – but His promises remain solid, sure and unchanging – *'My child, nothing can shake you out of My hand – death can't, life can't, the angels can't the demons can't – your fears for today, your worries for tomorrow – and even the powers of hell will never be able to separate you from My love.'* **11 To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen.**



Finally Peter ends his letter. **12** *By Silvanus, a faithful brother as I regard him, I have written briefly to you, exhorting and declaring that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it.* **13** *She who is at Babylon, who is likewise chosen, sends you greetings, and so does Mark, my son.* **14** *Greet one another with the kiss of love. Peace to all of you who are in Christ.* At the end of his letter, he gives us a truth statement and a charge: **'...this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it!** And the immediate thing it brings to my mind is what does he mean by 'the true grace of God?' and how do we go about standing in it? Because essentially he sums up all that he has been saying through these five chapters, by saying, 'All that I have said can be wrapped up in one word – Grace! This is all about the grace of God! So stand in grace – continue in grace – abide in grace!' So what is grace? And how do we stand firm in it?

Grace has nothing to do with us, our inner resolve, or our lack of inner resolve. Rather, grace is all about God and God freely granting us the gift of forgiveness, righteousness, mercy and love. The idea some people have of grace might be the way a ballerina floats across the stage in Swan Lake, or the way Steph Curry plays the game of basketball; or they might say grace is a short prayer before a meal; or they might say grace is unmerited favor; or they might have the idea that grace is a kind feeling God has about us so that He overlooks our sins and gives us grace – grace is like a second chance at doing good. But none of those is a Biblical perspective on the grace of God. The word 'grace' in the Bible is **charis**, which is translated 'grace, gracefulness, kindness, good will; a gift, favor, thanks or gratitude.' But all of those are just descriptions of what is intrinsic to grace. In other words it is the nature of grace. Grace is kind, it is a gesture of good will; it is graceful; and it is necessarily a gift, not something you pay for. If we could pay for it – it wouldn't be grace. But grace is more than just the sum of its synonyms.

**Grace is the power of God working in us to do what we could never do ourselves.** It is the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit in our lives, transforming our thinking, subjugating our will to His, and inspiring a holy passion for Christ in our being. Listen to this verse by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:10: *'By the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace unto me was not in vain, for I labored more abundantly than all of them, yet not I but the grace of God with me.'* All the credit for any holiness, for any virtue, for any goodness in Paul's life, he gives to the grace of God. And he is not talking about kindness, although grace is kind – he is not talking about gratitude, although God's grace gives rise to hymns of eternal thanks and gratefulness in our hearts – he is not talking about mere goodwill from God towards Paul, although grace is the ultimate good will of God toward us – he is talking about power. He says, 'I labored – **yet not I but the grace of God with me.**'

So who or what is working here? Labor means work and Paul says, *'I was working – but it was grace that worked with me to do the work that I worked.'* In other words, the grace of God was the decisive factor in all that Paul did – it was the engine that moved the machine. That is why Paul begins and ends all his letters to the saints with grace. Read through them – they always begin and end with some form of 'Grace to you' That's where John MacArthur got the idea. This is not some benevolent salutation or benediction, or a throw-away line – Paul really meant *'Grace to you – may the grace of God empower you and cause you to live a life of holiness and righteousness – may grace empower you to proclaim the excellencies of Christ to the world – may grace be the engine in your labor and the source of your power.'* And this is, I believe, how Peter saw it.

This does not mean that we are passive and inactive – that we just let whatever happens, happen. No. Paul said, *'I labored...and God's grace labored in my laboring.'* I labored more abundantly – yet not I but the grace of God with me. **It is knowing that your worst days are never so bad that you are beyond the reach of God's grace. And your best days are never so good that you are beyond the need of God's grace.**<sup>2</sup> It is the realization that without Him I can do nothing – and with Him, all things are possible. It is the realization that left to myself, I'm on the way to hell; but united with Him I am heaven-bound. And it is acting on that realization according to His word. **Standing firm in the grace is standing on all the promises of God.**

Stand firm in the fact that you are a pilgrim and stranger on this earth, and this world is not your home.  
Stand firm in the knowledge that your citizenship is in the heavens.  
Stand firm on the solid rock of God's choosing you.  
Stand firm in the knowledge that the work of the Holy Spirit is making you into the image of Christ.  
Stand firm on the promise that nothing can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

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2 Jerry Bridges, *The Discipline of Grace: God's Role and Our Role in the Pursuit of Holiness*

Stand firm on the fact that you have been born again to a living hope and that you have an imperishable and undefiled inheritance awaiting you in heaven.

Stand firm in the knowledge that God is for you and not against you.

Stand on all the promises of God – don't be swayed by anything – don't be discouraged by suffering – don't be undone by the roaring lion – stand firm in the grace!

Knowing all the while grace is undeserved. You can't earn, or buy it, or demand it. Grace is grace. When we get to heaven, there will be no contest to see who was the most deserving of God's grace because no one deserves it. I do think there will be one contest in heaven. When we look back and see what we were before, when we see the pit from which he rescued us, when we recall how wretched we were, how depraved and deserving of God's wrath; when we remember how God reached out and by His grace brought us into His family, and how He held us in His hand, and when we see the nail-scarred Jesus who loved us and gave Himself for us, when we look back on the road we have walked that was paved with grace, the only contest will be to see which of us will sing the loudest: *"Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost but now am found, was blind but now I see."* **This is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it.**

*Our good and gracious heavenly Father,*

*Grant that we would humble ourselves under Your mighty hand in all things, and drink in grace like rain. Help us to fix our hearts and minds firmly on the grace and not on the things of this world. Do not let us be surprised by suffering – but let us embrace all that You bring our way in view of the hope of heaven and the joy of knowing You. Help us to trust that You are good in all Your works and all Your ways – may we never doubt Your sovereignty even in the most painful times. Let Your magnificent promises fill us with hope that You will perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish us according to Your plan. And may we live to proclaim the excellencies of Your name without fear of any roaring lions, in the conquering and all-powerful name of Jesus Christ our Lord, we pray, Amen.*