

Many times, we're tempted to reduce our lives of faith to a kind of spiritual formula. “If we just do a good thing,” we assume that “God will do a good thing” for us. But this is a reversal of the biblical equation. **More often, because God does a good thing, the Holy Spirit then equips us to do good things.** It's tempting to assume that if God's dearly loved people just do things like “*Be alert*” in v. 8, or “*Resist*” the devil like in v. 9, then God will make good things happen to us. Instead, we ought to turn that equation around. Because God makes us “*strong, firm and steadfast*” then we Christians can do things Peter urges, like “*Humble yourselves, under God's mighty hand*” and “*Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you*” (vss. 6 & 7).

Peter assumes that first we are not by nature humble people, and second, life in this world brings with it anxiety. Anyone disagree? Because we are God's children we don't get to escape anxiety; nor will life always go as we planned. **Still, we may be tempted to believe that God is punishing us or that God has abandoned us.** Well, that's exactly what the devil wants us to believe! But Peter prepares us for an even tougher pill to swallow by providing an easier pill to swallow when he alludes to Proverbs 3:34: “*All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble*” (v. 5). Have you noticed the title of today's sermon? “**How Humble Are You?**” If we hear the expectations that Peter lays out for us, this is an extremely relevant question: **How humble are we?**” It's a personal question and therefore must be answered personally.

When we move to verse 8, Peter describes our enemy the devil like a roaring lion, prowling around, looking for someone to devour. We know the devil will do whatever it takes to make God's people believe there is no such thing as **hope**—only anxiety. **The one thing the devil most wants is for the children of God to lose hope in the God who loves them.** And the devil won't wait until our lives are over to torment us; he wants to make our lives on earth a living hell. So, what does Peter say we should do? Let me repeat it.

“Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time” (v. 6). When I was a younger person, and first heard that line from verse 6, I came to the conclusion that *humbling myself* would likely be less painful than waiting for God to step in and humble me! Today one of the phrases we hear a lot is: “Life comes at you fast.” One minute everything can be fine, and in the next, it feels as though the rug’s been pulled out from under us. When that happens, we usually pull back in disbelief. Filled with **anxiety** we wonder how God is Love when God doesn’t keep us from suffering painful awful things. How can we *humble ourselves* when everything within us cries out for relief because the world is collapsing around us?

Notice that Peter goes on to quickly say in verse 7, *“Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you.”* I appreciate Peter’s use of the word *anxiety*. Peter doesn’t say cast all your *suffering* on God or even cast all your *heartache* on God. He’s saying from personal experience that in the worst times of pain, in times of severe anxiety, if we can give it over to God, God will get close enough to share whatever suffering and heartache we face. But the single most difficult thing is ***to give God, or to cast on him all our anxiety***, all the fear and the worry that accompanies suffering and uncertainty.

But before we’re willing to do that, we want to know the end of the story. We want from God the guarantee of a good outcome. We want to know what comes next. Once we get all that information, then we might be willing to let go of our *anxiety*, but not until all those things are safely in place. You see, the real challenge in following Jesus is to find a way to *humble ourselves* before God and yield our lives to God’s gracious keeping **before we know anything about the outcome or the direction** in which the future might take us. **This requires that we have a deep and abiding trust in the One who created us in hope, who redeemed us in mercy, and who continues to sustain us in love.**

We must be able to live our lives one day at a time, with hope, perseverance, and faith, for no other reason except that we believe *God is with us*. We, who hate uncertainty almost more than anything else, must resist the temptation to

be crushed by it. Instead, we must humbly set our faces toward the future that the Holy Spirit is creating for us at this very moment. *And then walk by faith.*

Even if things are going well for us in life, there is no time in life when we can see around the corner, see the next step, or see far enough down the road. We might have an idea of what step we want to take, but whether or not we're able to take it is ultimately out of our hands. **We can't control life, but we have the freedom to choose how we respond to it and how we live it.** We can live **anxiously**, always afraid of what lies around the corner, and we can let **anxiety** defeat us. We can involve ourselves in a frenzy of activity to try to avoid it, but all that does is to give our **anxiety** the power to affect our lives and destroy our happiness. **Or we can turn to God and to those around us.**

One of the greatest lies that Satan tells us is that we need to get through our suffering under our own strength, and that our anxiety just goes to show how unreliable life really is. He wants us to think that all we can do is brace ourselves for the next hit and hope it won't hurt too much. **But that's no way to live! We don't have to be afraid of what tomorrow holds.** We know that God is with us always, creating and redeeming and giving life. Our suffering does not have the final word. And no one in this world suffers alone. We may feel as though we are alone as we go through our suffering, but not only is the Holy Spirit with us, so is every brother and sister in Christ. We don't need to be alone unless we choose to be.

Look around at the people you see here today. These are brothers and sisters God gave you to help you make it through this life a little more aware of God's goodness and love. **We need one another** and, above everything else, we need God. We need **God's love** to keep on going. We need **God's mercy** so that we have the energy to take our next breath. And it's here; it's here in abundance. It lies within us and around us. And in those times when we have trouble believing it, we must reach out to one another and be God's word of hope. We must take the next step forward in faith—in the power of the Holy Spirit.

A few years ago Dan Conoway wrote an article for the *Memphis Daily News* in which he said: **Nostalgia, always positive and always selective, can be fun and comforting. But it *can't* be a destination. Don't long to go where you *cannot* go. Long to make where you're going better.** I wholeheartedly agree with Dan! As a Billy Joel lyric reflected, "The good ole days weren't all that good, and tomorrow's not as bad as it seems." A gentleman who was brought up in the Christian faith here at Ken Mawr moved away in his retirement. He had an interesting phrase that has stuck with me over the years. Instead of saying "Have a nice day," he would always say, "Make it a good day!"

And then, let's make tomorrow terrific! I'm convinced that the apostle Peter would agree, because he warns us not to long for the good ole days. He says in chapter 1, verse 3, "*In [God's] great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.*" Peter knows the world well enough to know that because of human nature anyone who is *different* is treated with suspicion. Yet, followers of Jesus are supposed to be *different*. **The Christian faith serves as a kind of conscience for the world, and most people would rather brush aside any twinge of conscience that interferes with what they want. So, if having Christians around interferes with someone else's plans, well then, the Christians must go.**

Peter is keenly aware of persecution, and I believe that on some level, some sort of persecution is inevitable for Christians. Listen to what he says in chapter 4: "*Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed*" (1 Peter 4:12-13). **God, and only God, can restore us, support us, strengthen us, and establish us in hope.** We need to remind ourselves and remind one another of everything that God has done. We need to come here on Sunday mornings to celebrate God's love for us and to recount the mighty deeds of God and continue to live in hope, Christian hope, living hope, not just wishful thinking or optimism. **If God has done all these things in the past, surely, God will act again and bring us to the glory**

that awaits those who humble themselves. God has it all covered. It's a simple, but definitely not easy, way of life: ***“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.”***

How humble are you? is the question I want you to personally consider today. In verse 5 of today’s reading Peter says, *“All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another.”* The mark of a genuine Christian is setting our own desires and agendas aside so we may serve others. In verses 6 & 7 Peter lays down what I call “laws” for this *way of life*. **The first law is the law of humility before God. And the second law is the law of serenity with God.**

Abraham was the sexton of his synagogue for over thirty years when he suddenly told the Rabbi that he quit. The Rabbi was totally taken aback by Abraham’s sudden resignation. “Why, Abraham? After all these years, why now? Is there anything I can say or do to convince you to reconsider?”

Abraham told his Rabbi that he had prayed to God for many years to win the lottery. After all these years, I have yet to win even one dollar. So, “I quit!”

Since it was Friday, the Rabbi convinced Abraham to wait until Sabbath was over to make his final decision. He further offered that if Abraham would come to synagogue early on Sabbath, he would pray with him for God to let him win the lottery. So, Abraham arrived early on Sabbath and the Rabbi prayed with him that he would win the lottery. Then a voice thundered from the heavens, “Abraham, I’ve told you again and again, you have to buy a ticket!”

In times of distress, we normally try to do something to help ourselves. At other times we turn to God, but the circumstances of life do not change. So, what are we to do? **I say we try flipping verses 6 and 7 around.** Let’s first cast all our anxieties on him, if we expect to humble ourselves before God. This is ***the law of serenity with God and the law of humility before God.*** God is already at work in our lives. Therefore, ***“Humble yourselves under God’s mighty hand that he may lift you up...”*** To him be the power for ever and ever! Amen.