

Main Street

UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



1 Peter 5:1-11, 12-14 **“Situational Awareness”**

March 26, 2017
(4th Sunday in Lent)

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“Following Christ From City Center!”

I PETER 5:1-11, 12-14 "SITUATIONAL AWARENESS"

Peroration/Epilogue, Romans 15:30, Cohesive Thought Unit, 4:2 (1-2//2'-1')

7 Commands 1) vv.1-5a GLORY AND SUFFERING: ELDERS (Pastors).

Presbyteros = Elders Not Just Older, Honorific, Ex. 24:1 (LXX), 1 Macc. 14:20

a) v.1 Elders/Christ/Glory (3 Items).

Pattern = Address Leaders At The End (e.g. Romans 16:1-16)

- 1a So (*oun*) I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow (co) elder¹ Collegial, *co-elder* (neologism), Credentials (1a)
b and a (co) witness² of (about) the sufferings of Christ Disciple→Apostle(1:1)→Elder, Mt. 23:8-12, History (1b)
c as well as a partaker³ in the glory that is to be revealed. D.A., Person-To-Person, Common Future (1c)

Peter Assumes *Servant Leaders*, "Feed My Sheep" (Jn. 21:16), //Acts 20:18-35

Command 1 b) vv.2-3 Pastoral Duties And Proper Attitudes.

Feed, Protect, Discipline = Attentive Care

- 2a a Tend the flock (Lit. "Shepherd the sheep") of God 2:25, God's Flock, Not Ours, Ezek. 34, Counsel/Commands (2)
b that is *your charge* (portion), Posting, *not by... but (3x): ephanaphora*
b c not by constraint but willingly, (1) Not Unwillingly
c' not for shameful gain but eagerly, (2) Did. 12:5, Mt. 10:10, Paid, For God
3 b' not as domineering over those in *your charge* (3) *cleros/clergy*, Pagan Form Of Leadership
a' but being examples to the flock. *typos/ type*, Lifestyle: Word + Deed, Heb. 13:20, Lk. 12:32, Mt. 15:24

1) Concentric (a-b-c-c'-b'-a'), 2) Imperative (v.2a) + 3 Qualifications (vv.2b, c, 3)

a') vv.4-5a Chief Shepherd/Glory/ Elders.

- 4 And when the Chief Shepherd is manifested Jesus, John 10, Is. 63:11, T. Jud. 8:1
you will obtain the unfading crown of glory. 1 Cor. 9:5, Greek Games, Floral (amaranths), Crown Promise(3)
5a Likewise you that are younger, Deference (4)
Command 2 be subject (show deference) to the elders. 2:13, 18, 3:1, 5; 1 Jn. 2:12-15, Mentors/Wisdom

2) vv.5b-7 TWO COMMANDS ON HUMILITY + SCRIPTURE QUOTES

Humility Not A Virtue In The Ancient World, Negative/Weak/Slavish

a) v.5b-c Mutual Humility Towards One Another: Scriptural Promise Of God's Grace.

- Command 3
b Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, v. Culture, Command + Scripture + Promise
c because "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble." Prov. 3:34 (LXX), //James 4:6
Where Can I Serve?

b) vv.6-7 Mutual Humility Towards God: Scriptural Promise Of God's Care As Creatures.

- Command 4
6 Therefore (*oun*, Then) be humbled therefore under the mighty hand of God, p.v., Mt. 23:12, Lk. 14:11, 18:14
that in due time he may exalt you. Surrender = Command + Promise + Scripture
7 "Casting all your anxieties on him," for he cares about you. Ps. 55:22
Theme Of Care In 1 Peter: 1:5, 21, 2:9-10, 3:12, 4:14, 19, Mt. 6:15-27

2') vv.8-9 TWO COMMANDS ON SPIRITUAL WARFARE + REASONS.

Life As Battlefield, Real Danger, Command + Reason

a) v.8 The Devil: Command And Warning Concerning Awareness.

- Command 5,6
8a 1 Be sober (self-controlled)! Be watchful! Echoes 1:13, 4:7, Emotive Rhetoric, "Pay Attention! Wake Up!"
b 2 Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, *diabolos, ekphrasis* (hearing to sight)
seeking some one to devour. City Officials, Reason: Real Danger // *Rhet. Her.* 4.39.51
Trope = *descriptio*, Lion As Familiar Image, Metaphor = Target: devil // Source: lion

b) v.9 The Devil: Command And Warning Concerning Resistance And Suffering.

- Command 7
9a 1 Resist him, firm (strong) in your faith, Command To Resist In Faith, No Subordination To Evil
b 2 knowing that the same experience of suffering Reason: Not Alone/Solidarity, *A Mighty Fortress*
is required of your brotherhood throughout the world. Mid 60s, Nero, Hostile Change In Climate
Church Really Is Interconnected, Ecumenical, One

1') vv.10-11 SUFFERING AND GLORY: ALL, PROMISE + DOXOLOGY (3 Items).

- 10a And after you have suffered a little while, Suffering Is Temporary/Indeterminate, *Stand And Resist!*
b the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, Accumulation (4 Futures), Our Hope
will himself restore,¹ establish,² and strengthen³ you. 3 Synonym Series: Actions Of Christ
11 To him be the dominion (might) for ever and ever. Amen. Concluding Doxology + Amen
Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.39.15

vv.12-14 LETTER CLOSING: Greetings + 3 Virtues Highlighted.

Postscript, Scribe/Courier/Interpreter,

- 12 a By Silvanus, a faithful brother as I regard him, I have written briefly to you, Acts 15:22-23, 1 Thess. 1:1, 2 Thess. 1:1
exhorting and declaring that this is the true grace of God; Peter's Associates, Nature Of The Message
stand fast in it. *stand fast*, Ephesians 6:10-20
Last Command
13 b She who is at *Babylon* (i.e. code for Rome/exile), who is likewise *chosen*, sends you greetings; Inclusions //1:1-2
and so does my son Mark. Acts 12:2, Social Networks, Church, See Papius On Mark
14a,b Greet one another with the kiss of love./ Peace to all of you that are in Christ. 2 Results Of God's Grace In Christ

1 Peter 5:1-11, 12-14. 3

A Brief Treatment Of 1 Peter 5:1-11, 12-14

With these verses we come to last two thought units of 1 Peter. The *Peroration* sums up the themes of the letter and makes a direct emotional appeal to the audience as it addresses issues of leadership (vv.1-5), humility and deference (vv.5b-7), spiritual warfare and resistance (vv.8-9), and finally suffering and hope (vv.10-11). The *Letter Closing* includes the scribe/courier with commendation, letter summary and exhortation (v.12), sends corporate and individual greetings from the Roman church (v.13), names colleagues (Silvanus, Mark), and is built around the three virtues of *grace, love, and peace*.

The surface structure of vv.1-11 is a 4:2 concentric pattern (1. vv.1-5a, 2. vv.5b-7 // 2' vv.8-9, 1' vv.10-11. Inclusions are *suffering/Christ/glory* (v.1//v.10). Peter describes himself in a "series of 3" as *co-elder/witness/partaker* (v.1) parallel to a second "series of 3," *restore/establish/strengthen*, in v.10. Seven imperatives tie the whole together (*Tend the flock* [v.2], *be subject* [v.5a], *Clothe yourselves* [v.5b], *be humbled* [v.6], *Be sober* [v.8a], *Be watchful* [v.8a], *Resist him* [v.9a]. The two central sections (2//2') each contain two commands, the first on humility (vv.5b-c, 6-7) with supportive citations (Prov. 3:34 [LXX], Ps. 55:23), the second on spiritual conflict (vv.8, 9) with supportive reasons (the devil is a predator [v.8b]; suffering is common [v.9b]). The address is first person from Peter to *the elders among you* (v.1), *you that are younger* (v.5a), *all of you* (vv.5b-11, 14). *Grace* (vv.5c, 10b, 12b) is a link word between the epilogue and closing, as is *Christ* (vv.1, 10b, 14b). A doxology (v.11) ends the Peroration.

The use of *I exhort* (Gk. *parakaleo*, e.g. Romans 15:30, 1 Cor. 16:15) signals the near end of the letter. In deliberate collegiality, Peter names himself a *co-elder/co-witness/partaker*, but earlier as *apostle* (1:1). The past *sufferings of Christ* (v.1b) and *the glory that is to be revealed* (v.1c) mark the origin and goal of the movement. The opening section (1. vv.1-5) is a 3:1 chiasm (a-b-a') with *elder-glory//glory-elders* as inclusions (v.1//vv.4-5). The center (b. vv.2-3) has a 6:2 concentric pattern: *flock* (a//a'), *your charge* (b//b'), *not by... but* (c//c'); an overlapping ordering is a command (v.2a) plus three ethical contrasts (vv.2b-3). The dominant metaphor is *shepherd/flock* with biblical precedent (e.g. Ps. 23, Ezek. 34) implying faithful, attentive care under the *Chief Shepherd*. Each elder has a sub-flock (Gk. *cleros*/portion) they are to serve *willingly* and *eagerly* as *examples* (another "series of 3"). Despite collegiality, the hierarchy of Christ, Peter, elders, flock is intrinsic. Jesus wants his people led skillfully with heart and integrity by those under supervision. The motivation is Christ's own commendation as he bestows a victor's wreath (v.4). The call for deference from younger elders to elder elders! correlates with a culture that prized the wisdom of the experienced (v.5). Among servant leaders, there is respect and mentoring.

That *the younger* are to *be subject to the elders* is a bridge to the next section (2. vv.5b-7) on the virtue of *humility*, something Jesus modeled that was not valued in Greco-Roman culture as an attitude required of slaves in an honor/shame culture that was vertically ordered. The church is to don humility as a cloak that encircles; you do not want to be *stiffed* by God (v.5c). The world sees the unusually kind way believers treat one another, but the deep source of the practice is our being humbled *under the mighty hand of God* who *cares* for us in a tough neighborhood. The next section (2' vv.8-9) highlights a source of anxiety as *your adversary the devil* (v.8) who is as present and dangerous as a roving, hungry lion on the perimeter of the flock. A double command (v.8a, *Be sober! Be watchful!*) calls for vigilance. Our foe is to be firmly resisted in faith; this is the common pressure and pain of all Jesus' followers (v.9). Humility and Militancy are not contrary but complements. The Peroration closes with a call to perseverance, hope, and praise (1' vv.10-11). Better days are coming, and on the way we sing! Pain may not be avoided, but it can be out-hoped and out-lasted. In the end Christ wins, and we with him. For this we give praise now, "To him be the dominion.... Amen." The church is one, and we are the orchard where grace, love, and peace are sown and grown. We are now exiles in a foreign land, but not forever. It's all his, and ours!

SITUATIONAL AWARENESS

“Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour!”

There is a predator. We are the prey. Stay alert!

1 P E T E R 5 : 8 b

In light of the soon-to-come change of pastors at Main Street, I add a note of perspective. An ad was found in the *Milwaukee Sentinel* of July 16, 1875:

“Wanted: A rector for St. James' (Episcopal) Church. He must possess all Christian graces and a few worldly ones; must have such tact and disposition as will enable him to side with all parties in the parish on all points, giving offense to none; should possess a will of his own, but agree with all the vestry; must be socially inclined and of dignified manners— affable to all, neither running after the wealthy nor turning his back upon the poor; a man of high-low church tendencies preferred. Must be willing to preach first-class sermons and do first-class work on second-class compensation— salary should not be so much of an object as the desire to be a zealous laborer in the vineyard; should be able to convince all that they are miserable sinners without giving offense.

Each sermon must be short, but complete in itself— full of old-fashioned theology in modern dress: deep but polished, and free from the eloquence peculiar to newly-graduated theologians; should be young enough to be enthusiastic, but possess judgment of one of ripe years and experience. Only he who possesses the above qualifications need apply. To such a one will be given steady employment for a term of years.”¹

¹ PreachingToday.com search under 1 Peter 5:1-11.

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I wonder who applied for the job of Rev. Chameleon? And how long he lasted?

Now contrast this hodge-podge of demands for a people-pleaser with the simplicity and directness of the job description from the man to whom Jesus said, “Tend my lambs,” and, “Feed my sheep.”²

Simon Peter did not pull rank. Instead, in his first letter to the churches of Asia Minor, he came alongside his peers and younger colleagues, the servant leaders the church called *elders* after the Jewish model, and he called to mind their common work: to do for God’s people what a shepherd does for a flock.³ It didn’t need a lot of detail; everyone knew what it meant: lead, protect, feed, tend, care, mend, watch over, out in the morning and back in the evening; one of those *whatever it takes* jobs. Wool and mutton are valuable, but people are more valuable. Under the crud and neglect, they all bear God’s image.

Now there are other titles that apply to Peter along his journey, and I count five: first *fisherman*- which is where Jesus first found him early one morning; then *disciple* or *learner* which is what he became for three years as an understudy after answering the call, “Follow me.” He then became a *coward* and a *traitor* and a *liar*- which I count as one title- because he was not the brave man he imagined, and Jesus saw and said he would fail. Then, after his merciful restoration by the risen Lord, he received a new title, *apostle*, which means one who has seen the risen Jesus and is sent out on mission. But the title he uses here is none of these, though he does use the heavyweight title *apostle* in the first verse of the letter. Instead he uses the word *elder*, in Greek *prebyteros*, from which we get the words *presbyter* and *priest* and *Presbyterian*, but in that day it simple meant an older man, one who was wise and worthy of trust. And not just *elder* but *fellow-elder* to emphasize their common calling, sort of like

² John 20:15-16.

³ On leadership in the early church see Ben Witherington, *Letters and Homilies for Hellenized Christians, Volume II: 1-2 Peter* (Downer’s Grove, ILL: IVP, 2007), Excursus, “A CLOSER LOOK: Leadership Structures in the Early Church,” 221-224; also Thomas Oden, *Pastoral Theology* (New York, NY: HarperCollins 1983), Chapter 5, “Shepherding as a Pivotal Analogy,” 49-63.

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the Pope calling a newly ordained *a fellow priest*. “Therefore,” he says in verse 1, “I appeal to the elders among you, as a fellow elder...” And since I am an *elder* by ordination, Peter speaks across the years to me, and to your new pastor James McCoy Bruce. We live in the circle of St. Peter’s concern.

For thirty years Peter had been a traveling shepherd, telling the stories and story of his friend Jesus wherever he and his wife⁴ traveled and planting new churches among the scattered Jews of the Empire, much as Paul did among the Gentiles.⁵ And he marked the boundaries of the new thing God was doing in an interesting way to signal two important convictions of the new faith: 1) a Messiah who suffered and 2) a coming glorious future, and so he writes, “... and a co-witness of the sufferings of Christ as well as a partaker of the glory that is to be revealed.” Our faith includes suffering and glory, pain and hope, and in this world as it is they are always in tension with each other. But one day the first will be gone and only the second endure.

The Jewish Messiah, the expected one, Jesus, chose to suffer rather than disobey the call of God; he was faithful and trusting to the end, and it was a bitter end. The world did its very worst to him, an innocent man tortured to death in public, hung up like a slave or criminal, and God vindicated him utterly by raising him from the dead. The whole of what’s wrong with the world came down on his head and crushed him, but God’s gave him a wonderful, new embodied life, and this is the key event of history, a God who freely enters history this deeply in order to win us back and to remove the blockages of sin and evil and death that held us. And this means a glorious future yet to be revealed, but now known in part and in preview. But at the tipping point of time, when God says, “That’s enough!” Jesus will appear to claim his prize, and that’s us and the whole of creation. He made it; he came for it; he paid the price, and it will all be made new.

Heaven above after death is a great interim, a fantastic vacation, but what

⁴ 1 Corinthians 9:5.

⁵ For a sketch of Peter and his ministry, see Witherington, *Letters and Homilies*, “The Peter of the New Testament and Early Christian History,” 51-54.

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we're headed for is not creation abandoned and trashed, but everything set right and healed and made glorious again. We go upstairs at death, and at the end the upstairs is coming down to swallow and transform the downstairs, just as we pray, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, and Where? *On earth as it now is in heaven.* History as we know it— the long trek of pain and death— has an expiration date. In Jesus, Peter had witnessed the depth of God's love and the wonder of his future with us. And that is what his fellow elders— then and now, Elder Phil and Elder James— are to focus on— on the fullness of who Jesus is for the sake of his people, now and later. Teaching is part of our duty.

From time to time I watch the Velocity Channel; it's all about cars. I love the ones where they take a old rust heap, a completely trashed muscle car— say a 69 fastback Mustang— and turn it into something better than new. And I think, "That's what God's doing with me." Made new, better than new. At the end of show they always bring in the owner and pull the cover off the masterpiece, and the look on their face— surprise and delight— is exactly what God's after with us. The contrast of *the before* and *the after* is what the code word *salvation* is all about. Someone cares enough to remake us, not trash us as hopeless. And one day, we will be revealed, which is why Peter included himself as a *partaker, a participant in the glory that is to be revealed*, and if you look at people this way it makes a big difference. People matter; people— no matter how messed up— are worth it. Jesus suffered for them, and he has plans to remake them into a show piece. And if he put up with them, so can pastors, and so can you!

So if this is how elders should see ourselves and others, as God's long term rebuild projects, then what do you do between now and then? Well, as Peter instructed them in verse 2, "Tend the flock of God that is your portion, your charge." Not your flock, God's flock. Not someone else's flock, but your own appointment. Not to be *fleeced* but expertly tended. Not because you *have to* but because you *want to* please the Lord who called you, so do it willingly— and people can always tell if its just a religious job or a real calling. The motive matters, and if you're more concerned for personal raises than the welfare of the church has a whole, people soon know it. And if you preach it, you must live it, not perfectly but credibly and steadily knowing your example matters, as Peter noted, "... not as domineering over those in your charge but being *examples* to the flock." If it's a duty, go first; if a privilege, go last. Tithe, love

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your wife, take time with the poor, write your own sermons from scratch, preach and teach the Scriptures and the church's faith at every opportunity, do good funerals and weddings, be a bridge over racial and class barriers, visit the ill and neglected, make and keep appointments, bear up under pain, lead a prayer meeting, start a class meeting, fast, turn interruptions into opportunities, be open to the gifts and energies of the Holy Spirit, spend time with God, model good health habits, people are watching and listening!

I'm told General Eisenhower kept a piece of string in pocket. He'd pull it in one direction, the push it in the opposite on a table top. It was his lesson for senior leaders, and after a time of pulling and pushing, he'd say, "Pull it, and it'll follow wherever you wish. Push it, and it goes nowhere at all."⁶ Examples to the flock, examples to the soldiers; that was Peter, that was Ike.

Human motivation is complex, and there's nothing wrong with the reward motive if it's intrinsic, part of the thing itself and not tacked on. So what keeps pastors pastoring day in and day out, much of their work hidden and secret? For me *duty* is a chief motivator; it's what I promised to do, and I've found that making and keeping promises keeps me straight. But it's not duty for duty's sake, which can be a grim thing; it's duty in response to privilege, to calling, to being personally rescued by Jesus; it's duty as debt, and the ultimate reward for this work is relational, to have the *Chief Shepherd*— using the athletic imagery of the day— grant you *an unfading crown of glory*, a victor's wreath.

I had an odd day last week. I visited five retired United Methodist pastors, four in their 90s, one in his 80s. And when I hear stories of what it meant to pastor a small town church during World War II with most of the young men gone, or what it was like to be a service chaplain in Korea, or what it was like to have your legs frozen in the Battle of Bulge, it humbles me and I listen all the more because that's where the best learning comes. "Likewise," says Peter, "you that are younger elders, show deference to the older elders."⁷

⁶ PreachingToday.com search under 1 Peter 5:1-11.

⁷ The reading of Donald Senior, *1 Peter* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003), 141.

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The interesting thing in Peter’s strategy is that he included this brief section on the role of a pastor in a letter to be read publicly in multiple house churches all over the interior of Asia Minor. It’s important for churches to know who we are and who we’re not, what we are to do and what we are to leave to others. And for a current version of this report, you can read the job description of a pastor in our newest *Book of Discipline*,⁸ along with the list of failings that can have you put on trial and kicked out,⁹ along with the vows of ordination in our *Book of Worship*,¹⁰ and all are sobering. You promise to do it; and we line out what the *it* is; you have supervision; you have reports; and if you cross a line, we kick you out as unfit, just like the military. No sane person would do this as a career, but you might as a calling.

Now the way Peter organizes his thoughts, with the aid of his helper Silvanus,¹¹ is to have the end of one paragraph be the bridge to the next in a chain of ideas. The first paragraph ends on a note of deference, the younger to the older elders; the second picks it up with the related practice of humility, which is for all God’s people, “Clothe yourselves, *all of you*, with humility towards one another.” Then a warning and promise from the wisdom of Proverbs, “because God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”

Humility is not about thinking badly of yourself; it’s rather having an accurate estimate of your dependency, a keen awareness of your frailty and sin, your abiding status as a creature before God, and if you stay grounded in this self-estimate, guess what? It shows up in love and mercy to others; you will not be as impatient and demanding as you would otherwise; you learn the pleasure of living with a gracious God instead of being stiff-armed by God because you are a Christian jerk. Simply, humble people are just easy to be around. They create spaces to taste God’s amazing grace. And in the way the ancient world

⁸ Paragraph 340.

⁹ Para. 2702.1

¹⁰ Pages 685-699.

¹¹ Likely both scribe and courier. Peter could likely read and write but was not *lettered*.

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was organized, with everyone trying to increase their honor at the expense of others, humility was not valued; it's how slaves and nobodies were expected to behave around their betters. And so for the church to specialize in the practice of humility and deference, with Jesus as the ultimate foot-washer and cross-bearer, was to be so different from the world around them as to be thought strange and odd and different, even threatening to the dominant cultural project.

So when we resist consumerism with quality and simplicity, and when we take time to listen to people no one listens do, and when we honor one another with chastity and self-control, and when we look for common ground instead of increasingly polarization, and when the place the politics of the kingdom of God over our partisan loyalties of our red or blue tribe, we too will be seen as different and intriguing, worth checking out.

If we're just a reflection of the culture with a thin layer of spiritual laquer, why should people bother? But if we are creatively different in the right places, they might want know why, and the answer is the one we follow; Jesus is having good effects on us. And if, as Peter did, you regularly place yourself under the mighty hand of God, which is the image of kneeling before a king with all your fears and dreams, it will go well with you, because God cares. On your knees and honest before God: this is where we face our frailty and corruption and find, surprisingly, a God of care and grace and love and hope. And when we carry this experience out into our affairs, it shows up as humility. Humility is a byproduct, not something that can be produced by direct action.

The most revolutionary thing we can say to another person is this, "God cares for you, and we do too." Showing up in another person's life, whatever their faith or lack thereof, is a powerful argument for the God we claim to know, the God who— in the midst of blinding pain— cares. Perhaps the greatest privilege of my role is that I get to show up in people's lives, in hospital rooms, at their doorstep, in the best and worst moments of life and say those words.

Now as I pondered the logical connections between paragraphs two and three and the abrupt shift from humility to spiritual warfare, I saw something I'd not seen before, which should not surprise me since reading Scripture is a conversation with God, and in conversations there are always surprises.

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Did you know that anxiety, the kind of pervasive fear and worry that cripples, is on the rise?¹² Just last year Ruth Whippman, a keen British observer of American life, wrote a book titled, *America the Anxious: How Our Pursuit of Happiness Is Creating a Nation of Nervous Wrecks*.

I'm grateful for all the new psychiatric medicines we've come up with in the last few decades. For those hard-wired for depression or anxiety, they are life-savers, just as insulin is for diabetics, but there is a level of anxiety appropriate to human life, not because it's a mental illness but because there are things to be rightly feared. If someone is really after you, it's not paranoia; it's a threat you need to respond to with a clear strategy.

Not all anxiety is to be medicated; only a doctor can decide that; but some of it is to be understood as an early warning system for a genuine threat. We do as Peter suggested, and in prayer *cast all our anxieties* on God for him to sort out. Prayer is therapy; it's healing; it's the only place you can lay out all the mess of life and all its contradictions and conundrums without fear of being labeled. God already knows, but God delights to listen because it strengthens the relationship between the two of you; it builds intimacy. Sometimes you walk away with answers and insights, and sometimes you walk away from the appointment just glad to have laid it all out.

So we live in an anxious world, and the key is to sort out fears into a least two piles: the nutty ones, and the real ones, and that- I think- is the logical linkage between paragraphs 2 and 3. Someone or some thing is really after you, as he was after Jesus for forty days in the wilderness, as he is after all persons, only most of them don't know it. They see only the surface of life.

There is a discipline among military commanders; it's known and prized as *situational awareness*. It is intuition trained to expect and prepare for what cannot yet be seen, a kind of third eye. It's scanning the horizon and reading reports looking for clues. In the church we call it *discernment*, the gift and skill

¹² (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 2016).

of anticipation.¹³ So Peter, a master of this skill, issues two brief commands not to be intoxicated by the way of the world or to fall asleep in its arms but to *Be sober! Be watchful!* And then the reason: behind the appearances of this world is a constant threat, an ancient threat, a vicious, evil threat, one who wants to tear you down and take you out, a very intelligent foe, a master of probing maneuvers to find weak spots, a fiend, one Jesus resisted and exposed every day. And who is this? Peter tells us in verse 8, “Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour.” When Peter invoked this vivid figure, it’s so his audience would see and feel the threat and that the lesser known invisible figure, *the devil*, would be illumined by a better known predator, *the ferocity of a hungry lion*.

I also know, from two learned articles, that feeding prisoners to the beasts as not just a fact in Rome but in many of the larger eastern cities of Asia in the first century.¹⁴ So it was not just a metaphor but a real political threat intended to arouse deep feelings, but behind and beyond the metaphor and the political situation is a larger threat, a real *diabolos*, a true if invisible adversary, an evil fallen angel who hates us and scouts us and wants us for lunch, though there are many other ways for a unwary traveler to be devoured.¹⁵ One of the jobs of pastors, indeed of all who believe with Jesus that such powers are not myths but have true status, is to extract people from his paws and claws.

It is one thing for me to study and unfold the Scripture before you on Sunday from a safe distance, and something different to share encounters from my battle reports, the place where the text is played out in life.

¹³ For a fresh treatment, see Larry Warner, *Discernment: God’s Will & Living Jesus* (Tulsa, OK: Barefoot Publishing, 2016).

¹⁴ On the research, see Boris A. Paschke, “The Roman *ad bestias* Execution as a Possible Historical Background for 1 Peter 5:8,” *JSNT* 28:4 (2000), 489-500; also David Horrell, Bradley Arnold, Travis Williams, “Visuality, Vivid Description, and the Message of 1 Peter: The Significance of the Roaring Lion (1 Peter 5:8),” *JBL*, 132, No. 3 (2013), 697-716.

¹⁵ For a sketch of the devil, see Witherington, *Letters and Homilies*, “A CLOSER LOOK: Christians Having a Devil of a Time,” 239-242.

It was the Spring of 2007. I'd gone home for lunch and I remember making a pimento cheese sandwich on whole wheat with a glass of milk. There I sat at the table when a knock came at the door. "Who's that?" I thought and went to find out.

Standing outside our screen porch was a young woman I'd never met and in her hands a carton of eggs. "Hello, my name is Ann. I'm your new neighbor. My mom has chickens, and I brought you some fresh eggs."

Though it was against my normal judgment, she was so friendly I invited her in, put the eggs in the fridge, asked her to take a seat. What I immediately noticed was the jewelry she was wearing, full of signs and symbols. Matching rings, bracelets, necklace.

And as soon as she found out I was a pastor, she began to gush about her life of troubles. Precious little boy from a broken, live-in relationship of which there had been several. She was pro-life and left him because he wanted to pay for a procedure. Getting away from the drama in Andrews and moving to Georgetown, unable to pay the rent, by her own admission overweight and depressed, a blotched complexion, tattooed, once had dreams for college, and me trying to wolf down a sandwich and get to my next appointment, but apparently the Lord had other ideas, so I listened.

And then Ann dropped the bomb in the form of a contradictory statement many make these days, that she was *spiritual but not religious*. I sighed, "Oh no, not another one of those!" She'd grown up in a country Baptist Church, said Yes to Jesus and been baptized, but the troubles of her recent life led her on a spiritual search for a better deal, and now she was exploring Wicca, a nature religion full of spirits and spells and new powers to make life work. Love magic. Success magic. The devil's playground for disappointed Christians, something more exotic than "Just as I am, without one plea, but that thy blood was shed for me..." Something hip.

And when I asked, "Is that what the matching jewelry is all about?" she looked startled, "Yes it is," and began to explain the runes and signs in an elaborate story. I prayed, "Help me Lord, this is about to get ugly."

"Ann," I said, "thanks for the eggs, and Yes, your boy can ride his Big Wheel on our big driveway as long as you watch him, but I have some very bad

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news. You are an idolater. You are worshiping false gods. You are playing on the devil's playground. You are being deceived and headed for pain and loss."

"What do you mean?" she asked, crestfallen. I then very simply explained that Christians are forbidden throughout Scripture to pursue such knowledge or power or spiritual experiences outside the bounds of the faith because they are disloyal to God and open us to all forms of deception and spiritual bondage from their sponsors in the dark side of the spiritual world. It's OK to be a disappointed, struggling Christians, but it is sin and evil and finally stupid to think you can pursue the occult without consequences. The darkness has fangs.

I could tell I struck a nerve because of her answer, "Oh, no one ever told me that. I was just looking for answers; it was kind of exciting and exotic, and there's not much exciting in my life now. I feel dead-ended."

"I know you do, and the fact that you came by at just this time is no accident. I'm not your judge. I am a doctor of the soul who just gave you a diagnosis. This stuff will shrivel your soul and kill you. It's toxic."

Her next question surprised me, "So what should I do with the jewelry? I bought it on a Wiccan website. It cost me over two hundred and fifty dollars. Should I sell it to someone else?"

"No," I said, "You should destroy it as a costly personal sign of your breaking with evil and returning to Christ."

"You mean now?"

"That's up do you, and whether you do or not, we need to talk again soon. Jesus wants you to come home to him and get rid of all this spiritual sludge."

"I want to do it now."

It was so weird. I went and got a hammer. She took off the bling piece by piece and put it in a pile on the place at in front of her. I then said, "Let's go outside," and on the concrete driveway in the middle of the day I lifted a hammer to destroy the symbols of the dark kingdom. Just before the first blow fell, a thought came powerfully to mind, "No, let her do it," and I said, "The job is yours, not mine." She smashed it all, and the more she hammered the fiercer she became, and when it was over she smiled at me.

But breaking free is not quite so easy. It comes in layers. About a week

later, when I asked her about the spell-casting, she told me she had a trunk full of spell books in her car, and when we opened it, I mean a trunk full. I asked, “Why didn’t you tell me about these earlier?”

She said, “I was a little bit scared to make the spirits angry. They might hurt me and Jason.”

I was ticked but held back, “Our Jesus is bigger and badder than an puny spirit. You can’t count on his and my protection, so get the garbage bags. It took two of the big ones so heavy was the load, and when she added up the price, it was way more than the jewelry. No money for rent, but no credit limit for her new gods and goddesses whose creeping control was taking her captive. To the dump they went to burn.

Ann came to church that Sunday with Jason, and I told no one, but she told everyone who’d listen about the eggs and the pimento cheese sandwich and her change of heart and the cost of busted jewelry and trashed spells books. It took a while to stabilize her return to Christ. Lots of tears and prayers around our kitchen table. We prayed, and she got a job at the Post Office. Jason loved his new Big Wheel track. No more shack-ups, no more Weed, working on forgiveness for her mom and dad who divorced, and on occasion a dozen fresh eggs for an unlikely warrior who took up her cause. She moved to Salisbury a year later with a new job. She’s a member of a United Methodist Church and on the Church Council. She has now found that Jesus is faithful.

From such encounters, and my own battles, I do not doubt the power of Peter’s imagery or the reality behind the metaphor, “Be sober. Be watchful! Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in our faith, knowing that the same experience of suffering is required of your brothers and sisters throughout the world.”

This battle is everywhere on multiple fronts at the same time And sometimes, as I said earlier, it’s the job of pastors and helpers to extract the ignorant and foolish from the jaws and paws of a killer. And I will tell you that in the hours, and even for days after such an event, you feel disoriented. And the sad thing is that you cannot share such at a pastor’s meeting, at least not in our carefully circumscribed circles of conformity. It would mark you as *one of those* who believe the Scriptures and the Lord’s and the Apostles’ own

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encounters ought to me taken as models for today. I find it refreshing that the Prince of Apostles, a man soon to be martyred in Rome and crucified head down, could move so easily and seamlessly between the topics of pastoral leadership, community humility, and the spiritual battle that is all around us all time. How selective we have become.

Julie Mandel edits the “Nuremberg Project” for the Rutgers’ *Journal of Law and Religion*. She writes: "When people think about the Holocaust, they think about the crimes against Jews, but here's a different perspective. They wanted to eliminate the Jews altogether, but they were also looking to eliminate Christianity." Fragile, typewritten documents from the 1940s lay out the Nazi plan in grim detail: Take over the churches from within, using party sympathizers. Discredit, jail, or kill Christian leaders. Re-indoctrinate the congregants. Give them a new faith in Germany's Third Reich. Says Mandel:

"The best evidence of an anti-church plan is the systematic nature of different steps in that persecution: the campaign for the suppression of denominational and youth organizations, the campaign against denominational schools, the defamation campaign against the clergy were supported by the entire regimented press, by Nazi Party meetings, by traveling party speakers."¹⁶

And you think it can’t happen again? The cultural pressure to minimize Jesus within the church, to sanitize him and make him a polite mascot of our projects rather than a fierce and loving Lord who demand our loyalty and offers his protection, is everywhere. Where do you think that pressure ultimately comes from? Jesus is shrinking in his own church. Other agendas are being sold to us. And are you, as Peter counseled, alert and aware, or have you lulled off? This faith is not a pleasant walk in the park, at least not yet. We live on contested territory.

¹⁶ Edward Colimore, "Papers Reveal Nazi Aim: End Christianity," *Philadelphia Inquirer* (1-09-02).
