

Living with Security

1 Peter 4:12-5:14

13 September 2020 | Grace Bible Church Corinda | Ben Shannon

Big Idea: Where can we find the security we're looking for?

Big Question: True security is found by having the humility to trust in God.

Introduction

How do you stay safe? How do you keep your stuff safe? How do you approach security?

We often try to keep stuff safe by locking it up – and people, too, for that matter.

Gates, fences, razor-wire, doors, grills, mesh, bars, chains, cameras, alarms, sensors, guards, weapons and the list could go on.

Security is big business.

Another way of keeping someone or something safe is to hide it.

As far as I understand it, the technical term is “security through obscurity”.

Basically, if someone doesn't know where something is or even that it exists, it's difficult to take it.

We all do this without really thinking about it because we know that it's not wise to leave valuables lying around in plain sight.

If you're a Christian who's facing pressure because of your faith, some people will see it as an opportunity to go out in a blaze of glory and others will be tempted to give up.

Many of us will want to hide.

Keep your head down and your mouth shut so that no one notices.

If no one notices that you're a Christian and you do nothing to offend them, then they're not going to get upset.

There is some wisdom in doing that to certain degrees at times, but it doesn't ultimately work.

Security experts tell us that relying on obscurity for your security isn't wise.

Sooner or later, someone will spot what you're trying to hide.

I remember being in the stairwell of a unit complex we were staying... as you do.

I was at the bottom of the stairwell, at the back, looking out at the garden... again, as you do.

Someone had “planted” a spare key amongst the vines and from the look of it, it was quite a long time ago.

You couldn't see it from the path or the driveway, but from where I was standing it was as plain as day.

Obscure, but not very secure.

Peter closes his letter by saying that security for Christians isn't found through obscurity.

Security's found through humility.

Having the humility to trust in God alone.

Outline

Our journey through the book of 1 Peter has been challenging and I hope it's also been rewarding.

The letter was written by Peter – one of Jesus' right-hand men.

Actually it was also written by Silas, we're told in verse twelve of chapter five.

They're writing from the heart of an empire that doesn't recognise God's authority and supremacy – the capital city of Rome.

He calls it Babylon in verse thirteen.

In Peter's mind, the Roman Empire is like that super-power which wiped out the nation of Israel and took them off into exile.

They're writing to people who're suffering persecution because of their faith in Jesus.

On some occasions, that meant being martyred for their beliefs.

Most of the time though, the persecutions was probably low-level – angry looks and snide remarks.

They wrote to encourage Christians who were far away to stand firm and trust in God's amazing grace.

1 Peter is about living for Jesus in sight of the end.

All the way back at the very start of the letter, we saw that Peter wrote to Christians who are chosen, strangers and obedient to Jesus.

We saw that he unpacked what it means to be chosen in 1:13-2:10.

And then what it means to be strangers in 2:11-4:11.

We're going to cover the whole last section in one hit this morning – verses 4:12-5:14.

In this section, Peter brings together everything he's been saying.

The pattern of Christ's sufferings will be stamped on every believer.

True security is found by having the humility to trust in God.

- Humility to Trust during Trials (4:12-19)
- Humility to Lead with Love (5:1-6)
- Humility before the Sovereign of Salvation (5:7-11)

Humility to Trust during Trials (4:12-19)

Have the humility to trust during trials.

We all know that suffering isn't part of the way that the world was meant to be.

There wasn't suffering in the good world that God created.

And yet Peter says, "Don't be surprised at fiery trials which come to test you."

Or more literally, the burning trial.

That makes it sound like these Christians are facing some really heavy-duty persecution.

However, the historical evidence suggests that's not likely to have been the case at the time.

It's more likely they're facing ridicule – verse fourteen – being called names and perhaps being pushed around for their faith.

I don't think Peter has in mind being one of Nero's candles, so much as the difficulties and adversities that refine us.

It was weeks ago for us, but not nearly so long when Peter was writing this, that he talked about fire in chapter one.

He used the image of refining fire there in verse seven.

The fiery trials are refining challenges that will show our faith is genuine and also grow our faith.

What a marketing plan!

It's much better to be honest upfront that following Jesus isn't always easy – being forewarned is being forearmed.

Don't think "where did that come from?" or "I wasn't expecting that!"

It's not strange if you suffer for your faith in Christ.

Don't be surprised when God uses fiery trials to refine you.

Our natural inclination is to try and stop the persecution.

Avoiding persecution isn't a bad thing to do.

Don't go looking for trouble and picking fights.

At the same time, following Jesus comes with a cost, so follow Jesus no matter the cost.

Suffering for Jesus produces joy.

It's one thing to press on with determination in the face of suffering, but it's quite another to be able to rejoice in that, isn't it?

Rejoice, Peter says, because you're sharing the sufferings of Christ.

You're following the same path that he walked along.

That doesn't mean that you need to love to learn the pain itself.

The point is NOT to become a sadist who likes the suffering.

The joy doesn't come from the suffering itself, it comes from Christ.

The joy isn't found in the suffering, but where the suffering leads – being with Christ in heaven forever.

Future joy depends on present suffering because you've got to go through the current suffering to reach that future joy.

The temptation is to give up and not be obedient to Jesus because it means suffering now.

If you give up now though, you won't get the reward.

You suffer now for following Jesus since following Jesus is the only way to get the best, fullest and ultimate joy when Jesus comes back.

When you're back's against the wall for following Jesus, which way are you going to choose?

It's a choice that we've all got to make and there are only two choices.

Either we follow Jesus and endure the suffering that comes with it or you turn your back on him.

Those two paths lead in two different directions – either you get respite from judgement now or you face his judgement on the last day.

Remember, Peter knew what it was like to deny Jesus three times and you can't help but wonder if it wasn't the pain of going through that which made him willing to suffer for Jesus later in life.

Remember that you're actually blessed, even if you're ridiculed for Jesus.

Not because you ARE suffering but because you know Jesus and God blesses us.

As a Christian, you've got the gift of God's Spirit – God's presence with us.

Peter makes an allusion to Isaiah 11:2 which talks about God's Spirit resting on his servant.

The same Spirit that was on Jesus is now on you.

The Holy Spirit who, according to chapter one, told the prophets about the suffering Christ to come, is the same one who reminds us that what we're going through now is comes before the glory that we'll see then.

It's important to remember the kind of suffering that Peter's talking about though.

It's not the suffering of a body that's getting old or a boss who's incompetent.

He means suffering unjustly for the sake of Christ.

Remember that it's NOT suffering for doing the wrong things.

Whether those are really big sins or even quite small ones – like being a busybody.

Don't be a pest for Jesus.

If you suffer for doing these things, then you can't claim that it's for Jesus.

Verse fifteen:

1 Peter 4:15 NIV11 ¹⁵ If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler.

But if you suffer for being a Christian, don't be ashamed.

We talk about Christians all the time, but this's one of the few places in the New Testament that uses the term.

It literally means to be a follower of Christ and it seems to be a term used by outsiders to describe people like us.

It was in the city of Antioch that the church first got called Christians¹ and King Agrippa certainly knew what a Christian was when he interviewed Paul in the city of Caesarea.²

It can be tempting to throw in the towel or go into hiding.

Don't do that if you're suffering for the name of Jesus.

Glory in God because you get to carry the name of Christ!

It mightn't seem obvious at first that Peter uses judgement to make his case.

Especially judgement beginning with God's household – what's that all about?

Remember that he described Christians as being built up into a house in chapter two?

Wasn't that a spiritual house of HOLY people, though?

Isn't there now no more condemnation for believers?

We're free from condemnation because of Jesus, but not judgment.

The final judgment that God will undertake begins in us as Christians now.

God uses our suffering now to refine and purify us as suffering humbles us to follow God's ways.

He's reflecting on Malachi 3, which talks about judgment which begins with the temple and purifies it.

God saves by refining us through suffering.

If that's the case for Christians, what about someone who doesn't follow Christ?

Peter quotes from Proverbs 11:31 to say that it's hard for a righteous person to be saved.

The only hope for sinners is Jesus.

Only he is the righteous one who could satisfy God's anger at sin and save us.

If you don't know Christ as your Saviour, you need to put your trust in him today.

So, we entrust ourselves to God, the one who made us for his purposes.

That takes humility because we want to save ourselves.

We want to be responsible for making our own way to heaven and we don't want it to involve suffering.

But God uses suffering to refine us as trials come our way.

God uses suffering to humble us and cause us to cling to him.

Humility to Lead with Love (5:1-6)

Secondly, Peter shows how humility before God works out in loving leadership.

Peter addresses the elders first.

Peter was an elder himself, according to verse one of chapter five.

It's a bit of a weird term because it's not really about what it sounds like.

An elder isn't just about age – a young man can be godly and mature and an older man can be ungodly and immature.

It's a carryover from Judaism where elder was the term used for leaders in the assembly.

Elders are the leaders and throughout the New Testament (especially in the book of Acts), we see elders being appointed to lead churches.

This letter was probably sent around a bunch of different churches and Peter addresses the elders in each one.

Why the elders?

Possibly because when suffering and persecution come, they're the going to be the ones with the biggest targets painted on their backs.

Leaders will be the first ones to take a hit.

When you read material from Open Doors, Voice of the Martyrs or Barnabas Fund, you often read about what's happened to pastors.

The only thing that really makes elders different from any other Christian, is their ability to teach.

That's the only thing on the lists in Titus 1 and 1 Timothy 3 that isn't about character.

Elders witness to the sufferings of Christ in their teaching – pointing people to the cross and calling them to take up their own cross and follow him.

But Peter knew that there wasn't glory in those roles.

His hope was in sharing the glory to be revealed when Jesus comes back.

When the going gets tough, different leaders will naturally want to respond in different ways.

Some leaders are going to feel like it'd be easier to hide.

Others are going to come out fighting, looking for the opportunity to be taken down in a blaze of glory.

The Holy Spirit, through Peter, is saying that leaders in the church need humility to serve.

The Bible often describes the leaders of God's people as shepherds, for example in Zechariah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel..

Sometimes they're described as being bad shepherds.

It's no wonder that Peter, in particular, sees looking after God's people as being a shepherd.

At the end of John's gospel, John records how Jesus commissioned Peter.

Why don't you turn there with me? John 21.

Three times, Jesus asks Peter whether he loves Jesus and three times, Peter responds that he does.

John 21:15–17 NIV11 ¹⁵ When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs." ¹⁶ Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep." ¹⁷ The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John,

do you love me?" Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my sheep.

A shepherd's first job is to feed the sheep.

To make sure that they have food and water.

It's also their job to watch out for the sheep.

He protects the sheep from the danger of wild animals.

It takes humility to serve in this way.

Peter gives us three contrasts that show that leadership isn't about the leader, it's about loving others

Not under pressure but willing: he's talking about the willingness to do what God wants.

Not for money but eager: don't do it for the money like in much of church history where being a minister was quite lucrative.

Not harsh but an example: it's not a case of do as I say, not as I do.

Don't call someone to do something you're not prepared to do yourself.

Leadership is hard because there's a very fine line between leading with courage and conviction, and leading with pride.

And guess what? Every leader messes it up.

It takes humility to continue leading even when you know that you're a sinner and you have messed up.

Being a shepherd is a humbling experience because it's incredibly hard to deal with your own sin as well as other people's.

It's not something that you do because you've got to do it, but willingly.

You don't serve as an elder for what you can get out of it.

If you do it because you're looking for position, power and prestige, then you'll be a poor shepherd.

Elders need the humility to remember that they aren't the supreme authority, and you do too.

Our church is Jesus' flock, not mine.

Elders have to give an account to the Chief Shepherd, verse four.

He will give the crown of glory that'll never fade away to those who serve with humility.

Peter then has a word to younger people and I think he's especially got young men in mind.

Young men who want to be leaders can see all the faults of the leaders they're under.

It's easy to see the things that are wrong.

How do I know? Because I've been there!

When God calls you to serve in this way, you quickly discover that it's not as easy to fix those things as it looks sitting on the sidelines.

If you're young and you work on humility, God will lift you up at the right time to serve.

Peter begins verse five with "in the same way".

In the same way as what?

Just like elders need to continually work on humility, we all do.

Being subject to the elders takes humility because the elders are going to get things wrong all the time.

Humility is how you're meant to act in all relationships though.

And we're given an important warning here – God actively opposes the proud and he's kind towards the humble.

Peter quotes from Proverbs 3:34:

1 Peter 5:5 NIV11 "God opposes the proud but shows favour to the humble."

So this point about loving leadership is really about humbling ourselves to follow the loving leadership of Christ.

He's the one that we can turn to for leadership in difficult times.

Humility before the Sovereign of Salvation (5:7-11)

Humble yourself before the sovereign of salvation.

We all feel anxious at times.

Anxiety is real and it can be absolutely crippling.

An important part of dealing with anxiety is trusting in God.

I'm not talking about some kind of generic trust in God – a spiritual "She'll be right, mate."

Our anxiety can be helped when we remember that we can trust our present and our future – all our concerns – to the Lord.

Yesterday, I wasn't facing the kind of suffering that Peter's talking about here.

However, I did have this sick feeling in the pit of my stomach and I was finding it hard to focus.

Unlike some of you, I've never had anxiety as a constant companion, but I do know what it feels like.

Usually I feel anxious because I'm stressed, overwhelmed and feel out of control.

It's what I feel like when all of my security's taken away.

Verse seven was such a great reminder.

1 Peter 5:7 NIV11 ⁷ Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

Cast your anxiety on him.

We can find our security in Jesus instead of ourselves.

I wrote this out as I was preaching to myself and as I did, that sick feeling went away and I had the peace of trusting in God alone.

We can trust him because our God is the God who cares.

God isn't just powerful, but he cares for you and wants the best for his people.

And that also means that you're never alone.

When no one else cares about what's going on, he still does.

There's nothing that's too big for him to be able to handle.

The reason we can trust him is because of his mighty hand, verse six.

He's in control of everything.

Whether you keep your job or lose it, God's in control.

Whether you get COVID-19 or not, God's in control.

Whether house prices go up or down, God's in control.

Whether you graduate with the marks you wanted or not, God's in control.

We can sometimes feel like our problems are so big, so overwhelming, so difficult that they're impossible.

For the God who made the universe with his words, it's simple though.

And there's nothing too small and insignificant for him to be concerned with.

Sometimes we believe the lie whispered to us by the deceiver that our problems – as big and real as they seem to us – would really be too small for God to care about.

Nup, not for the one who knows the number of hairs on your head.

Do you sometimes marvel, as I do, about the fact that God would even care about such a trivial detail?

A Christian in India who's seen persecution up close reminds us that God is always there to encourage us.

He's our constant rock and support.

This man writes:

"The Christian life is a life of risk. If you love the Lord and live your life, the risk is there. But God is always there to support us. God is always there to encourage us."³

Following Jesus can be risky, but don't forget that he's always there to help us.

So, be alert and of sober mind.

Peter's talked about this a number of times in the book already – in chapter 1:13 and 4:7.

The reason to be alert is because the devil's prowling around.

Verse eight is a well-known verse:

1 Peter 5:8 NIV11 ⁸ Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.

The devil's always looking for an opportunity to take you down.

The image of a lion is an interesting one, because he's a hunting enemy trying to take down his prey.

While God loves you and cares for you, the devil tries to convince you to harm yourself.

But his power is limited.

He can fire lies. He can suggest that God's people be afraid. He can intimidate you.

But he can't actually hurt you.

All he can do is convince you to turn your back on God.

So, be vigilant. Resist. Stand firm. Dig your heels and don't let go.

You don't resist this by doing mighty acts for God.

You do it by humbly trusting him.

Don't fall asleep at the wheel, but stand firm in the faith.

And remember that you're not alone.

The same kind of sufferings are being experienced by believers around the world.

It can be so easy to have a pity party for ourselves when there are others around the world in much more difficult positions than what we are.

To be honest, often the more we talk about how much we're suffering, the less we actually are.

1 in 8 Christians worldwide are persecuted for following Jesus.⁴

It's estimated that 260 million Christians face intimidation, prison, or even death for their faith in Jesus.

We need to stand together and pray that they would be resilient.

We want to pray that these Christians wouldn't suffer any longer, but they ask us to pray that they would stand firm.

Others face risks we can only imagine and we have so much to learn from Christians in places like North Korea, Afghanistan, Somalia, Libya, Pakistan, Eritrea, Sudan, Yemen, Iran and India.

Christians in many of these nations face arrest or violence.

In Somalia, there is no safe place for Christians.

In China, surveillance cameras, facial recognition software and even artificial intelligence have been used to target Chinese Christians and shut down their churches.

On Resurrection Sunday 2019, an extremist strapped with explosives came into a church courtyard in Sri Lanka where several children had gathered before church began and detonated his bomb.

Ultimately, our future rests on God himself.

He's the God of grace.

He's the one who will bring us into his eternal glory.

Now, yes, you might need to suffer for a little while.

But he will give us the strength and the resolve that we need, verse 10.

That's why Peter can close – just as he started – by praising God.

Even though there will be suffering, God is at work in it.

He's still in control so you can press on and resist evil in his power.

So, he closes with these words:

1 Peter 5:11 NIV11 ⁵To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.

Conclusion

2020 feels like the year that everyone wants to forget.

We've had it all: fires, floods and pestilence.

This's been a year of uncertainty.

There have been times when it's been impossible to know what'll happen in two days' time, let alone next week.

And our friends in Victoria are still right in the thick of it.

Everything is cancelled, everyone is scared of a certain disease.

Everything's cancelled, because of COVID-19.

As human beings, we want security in uncertain times.

Most of us struggle with uncertain times because we're not in control.

Where do you turn for security?

Your job? Money? Health? Relationships? Freedom to move around? Your citizenship?

2020 has been so unsettling because it's the year that's stripped away so many of the things that we usually turn to for security.

True security isn't found in anything we can do ourselves.

True security is found in suffering for Jesus now, with the hope of glory to come.

If you want security now and in the future, humbly trust in him.

¹ Acts 11:26

² Acts 26:28

³ Open Doors Australia, "Sixty Second Stories: Short Stories You Can Share" *Frontline Faith*, Issue 4, 2020, p.11.

⁴ Open Doors Australia, 'About Persecution', Open Doors Australia, accessed 12 September 2020, <https://www.opendoors.org.au/persecuted-christians/about-persecution/>.

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Big Idea: Where can we find the security we're looking for?

Big Question: True security is found by having the humility to trust in God.

Discussion Questions

1. What are some things that offer you security in this life?
2. What is the "fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you"?
3. Why can Christians rejoice even as they suffer?
4. What does this passage teach us about how Christians will face God's judgment?
5. Why does Peter address elders and those who are younger?
6. How does knowing God's character help us to deal with anxiety?
7. What can you do to stand against the devil?
8. How would you describe the connection between suffering and glory?