

IN CASE OF FIERY TRIALS

IN PUBLIC BUILDINGS TODAY, fire extinguishers are mounted on the walls. The instructions are usually quite plain and simple: “In case of fire: (1) Pull ring pin. (2) Start from 8 feet back. (3) Aim at base of fire. Use extinguisher upright. (4) Squeeze lever. Sweep side to side.” Following these four steps could save your life.

Do you know what steps to take when you’re going through personal problems that seem like fiery trials? Do you know how to deal with—and overcome—the heat? Trials are inevitable in this life. “Man is born to trouble as surely as sparks fly upward” (Job 5:7). Jesus said, “In this world you will have trouble” (John 16:33). The question is: Do you know how to handle these promised troubles?

In the first century, the apostle Peter wrote a letter to Christians who were in the midst of a “fiery trial” (1 Pet. 4:12 KJV). Living in various parts of Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey), these believers were facing opposition, intimidation, and persecution because of their faith in Jesus Christ. How were they to cope? In 1 Peter 5:6-11 the apostle gives them some explicit instructions.

There are many wonderful promises in the Bible that provide hope and strength in times of trouble. This passage in 1 Peter 5 not only includes wonderful promises but also gives a set of four instructions to follow “in case of fire” so that you can escape the flames unharmed.

1. *Humble yourselves under God’s mighty hand (v. 6).* You must recognize and accept the fact that every trial is part of God’s plan for your life. Either by divine intention or divine permission, you are passing through the fire. Ultimately, it is *his* hand that is pressing down upon you. Humble yourself and submit to his wise and good plan. Persecution was God’s will for the Christians of Asia Minor (1 Pet. 4:19). Peter wrote to them: “Humble yourselves . . . under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.”

Our Lord Jesus Christ is the perfect example of such humble submission. In the Garden of Gethsemane he prayed, “Not my will, but yours be done” (Luke 22:42)—even though his submission to the Father’s will meant the fiery suffering of the cross. And God did lift him up in due time: On the third day he raised Jesus from the dead and exalted him to his own right hand in heaven.

Likewise, humbly submit yourself to God in the midst of your trials (like Jesus, you can do this in prayer), and he will raise you up at just the right time. He may change the troublesome circumstances, or he may change you. Either way, you will be delivered.

2. *Cast all your anxiety on him (v. 7).* Peter assumes that Christians will be prone to worry when they encounter fiery trials. Anxious thoughts naturally tend to multiply within us. How can we handle these worries? Like a heavy bundle or burden, throw your anxiety onto the Lord. Cast *all* your anxiety upon him. His strong shoulders can easily bear the load.

Is your tendency to cast your worry on God and then take it back again? Or do you give him only part of the burden? Don’t proudly try to manage the problem on your own. Humbly acknowledge your need of God’s help. Go to him in prayer, turning every anxious thought into a petition (see Phil. 4:6-7). Fulfill whatever responsibilities are yours in the situation, and then leave the outcome in God’s hands.

Why follow this course? Peter says, "Because [God] cares for you." You are his concern. You matter to the Lord. As a good shepherd cares for his sheep, so the Lord cares for you.

3. Resist the devil (vv. 8-9). In order to resist the devil, you must first be awake and alert to his activity. While God intends every trial for your good, "your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour." His goal is to use the very same trials to destroy you. Watch out!

While Emperor Nero was beginning to torch the Christians in Rome and throw them to the lions, Peter knew that behind this cruel earthly tyrant was a spiritual adversary far more dangerous. Beware of the accusations, doubts, and fears with which Satan can fill your mind. At times, his roars become so loud that we barely hear the promises of God. But Peter instructs us: "Resist him, standing firm in the faith."

Exactly how do you resist the devil? In a prayer of faith, claim the victory that Christ has already won over our adversary. "The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work" (1 John 3:8). Christ defeated Satan by his death on the cross and by his resurrection. We share in that victory by faith. In his classic allegory *Pilgrim's Progress*, John Bunyan pictures this truth when the hero of his story, Christian, comes to a place on his journey where there are two roaring lions on either side of a narrow pass. He finds, though, that they are chained and can't quite reach the path. Christian walks safely between them.

In addition, read Ephesians 6:10-18, where there is a description of God's armor, his divine equipment that enables us to resist the devil. As you begin each new day (as a hymn says), "Put on the gospel armor, each piece put on with prayer." With this preparation you will be able to keep standing against every attack.

4. Keep perspective (vv. 9-10). This final instruction is a summary of two thoughts found in 1 Peter 5. It is so easy in the midst of the fire to lose perspective. We are tempted to believe that our trial is unique. But Peter reminds us: "You know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings" (v. 9). Whether it is persecution or some other kind of test, other brothers and sisters in Christ have faced the same trials and have triumphed. And you can too! No indulging in self-pity. No giving in to despair. Even Christ himself has been tested as we are, and he promises to give us grace to help us in our time of need (Heb. 4:14-16).

We are also tempted to believe that our trial will never end, that deliverance will never come. But here is a sure word of promise: "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" (1 Pet. 5:10). Our sufferings often seem prolonged, but on God's timetable, they last but "a little while." "Weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning" (Ps. 30:5). We discover that God does indeed refine, restore, and renew us. One day, all the fires of affliction will be extinguished, and all our sufferings will be completely offset by the eternal glory we will share with Jesus Christ.

The next time you enter the furnace of affliction, go over this checklist:

- (1) Have you humbled yourself under God's mighty hand, submitting to his plan for your life?
- (2) Have you cast all your anxieties on the Lord?
- (3) Are you alert to Satan's devices and resisting him by faith?
- (4) Are you keeping perspective?

If you are in the midst of a fiery trial right now, take immediate action. Open your Bible to 1 Peter 5:6-11, drop to your knees in prayer, and take the prescribed steps. End your time of prayer as Peter concludes his instructions—with praise: “To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen” (v. 11).

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