

In the south of France, between the cities of Arles and Montpellier, is a small, medieval town called Aigues-Mortes. Situated on the marshy coast of the Camargue region, the city is encircled by a wall that is still walkable today. In the corner of the city within its walls is Constance Tower. In the 18th century, Constance Tower was home to a woman named Marie Durand. Durand did not choose the Tower for her home, but rather was confined to the Tower by force. For 38 years, Constance Tower was Marie Durand's prison, along with other Protestant women. They were imprisoned following the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, which banned the Protestant practice of faith in France. These women endured prison rather than denying what they believed true.

As you climb the stairs of Constance Tower, the top portion is a large open area. In the center of the room is a small ledge. On that ledge under modern-day protective glass is a single word carved in the stone and attributed to the hand of Marie Durand. The word, translated into English, is *resist*.

The word has been revived in recent months in our country and employed in a variety of causes. But Marie Durand's case seems unique. At first glance, resist seems like a bizarre declaration for someone in prison. How can someone who is imprisoned resist? An outsider would say, "You have lost! You were defeated!" But despite 38 years of imprisonment for her faith, Marie Durand understood something that we desperately need to know: you can be under the hardship of adversity and still resist. Though your ability to physically overcome adversity may be taken away, your ability to resist remains. Resistance is a choice of where to sink the pillars of your life while the world swirls around you in chaos.

Marie Durand understood what Peter wrote to the early followers of Jesus. Peter exhorts them—and us—to resist. Resist our desire to rule and control. Resist our adversary who seeks our destruction. Rather, to sink the foundation of our life in the grace of God. It is a careful resistance knowing that we are cared for.

### Resisting Our Desire to Rule

"God opposes the proud

but shows favor to the humble."

**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 5:5b-7).**

### Humility toward one another

Peter begins by exhorting his audience to resist the desire to rule. Clothe yourself with humility toward one another. Rather than endless attempts to rule over others, Peter exhorts that humility should adorn us, much like we adorn our body with clothing. What is humility? *The NY Times* columnist David Brooks describes it this way: "Humility is freedom from [the] need to prove you are superior all the time, but egotism is a ravenous hunger in a small space."

Peter then makes a fascinating statement: God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. The original statement is from Proverbs 3:34, and James 4:6 also has the same statement. So, this is the third time that this statement is made in the Bible. If something is written once in the Bible, we should pay attention. If twice, we should really pay attention. If three times, we should really, really pay attention!

It's a fascinating statement about who God opposes and who God favors. God opposes the pride-filled person. He opposes, as Brooks described it, the egotism that is "a ravenous hunger in a small space." Contrarily, God favors the humble. Who does God celebrate? Who does God elevate? The humble, the one who has put aside their need to rule everyone and everything.

### Humility under God

In order to be humble **toward** others, Peter roots our humility **under** God. John Calvin wrote that the person who is humble under God has emptied themselves of dependence on "their own power, wisdom, and righteousness, [and seeks] every good from God alone." Our desire to rule and construct our own good has been surrendered to the good that God gives. What good does God give to the humble? He delivers and He exalts them.

Peter uses the phrase, "God's mighty hand." A variant of this phrase is used often in the Exodus story—the central story in Jewish history. In the Exodus story, God delivered His people from enslavement to the insatiable demands of the oppressive rule of Pharaoh. God's power—His mighty hand—was the means of defeat of Pharaoh and freedom for Israel. Living in a sin-marred world means that difficult seasons in life will come. The oppression of Pharaoh's demands will wear us down. But God is able to deliver. We can humble ourselves under God certain that He will not forget His people. To humble yourself under God's mighty hand isn't hiding from reality or hoping that things will work out ok. Rather, it means an active belief that God is

strong enough to deliver from even the most oppressive adversary. You are entrusting yourself to the God who has won and will win.

Not only does God deliver the humble, but He also exalts the humble. There is a reason to humble yourself under God: He will lift you up. There is no lifting up without humbling. There may be seasons of languishing in the valley, but there will be a summit of God's exaltation. It will come to those who have surrendered their need to rule in favor of seeking God's good.

The exaltation may not come when we want. He will lift you up "in due time," in other words, at the proper time, when the time is right. As someone once said, "God knows how to humble you without humiliating you, exalt you without flattering you." God knows when it is best for us to be elevated, and He will not disappoint.

If that's the value of humbling ourselves toward others and under God, how do we humble ourselves?

The way of humility is by casting your anxiety (or cares) on the Lord. In the grammar of the original Greek, this phrase is not a separate command, but the means by which one is humble. "Cast" means "to propel" or "to throw upon." This phrase is a quotation from Psalm 55:22: "*Cast your cares on the Lord and He will sustain you. He will never let the righteous be shaken.*" Propelling your anxiety on the Lord is how humbling happens.

Casting your cares on the Lord is not a wasted activity. He cares for you. He will sustain you, as the Psalmist wrote. That's the underlying reason why we're anxious: because we don't believe that God will care for us. We question whether He will be strong enough to deliver. We don't believe that God is working for our good. But the clarity of Peter's words can't be mistaken: He cares for you. He is benevolent toward you. He is good and working for your good. Knowing that God is good changes us. As Calvin put it: "As soon as we are convinced that God cares for us, our minds are easily led to patience and humility."

Peter calls to resist our desire to rule. Rather than clamoring to prove you are superior, be humble toward one another and humble yourself under God. He is strong enough to deliver you, and, moreover, He will exalt you at the proper time. The path of humility—the way to humble yourself toward others and under God—is by propelling your anxiousness upon the God who cares for you.

### **Resisting Our Enemy's Desire to Destroy**

**Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. 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 (verses 8-9).**

Not only resist the desire to rule, but also resist the enemy's desire to destroy you. Peter challenges us to be alert (watchful) and of sober mind (clear in focus). The reason is that you have an adversary. You are not unopposed as you seek to live in the way that God designs. Your enemy is the Devil, another term for Satan. When the biblical writers talk about Satan, one of the interesting dynamics that they describe is that Satan has some power on earth: He is "*the prince of this world*" (John 14:30) and "*the ruler of the kingdom of the air*" (Eph. 2:2). But Satan's power is limited. Satan is, as it were, on a leash the length of which is set by God. We see this most clearly in Job as Satan requests of God to do what he wants to do with Job.

For our purposes in this passage, Peter wants to remind us that the devil has an aim. His aim is destruction. Peter uses the image of a prowling lion. Years ago, I went to Queen Elizabeth National Park in Uganda, a large, open wildlife reserve. At one point, we stopped the car and peered over a field. Several hundred yards from us was a large herd of gazelle moving from our right to left. Trailing behind them, almost imperceptibly, was a lone figure. We would have missed it if our guide hadn't pointed it out. Following the herd of gazelles at a distance was a lion. Two interesting things stood out to me about the prowling of this lion. First, it was difficult to see. It crouched low in the tall grass. Second, the lion was incredibly patient. It was slow, it stopped for long stretches of time, it moved carefully and intentionally.

You have an adversary. He is almost imperceptible. He is intentional and cunning. His aim is your destruction, and he knows what he's doing. A puritan pastor from several centuries ago put the warning this way: "[Satan's] baits shall be so fitted to your temper and disposition, that he will be sure to find advantages within you, and make your own principles and inclinations to betray you; and whenever he [ruins] you, he will make you the instrument of your own ruin" (Richard Baxter).

Instead of leaving us with dread or despair, Peter says something surprising: the devil, this prowling lion, can be resisted. How can we resist the devil? By standing firm in faith. Faith in what? Faith that God cares for us. Confidence that God is good and working for our good. And in the dark seasons of suffering, we have this encouragement: people throughout the church body are also learning to stand firm in the belief that God is good.

The danger in suffering is that we think that we are alone. Your desire in suffering will be to pull away, but that is also your greatest danger. The devil desires to separate you in order to devour you. That crouching lion in Uganda was not waiting to pounce on the herd, but instead waiting for one to fall back from the pack. The encouragement in your difficulty is that you are not alone. At no time do we need to be reminded of this more than when we face difficulty. Some of my most meaningful conversations have happened sitting around a fire pit sharing my

struggles with close friends as they share theirs. Sitting over a cup of coffee as we both try to make sense of life in this upside down world. Those are holy moments because we're reminded that we're in this together.

### What God Will Do

**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 (verses 10-11).**

If you resist the desire to rule by humbling yourself toward others and under God's mighty hand, if you resist the devil in his desire to devour you, what will remain? Through everything remains the God who is full of grace. All grace flows from Him, all grace is interconnected because of Him. All grace that you receive is from Him. And if we weren't clear on His grace, Peter reminds us that followers of Jesus are called by the Father. He has been at work in His benevolence toward you.

His grace shows in this: suffering is only for "a little while." Will your suffering last a day? A week? Will your struggle continue for a year? Or longer? The length of the difficulty is not known to us, but we are told it is a season, "a little while." One day there will be an end. And even if your suffering is longer than you would hope, there is an "eternal glory" coming for those in Christ. Your suffering does not have the final word.

Even better than the hope that suffering has an end is the knowledge that God Himself is at work in your life to bring a better future. God has a personal interest in you. He is at work in you and for you. Peter tells us how with four synonyms that are built like a crescendo of grace. Here it is in the NASB:

1. He will perfect you. He will restore, put things right.
2. He will confirm you, solidifying your purpose.
3. He will strengthen you, making you strong.
4. He will establish you, providing a secure foundation.

To paraphrase an ancient commentator:

1. God shall **perfect** you, that no **defect** shall remain in you.
2. God shall **confirm** you, that nothing may **shake** you.
3. God shall **strengthen** you, that you may **overcome** every adversary.
4. God shall **establish** you, that no one can **remove** you from His care.

This is His grace at work in you.

Peter, enamored by God who would be this gracious to us, breaks out into song: "To Him be the power forever and ever. Amen."

### Final Words

**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. Greet one another with a kiss of love.**

**Peace to all of you who are in Christ (verses 12-14).**

Peter brings a close to the entire letter with several statements. He highlights the faithfulness of Silas. Silas was a member of the core leadership of the early church. He partnered with Paul in Asia Minor and Greece (2 Corinthians 1:19), he co-authored 1 & 2 Thessalonians with Paul and Timothy, and he carried the letter from the council of Jerusalem to Antioch (Acts 15:23). Peter reminds his audience that there are people like Silas who are working for their good in the example of God.

Peter also states his aim of the letter. He wrote this letter to encourage the church and to attest to the grace of God. His desire is that church be encouraged to stand firm in the grace that comes from the God of all grace.

The church in Peter's day needed grace. He referred to the church in Rome as "she who is in Babylon." Babylon is an image that stretches to another critical event in the history of Israel. Israel was exiled in Babylon, a place far from home, as a result of their sin. Their only hope was God acting in grace to bring them home. In Peter's day, the church was in exile in a world not their home. The church lived as exiles not because sin drove them away from God, but because of grace that called them to God.

This grace of God toward us is found in Jesus. The cross shows how much God cares for us. We don't have to wonder; the Cross stands ever-present as a symbol of God's victorious grace. His victory ushers in God's new world—a world in which God is working for you, that He Himself perfects, confirms, strengthens, and establishes you.

How do you resist the temptation to rule and control the way of the world? How do you resist the devil who seeks your destruction? Two things stand out. First, practice propelling your anxiety upon God. We carry anxiety that we were never meant to carry. We bear burdens that are not ours to bear. God is strong enough to deliver; give Him the space to do so.

Second, stand firm in your faith by finding ways to remember that you're not alone. The temptation in your adversity will be to pull away from people. Isolation is the breeding ground for destruction. Pursue someone or a few people who could walk with you, with whom you can be known.

Have this hope: that whatever comes, it will only last a little while. And God, who is good and working for your good, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. He has not left you, and He has not finished His work in you because He cares for you.

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