

A BELIEVER'S SURVIVAL GUIDE FOR LIFE IN A HOSTILE WORLD

1 Peter 5:5b-11 | Seventh Sunday of Easter | June 1, 2014

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.

J.J.

In the name of the risen and ascended Christ, dear friends:

Survival shows are very popular these days. *Man vs. Wild*, *Survivor Man*, and *Dual Survival* are just a few of the titles you can find on cable or Netflix. Each of these shows features a survival expert teaching skills like how to start a fire without matches and how to purify water for drinking. They do this by entering a hostile environment and modeling these skills for the viewer. For the most part these shows are about entertainment. It's fun to watch these guys get dirty and eat gross stuff as they struggle to survive. I suppose, if you ever found yourself stranded in a hostile environment, cut off from assistance, the skills they teach could come in handy.

We live in a hostile environment, filled with danger. Every day the devil tries to gobble us up. Every day the world tries to lead us into a deadly trap. Every day our own sinful natures try to kill us. As believers stranded in an unbelieving world we are under constant attack from the spiritual forces of evil. We suffer for the sake of our faith. We bear the cross. And it's not easy. What are we to do? How can we endure? How can we hope to survive

our journey through this hostile environment until we reach our eternal destination? Peter has an answer. He gives us some survival tips. The portion of God's Word before us this morning could be called A BELIEVER'S SURVIVAL GUIDE FOR LIFE IN A HOSTILE WORLD. Let's open up this guide and learn the skills we need to survive.

I. Humble Yourself

The believers to whom Peter first wrote our text were suffering. They lived under the rule of crazy, Christian-hating Nero. They were being arrested and imprisoned. Their property was being seized. Some were enslaved. The lions were warming up in the arena. They were under intense pressure to renounce their Christian faith. They were struggling to survive. Peter wrote to encourage them.

His first piece of advice? **Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand.** Human beings by nature are proud creatures. When suffering comes we tend to believe we deserve better. After all, we're pretty good people, certainly better than most. We shouldn't get cancer. We should have story-book weddings and marriages to match. Our bank accounts should be full and we

should be successful in all we do. We sometimes think we are entitled to a problem-free existence in a world filled with pain and sorrow.

God thinks differently. He **disciplines those he loves** (Hebrews 12:6). Like immature children, we often need the Lord's loving discipline. And so he allows plaque to clog our arteries. He permits a family member to hurt us deeply. He doesn't stop the thief from stealing our identity and destroying our credit. Do we deserve better from him? No. We deserve much worse. **The wages of sin is death** (Romans 6:23). Our sinful pride has earned us an eternity of death in hell.

But God has saved us from our sinful pride. How? Humility. **He humbled himself and became obedient to death--even death on a cross!** (Philippians 2:9) Jesus took our pride and our arrogance, our sinful self-reliance and our silly sense of entitlement onto his own shoulders. He carried the whole horrible mess to the cross. He bled the blood of the God-man. He poured out his life and died, the only payment that could atone for a world's pride, for our pride. His perfect, sinless life counts for us. His resurrection sealed his sacrifice. Our sin is gone. Our relationship with him has been repaired.

So then, why all this suffering? God allows trouble into our lives so that we never forget how much we need him. He takes away health or wealth to humble us, to call us to repentance, to force us to rely on him for every blessing, physical and spiritual.

Peter quotes the proverb: **"God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble"** (3:34). This world champions proud self-reliance. God opposes it. It is only when we have been properly humbled that we are ready to receive God's grace. As Paul put it, **"When I am weak, then I am strong"** (2 Corinthians 12:10). Want to survive in this hostile world? Survival starts with humility.

II. Cast All Your Anxiety on Him

Another part of godly humility is recognizing our inability to deal with our daily problems on our own. We need help. **Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.** God promise the help we need. When we fall down, God picks us up and dusts us off. He either solves the problem for us or gives us the strength to endure it.

And so Peter encourages us with these familiar words: **Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.** Wouldn't you love to be able to take all your troubles, crumple them into a ball and just throw them away? In a sense, you can. Maybe you've seen a little poster that says something like this: "Good morning! It's the Lord! I'll be handling all your problems today." The God who cares for us promises to carry all our anxiety for us.

All of it. It's important to remember that. There's no fear too big, no concern too little. Debilitating pain? Take it to the Lord in prayer. Financial struggles? Throw it God's way. Lawn mower on the fritz? Ask God for help. Boyfriend troubles? Talk to

the Lord about it. He cares for you! He promises to hear and answer.

Imagine trying to climb Everest with the help of a Sherpa to do the heavy lifting. No way you'd make it. You wouldn't survive. To survive in this hostile world let God do the heavy lifting. Leave your anxious burdens at his throne of grace.
Cast all your anxiety on him.

III. Beware of the Devil

The devil wants you to forget what I just said to you. In fact, he wants you to forget everything God tells us in his Word. So Peter gives this survival tip: **Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.** Peter tells us to think of the devil in the same way as we would think of a downed power line. Danger! Stay away! The devil is not your friend. He is not the fun-loving, laid-back, life of the party. He's a demon. He's an evil and powerful spiritual being who wants to devour your soul. He is all-too-real. Take him *very* seriously!

Peter knew from personal experience what happens when you don't take the devil seriously. He let his guard down on more than one occasion. In Gethsemane Jesus said, **"Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation"** (Matthew 26:41). Peter took a nap. Later, in the high priest's court yard, with oaths and curses Peter – who promised to go to death with Jesus if necessary – denied even knowing him.

If it can happen to Peter, the Lord's

Apostle, it can certainly happen to you and me. I beg you to heed Peter's Spirit-inspired warning. Be awake and watchful!

How do we do that? By making regular use of the Means of Grace. By hearing the Word and receiving the Sacrament so that we are strengthened in faith and in the ability to resist temptation. Prayer is also an important component of our survival plan. We need to spend time on our knees so that the devil won't put us flat on our backs. Armed with God's powerful Word and alert through prayer we can resist the devil. Satan is a liar. He hates the truth. As Luther put it: "One little Word can fell him."

IV. Know that You Are Not Alone

As you struggle to survive the devil's constant attacks, remember: You are not alone. Our text says: **You know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.** Across the world, in faraway places and cultures, and right here in our own back yard, our fellow Christians understand what we are going through. Many are assailed by the same doubts. Many endure the same kinds of suffering.

Not only do we have our Lord's own promise to be with us always, to never leave us or forsake us, we also have the support of our Christian family. Look to your left and right. Look in front of you and behind you. Those are your brothers and sisters in Christ. They are suffering sinners, just like you. They know what you're going through. They pray for you, help you, encourage you. And they give

you the opportunity to do the same. How wonderful to know that we don't have to journey alone! We walk the dangerous roads of this world, hand-in-hand, trusting in the same Savior, and looking forward to the same destination.

V. Look Forward to Future Glory

That's Peter's final survival tip: Look forward to future glory. He writes: **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.**

Note that our sufferings in this world are only for "a little while." It may not seem like that while you are struggling through painful turmoil, but it's the truth. Talk to one of your elders, someone who has a lot more years behind them than ahead of them. They will tell you that time flies. Life in this world is short. But that means suffering in this world is short too.

God has called us to something much better, the eternal glory of heaven. God promises to strengthen us so that we can survive the dangers of this world until finally, he brings us to the never-ending safety of his heavenly kingdom.

My friends, keep your eyes on the prize. As Paul told the Colossians: **Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things** (3:2). Keep looking forward to the future glory that Christ won for you.

CBS's *Survivor* is still a somewhat popular TV show. It's not really about survival at all. It's a game show. The contestants do

go through some hardships, but are never in any real danger. It's just a game.

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, surviving life in this world is no game. It's a matter of life and death. Eternity lies in the balance. The dangers and distractions are very real. But we will survive. We will survive because God has given us all the survival tools we need. We will survive because he has given us Jesus. **To him be the power forever and ever. Amen.**

S.D.G.