

1 Peter 5 – May 24 2020

⁶ Be humble, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. ⁷ Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. ⁸ Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. ⁹ Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings. ¹⁰ 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.

The title caught my eye: *Staying Close to God's Word While in the Military*. The video presentation is given by someone who has been there: Paul Wolfgramm spent 6yrs in the Marine Corp Reserve, an infantry Marine who deployed to Iraq. He introduces the importance of the topic with this point:



- The devil is not the cuddly, tame lion of the cartoon or stuffed animal type, which is so often portrayed in our culture.
- Instead, Peter's description shows us a reality like this image. When it comes to the devil, "Look out!"



Paul, in the video, goes on to mention getting prepared for common temptations faced in military life – common in other walks of life too. He cites the prevalence of...

- Alcohol abuse
- Language that takes God's name in vain
- Improper relationships (both among unmarried and married individuals)

And then in addition to temptations, he talks about the danger of potential: Spiritual isolation. There are steps you can take to help guard against that happening. That's the main encouragement of the video. Why?

What does a lion on the prowl attempt to do? You can certainly expect him to watch for a weak, or distracted, or isolated target. And so, we see how important it is that we are not cut off from the spiritual food, which strengthens and focuses us against the devil's attacks – temptations.

It's timely that this video came out at graduation season. Graduating high school seniors who are entering the military will gain here some important guidance. It's also timely that it appeared in my inbox just as this Bible section was up for this Sunday. We all can use this reminder:

- our enemy is definitely not a cuddly, friendly lion. (Show Petros' stuffed lion.)

I don't think anyone in their right mind thinks that they could overpower a lion in the wild. So people arm themselves accordingly, or put up defenses, when they are in terrain where lions are known to be present. | Why is it, then, that we – Christians – wander into the "jungle" of the world so often – maybe not unarmed, but – under-armed, or underprepared against the spiritual predator we face?

It's probably sheer laziness sometimes, for which we are at fault. "I can get by," one might think. Other times it may be more elements of pride. "I'm strong enough, and aware enough, to handle this," one might feel. But as we give the attention to this issue that it deserves, do we honestly conclude we are ok without added support, wisdom, and strength against this lion who is out to devour us?

Let's give this topic our attention today and see where that leads us.

Peter is winding up his letter – this book of the Bible. And the Holy Spirit inspires him to share these important closing points. Here's a summary:

- Be humble (under God's mighty hand). (vs.6)
- Pray (because God cares for you / answers). (vs.7)
- Be alert (against the devil). (vs.8)
- Stand in faith (in strength from God). (vs.9-11)

When Peter recorded these words for God's people sometime in the mid-60's A.D., persecution of Christians was on the rise throughout the Roman Empire. Already they were enduring insult, hardship and suffering.

We can find application. Sometimes the devil unleashes his "roar" at you. It takes other forms than physical intimidation or persecution. He'll try to stir terror in you with pressure from the unbelieving world, or its insistence, to accept its ideas and ways. In an academic setting, like schools, the pressure is: "You can't challenge the findings of geologists, biologists and astrophysicists" about the world and how it got here. In the military setting, but also beyond, you'll get the message: throw God's name around with curses and complaints and you'll fit in; bring it up in any other way and you have a lot less certainty of where you stand.

The devil will try to intimidate, to disorientate you (or me). And then after we face that, if we haven't given in to that, he'll try to turn the tables. He'll try to lead us to a leading kind of question like: "Hasn't God forgotten about you?"

He's got other tactics still beyond that. He'll try to sneak up on you with his deceptive and empty promises, like presenting something as good that is really sin. He'll suggest: "It'll make you happy." He's a liar, and he has been known to be quite convincing when he proposes: "Your life will be so much better and it won't really hurt anything / anyone."

What happens when we're not (fed with and) focused on God's truth & His promises? Here's where the crucial importance hits home of God's call to be clear-minded, or self-controlled, and alert!

The ideas and ways of the world bombard us. The lies of the devil challenge us. See the futility of going at your daily struggle without strength from God, which leaves one weakened or easily distracted and more susceptible.

Now if all this talk about spiritual danger seems a bit scary, well, that's good! I mean, if you are going to remain spiritually safe, you'll be served well by a *healthy* wariness of your enemy the Devil. If you're self-controlled and alert, clear-minded and on guard, you'll be better prepared to spot the predator as he stalks, and better armed to turn him and his temptations away.

Keep yourselves, then, firmly planted in God's Word: to hear the warnings. As you and I are equipped with God's Word, we'll also be strengthened to rely on God's promises, like the one we have here:

"And the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ... will himself restore you, and make you strong..."

Take this in: if our outcome depended on our battles against the tempter and temptations, we'd be done – doomed – lion's prey.

But Jesus dealt the devil a death blow. And the Holy Spirit snatched us out of the devil's jaws.

Just think of how! The God of all Grace quietly entered into the world for us. *He took our place!* God the Son was clothed in flesh for us. Jesus lived the humble life of trust in God the Father that you and I failed to live. Every humble step he took in this world was grace, undeserved love: every action, every word. Grace all the way to the end, where nothing else in all the world could force him to go: the cross. Grace moved the Father to tip the cup, filled with our suffering, to His Son to drink. Grace led Jesus to swallow down every last drop of the wrath & punishment for *our* sin. He died the death that our sins deserved. And so Jesus conquered the lion opposed to us.

And then, that these gifts would be yours and my own...

The God of all grace "*called you*" – and me – "*into his eternal glory in Christ Jesus.*" The Holy Spirit led you to see what He – in grace – had planned and carried out long before you were even born. In Jesus we have the forgiveness of sins... the riches of God's grace lavished on us (Eph.1:7). Because Jesus won the war, because the Holy Spirit has brought you to faith in what Jesus has done, you have God's gift of life eternal.

And now you can live your life here in His strength.

In vs.9, Peter writes: *“Resist the devil, standing firm in the faith!”* And the answer to how are you going to have the strength?

We aren't fighting the battle with strength that comes from us, but with strength that God gives to us. He supplies us power for warding off the lion's attacks. The power is provided through the good news of His grace - that's His love to us. This is what fills our hearts with truth, and strength.

“Stand fast in that grace of God,” Peter urges in vs.12.

The truth He has given you is your sword. He equips you to take your stand against your enemies. He gives you the vital encouragements: remain clear-minded and alert. He imparts such spiritual sharpness, clarity and awareness to us, as we hear His Word.

And when you get battle worn or wounded in the fight, He is your source of healing and strength. *“He will heal / restore you, and make you strong.”*

Stand firm then in the faith, through the strength that God gives you!

I want to close out the sermon with a comfort that might not be so obvious. Here's the summary again of this section:

- Be humble (under God's mighty hand). (vs.6)
- Pray (because God cares for you / answers). (vs.7)
- Be alert (against the devil). (vs.8)
- Stand in faith (in strength from God). (vs.9-11)

Going back to the very beginning, when you hear *“Be humble under God's mighty hand,”* you might not at first connect... The phrase *“mighty hand”* is often – and this is in a large percentage of the cases – used in the Bible to refer to God's deliverance of His people, like when He brought Israel out of their slavery in Egypt.

If you are under God's hand, yes that calls for humble trust. But oh what comfort there is in being in just that place – where hearts are moved with humble trust in God. You know His power. You know He is the God who has used His strength to deliver you. You know how He cares. You know His invitation to call on Him in every trouble. He promises to hear and answer. And though you still face pain and trouble, you know in the midst of all of it: you are UNDER God's mighty hand of love and protection. So know... *“In all these things [which we face in life] we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For ... neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord”* (Romans 8). *“Continue to live in Him, rooted and built up in Him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught”* (Colossians 2). Amen.