Good morning! It sure has been a roller coaster ride for us in our country over the last couple of days. A virus that seems to have its origin in a remote place on the other side of the planet has made its way close to home. A week ago, none of us would have imagined an executive order from the governor of our state that actually mandated public gatherings of 100 or more to be suspended. No one is saying that we can’t meet—we just can’t meet right now like the way we are accustomed. Nor should we. Our concern is for the elderly among us and for those with the weakest immune systems. The way it has been explained to me, the greatest concern at this point is ‘mitigation’ which refers to the precautionary measures that are taken to reduce the spread of COVID-19. Larger gatherings of people spread the potential reach of the virus.

So we may need to get used to meeting in a different way for the next few weeks. I will be working together with all of our leadership and staff to determine some ways we can still ‘do’ church. I think it is more important for us to remember that we are the church. That is something we have been learning from our study of the book of Acts. And the church has a tremendous opportunity to shine bright in a time of crisis. I think back through history at how the church responded to various difficulties, such as the plague in 16th century Europe. The University in Wittenberg where Martin Luther taught was shut down. Luther and other faculty were urged to leave. A lot of German pastors looked to Luther for his counsel. Listen to what he said in a letter that he wrote to a pastor friend in 1527:

“Now if a deadly epidemic strikes, we should stay where we are, make our preparations, and take courage in the fact that we are mutually bound together…I shall ask God mercifully to protect us. Then I shall fumigate, help purify the air, administer medicine and take it. I shall avoid places and persons where my presence is not needed in order not to become contaminated, and thus by chance inflict others and so cause their death as a result of my negligence. If God wish to take me, He will surely find me and I have done what He has expected of me so I am not responsible for either my own death or
the death of others. If my neighbor needs me, however, I shall not avoid place or person but will freely go as stated above. See this is such a God-fearing faith because it is neither brash nor foolhardy and does not tempt God.”

Dealing with a pandemic crisis on this scale may be a first for us, but it is not a first for the church of God. The church has been faced with far more severe situations, such as persecution. That was the case for the believers to whom Peter wrote two different letters. So if you have a Bible with you, take it and turn with me to 1 Peter 4-5. I want to step away from Acts today, and we’ll pick it back up later.

It is interesting that in these last chapters, Peter spends time instructing both the leaders of the church and the church itself. He is calling on both the church’s leadership as well as the church’s membership to be patient with one another in the face of difficulty. God’s shepherds needs to be patient with His people who are fearful, and God’s people need to be patient with their shepherd as he tries to lead them through crisis. Leadership is tough, whether it be in the church or a school or in civil government. That’s why the most important thing we can do for leadership is pray for and support those who lead us.

If we are to live with this hope in a time of crisis, I want to show you a few things that we must keep in mind. To begin with, crisis often…

1—Works to REVEAL the character of our faith (4:12-16)

“Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when His glory is revealed. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or a meddler. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name.”

Peter is dealing with the reality of Christian suffering. Within these verses, he seeks to encourage and comfort his readers in the midst of their trials. Having endured plenty of
afflictions for Christ’s sake in his own life, Peter was more than qualified to speak on the subject. How were they to respond to suffering? How should we as believers react whenever we, too, face the heat?

Notice he doesn’t give them answers as much as he gives them assurances. To move forward, they needed a clear perspective. The glory of God needed to eclipse the nature of their circumstances.

John Piper —“Wimpy world views make wimpy Christians, and wimpy Christians won’t survive the days ahead.”

I want us to pay close attention to Peter’s instructions here. You ought to read these verses carefully and underline each specific instruction that he gives. It is important that we not fall to pieces when we face the furnace. Instead, we’re to remain calm and confident. The only way to do that is to have an enlarged view of the glory of God. He uses our trials to reveal the character of our faith.

We recognize it for what it is

The ‘fiery trial’ that Peter is referring to here is one that has been brought on because of obedience to the gospel. They had been in the furnace for their faith. In fact, the word that Peter uses in the verse implies the heat of adversity.

“Fiery Trial”—word is ‘pyrosis’ and speaks of an agonizing experience of burning with fire

Their faith in Jesus Christ made these believers the target of persecution. They were being viewed differently by their society now that they had pledged their allegiance to Him. But the point is that they now found themselves in a very uncomfortable and uncertain position.

We should never become caught off guard when experience trouble, but rather we should expect it. As the followers of Jesus, we should never be shocked when we find the world uncomfortable. He said that in the world we will face tribulation.
We rejoice in it for what it does

Notice that Peter says that these trials aren’t strange, but are necessary for our testing. It becomes the way that our faith is proven to be legitimate. When we hurt, it becomes easy for us to wallow in our self-pity and even question God’s presence with us. The fiery trial served as evidence that they were sharing in Christ’s suffering, which meant that they would also share in His glory when He would one day be revealed. They had every reason to rejoice when they were insulted for Christ’s sake because it meant that the Spirit of God rested upon their lives. There are both right and wrong reasons to suffer. But when we suffer as Christians, it is merely preparing us for future glory.

Crisis works to reveal the character of our faith. Notice also that crisis often…

2—Helps to REMIND us of what is most important (4:17-19)

“For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And if the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner? Therefore let those who suffer according to God’s will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.”

Peter says that “it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God.” God is working in our lives, saving us from the presence and power of sin. Though it is hard to endure and difficult to understand, we need the heat of the furnace to be purified and set apart. Trials become tools in the hands of God to refine His own.

James 1:2-4—“Count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.”

The point that Peter is making here is this—if God doesn’t keep His own children from the ‘fiery trial,’ what will happen to those who are lost when God’s judgment falls? The way to heaven is paved with crisis. If it is true for believers, what about unbelievers? The only suffering that you and I will ever experience is what we encounter in this life—
it’s momentary. We endure by keeping the end in mind. Peter says, “Therefore let those who suffer according to God’s will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.” As Christians, we can expect suffering in life, and we ought to evaluate the reason behind it. Peter says that our suffering is to be entrusted to God. In the midst of life’s hurts, we must commit ourselves to One who knows best.

“Let those who suffer according to God’s will…”

When we face the heat, you and I are to trust in the perfect will of God. That’s the only thing that will get us through the tough times. Often, we think that a reason ought to be given. We want God to explain Himself to us. Let’s just suppose that we did have an explanation for life’s puzzling questions. Is that really the solution? It’s very doubtful.

Peter says, “…entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.”

When in a crisis, we can take heart in the truth that there is a faithful Creator who can be trusted. We must ‘entrust’ our souls’ care to Him.

“Entrust” — to deposit something for safekeeping (Luke 23)

When things aren’t going well, such truth often escapes our thinking. Yet when the rug gets pulled out from under us, this is the only truth we have to lean on. It is the hope that we should have been resting in all along.

Now I don’t know if it is this way for you, but when my circumstances are comfortable, I’m very self-sufficient. My prayer life begins to dry up. Heaven doesn’t occupy much of my thought life. That’s why self-sufficiency is the enemy of productive faith. It is at this point that pain serves the purpose of radically re-orienting my life. God allows the crisis because we are so quick to forget Him. We can become so preoccupied with the ‘stuff’ of life that we take our eyes off of the Lord. Over and over again, He uses a ‘fiery trial’ to remind us that things in this life are only temporary.

C.S. Lewis — “I am progressing along the path of life in my ordinary contentedly fallen and godless condition, absorbed in a merry meeting with my friends for the morrow or a bit of work that tickles my vanity today, a holiday or a new book, when suddenly a threat
of serious disease, or a headline in the newspapers that threatens us all with destruction, sends this whole pack of cards tumbling down. At first I’m overwhelmed, and all my little happinesses look like broken toys. Then, slowly and reluctantly, bit by bit, I try to bring myself into the frame of mind that I should be in at all times. I remind myself that all these toys were never intended to possess my heart, that my true good is in another world and my only real treasure is Christ.”

That describes basic human nature. We easily forget what Peter says in these verses when everything we hold dear suddenly ignites in the incinerator of life’s fiery trials. And yet God uses those trials to bring us right back to Himself.

There’s a third thing that crisis is good for. The Bible says that it:

3—Serves to REFLECT God’s grace in our lives (5:1-7)

“So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time He may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on Him, because He cares for you.”

Here in these verses, Peter mentions some attitudes that ought to be found in the life of every Christian. It is the evidence of God’s grace.

Responsibility (5:1-4)

Having spent sufficient time encouraging the suffering little lambs of God’s flock, Peter now turns his attention to the shepherds of that flock. He has some words of comfort and instruction to give to their leaders.
After instructing believers on how to endure suffering, Peter issues an urgent call for faithful leaders. These are not unrelated subjects. Tough times demand that God’s people have true leadership. The church needs faithful leaders if it is to live and witness for Christ in a hostile environment. God’s flock needs faithful shepherds. These leaders were to faithfully carry out their duties and lead the flock by example, through word and deed.

A time of crisis is a time for God’s people to lead with responsibility. Whether you are a pastor or a teacher, a moms or dad, a supervisor or a student. We have a mandate to be an example of what it means to follow Jesus to a world that is watching. And we don't have to panic in times like these. Jesus is the Good Shepherd, and He said:

**John 10:11**—“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep.”

**Submission (5:5a)**

The elders are to shepherd the flock of God with willingness, eagerness, and meekness. Peter now follows that up by calling on the flock to willingly submit to the leadership of her elders.

**“Be Subject To” — military term that literally means to line up under; present tense language; literally means ‘keep on being’ subject to; descriptive of a lifestyle**

**Humility (5:5b-6)**

“Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you.”

Without humility, there could be no submission. That’s why Peter says, “Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another.” This is to be the posture of each one of us toward the other in the family of God. One translation even says, “Put on the servant’s apron of humility to one another.” As he was writing these words, perhaps in his mind Peter went back to an unforgettable experience one night when
Deity wrapped Himself in humility and did the unthinkable. The Bible says in John 13 that Jesus ‘clothed Himself’ with a towel, assumed the role of a servant, and washed His disciples’ filthy feet. Peter never lost sight of that servant’s apron. Jesus said:

**John 13:14-15**—“If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you.”

Peter quotes from Proverbs 3:34, a verse that is also referred to by the apostle James to make the same point. God opposes the proud, but He gives grace to the humble.

**“Opposes” — carries the idea of being set in battle array**

God is opposed to the proud because He hates the sin of pride. It is at the top of the list of things that God detests according to Proverbs 6. Again and again, the Bible says that God resists the proud, but He gives grace to the humble.

**Micah 6:8**—“What does the Lord require of you, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with the Lord your God?”

**Proverbs 29:23**—“A man’s pride will bring him low, but he who is lowly in spirit will obtain honor.”

**Luke 14:11**—“For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

**Trust** (5:7)

“Casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.”

Responsibility, submission, humility, and now notice that Peter stresses the importance of trust in the face of life’s anxieties. We’re not to go through life gripped by fear and worry, but instead we are to trust God in each situation. The opposite attitude of trust is worry, which is really a subtle form of unbelief. Worry is foolish because it lives in a hypothetical future. It deals in what if’s and could be’s. Jesus had much to say about worry and anxiety. That word ‘worry’ comes from an Old English word that means to
strangle or to choke. And that is exactly what it does to you whenever it grips your mind—it will strangle the life out of you. Yet we see it as a harmless thing. But at the root of worry there exists a subtle unbelief that is unwilling to trust God in the details of life.

“Anxieties”—worries and concerns (Parable of the Sower)

Life’s ‘anxieties’ come in a variety of forms. Sometimes they come in the form of difficult people. Sometimes they come in the form of health concerns and potential sickness. Sometimes they come in the form of needs in the lives of our children. Yet no matter the packaging they come in, Peter tells us how to process them.

“Casting”—to throw upon

The idea is that we ‘throw’ ourselves completely upon the care of God. We cast ourselves entirely upon His sufficient mercy. Psalm 55:22 says, “Cast your burden upon the Lord and He will sustain you; He will never allow the righteous to be shaken.” Faith in a sovereign God is the antidote to anxiety.

Think of how Jesus entrusted His life to the Father while suffering for our sin on the cross. Jesus carried the heaviest of burdens in our place so that we can lay it down and find rest. And at the proper time, God exalted Him to the highest place. Cast all of your anxieties upon Him, for He cares for you! He carried the weight of your sin so that you can be free. Jesus paid the debt, so you can lay the burden down. Do you believe it? Not theoretically, but practically? Are you committing your way to Jesus Christ?

4—Helps us RECOGNIZE our source of conflict (5:8-9)

“Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.”

In many ways, the dramatic climax of 1 Peter sounds like a general who is rallying his troops before leading them into battle. Peter has addressed the elders of the church. He has called upon those who are younger to live in humility and commit their cares and
concerns to the Commander in Chief. Now, he calls upon believers to recognize the source of spiritual conflict—we have an enemy who is in opposition to us.

We must be alert

The real enemy that we face is not crisis itself. Peter wants his readers to know that their enemy is not flesh and blood. The source behind their spiritual conflict is the adversary, the devil. While God often uses our struggles to draw us closer to Him, Satan tries to use them like a crow bar to pry us away from Him. Our victory over this opponent depends on knowing his tactics and schemes.

2 Corinthians 2:11—“...so that we are not outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs.”

Success in combat demands that we be familiar with the enemy's tactics. Peter wants his readers to be well aware of Satan's tactics, and not be caught off guard. They needed to be alert.

“Sober-minded”—involves ordering and balancing life's important issues, which requires the discipline of mind and body that avoids the intoxicating allurements of the world

“Watchful”—an imperative command that means to stay awake and on the alert; speaks of vigilance

Peter had heard Jesus use this very same word once before. While the disciples were with Him in the garden of Gethsemane, He called them to vigilance. Peter had failed once before, and he doesn’t want the same for his readers.

Matthew 26:41—“Keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

The reason we must be alert is that our adversary the devil ‘prowls’ around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.
“Prowls Around”—word is a present tense verb; the idea is that the devil is constantly on the move

We often relax, and we have to sleep. But the devil never relaxes. He doesn’t relent. He never takes a vacation. He comes in by stealth and is constantly working secretly against us. He is constantly on the prowl like a lion. The devil often waits for our moments of pride and weakness to make his move against our soul. He ‘prowls’ around while stalking our every step, waiting for some strategic and opportune moment to catch us off guard. What exactly is his goal? He wants to devour us.

We must be anchored

Peter doesn’t tell his readers to tuck tail and run. Instead, he says that they are to ‘resist’ the devil, something that cannot be done in our own strength.

“Resist”—means to withstand or set oneself against

The way to resist him involves being ‘firm’ in our faith. We must be grounded in the faith. This simply means that we stand our ground upon the Word of God and refuse to be shaken. We resist him firm in our faith in God. We can’t resist the devil unless we’re first submitted to God.

James said something similar:

James 4:6-8—“God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.”

We must be aware

Notice how Peter says we need to be aware that we are not in this conflict all by ourselves. Notice what else Peter goes on to say in verse 9—“…knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.”

In other words, “You all aren't the only followers of Jesus who are suffering for your faith.” They were not the only ones being targeted and attacked by the adversary.
There were plenty of other Christians who were in the thick of the conflict right there with them. Sometimes, we feel like we’re all alone when we are in the midst of some struggle. And that’s what the devil wants you to believe, but it is not true.

5—Teaches us to RELY upon the Lord (5:10-11)

“And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen.”

Peter says that the grace of God is sufficient for us no matter what we are facing. He reminds these Christians that their suffering is only for a little while. That’s true for life’s struggles. Compared to eternity, they only last a little while. Listen to what he says believers are called to—the God of all grace has called us to His eternal glory in Christ! This means that our temporary struggles are nothing when we compare them to what we have to look forward to.

Peter then paints a picture of a well-rounded warrior who has come through life’s battles and has emerged with maturity and experience that could not have been developed any other way. God had a goal in mind for their faith, and the goal was maturity. The only way that their faith could be strengthened was for it to be forged in the fire.

What was God up to in their lives? He was working to restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish them. Each of these words are descriptive of what God is doing by way of sanctification in the believer’s life.

“Restore”—to thoroughly complete or to perfect

Philippians 1:6—“And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.”

“Confirm”—to set fast; to make stable

“Strengthen”—to make sturdy
1 Thessalonians 3:2-3—“To strengthen and encourage you in your faith, that no one be moved by these afflictions.”

“Establish”—to lay as a foundation

Each of these words denote strength and immovability that God wants you as a believer to have in the face of struggle. While the adversary wants to devour and destroy your faith, God’s promise to you in Christ is that He is working to build you up and make you stronger. His sufficient grace will lead you through the struggle.

Let me give you one final thought about a time of crisis:

6—Demands we REMEMBER other people (5:12-14)

“By Silvanus, a faithful brother as I regard him, I have written briefly to you, exhorting and declaring that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it. She who is at Babylon, who is likewise chosen, sends you greetings, and so does Mark, my son. Greet one another with the kiss of love. Peace to all of you who are in Christ.”

According to Peter, hope in a time of crisis demands we remember the presence of other people in our lives. Now, it wouldn’t be hard to read these last few verses and then close the book. But there is a very important truth being emphasized as Peter concludes his letter—the principle of cooperation. I want you to carefully notice the names that Peter makes mention of in these verses.

- Silas, a faithful brother
- She who is at Babylon, also chosen
- Mark, my son
- One another…all of you

By helping one another

“By Silvanus, a faithful brother as I regard him, I have written briefly to you, exhorting and declaring that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it.”
The name ‘Silvanus’ is another way of saying Silas. He was one of Paul’s travel companions, after having replaced Barnabas on his missionary journeys. It was Silas who was there with Paul in the Philippian jail. Acts 15:22 reveals that Silas was one of the leading men in the church, even though he isn’t on record having said a word. Like an old faithful oak, Silas was there for Paul, and now Peter says that Silas has been there for himself. We need those people in times of crisis.

By encouraging one another

“She who is at Babylon, who is likewise chosen, sends you greetings, and so does Mark, my son.”

More than likely, Peter is speaking in cryptic language here. The word ‘Babylon’ is another way of referring to Rome, the city where Peter was being held as a prisoner. Both the church in Rome as well as Mark sends greetings to the believers. It shows how we need encouragement from other Christians when we face life’s struggles.

By loving one another

“Greet one another with the kiss of love.”

Now, obviously Peter wasn’t dealing with a coronavirus. But his point is that our relationship with one another isn’t some surface level and superficial relationship. We are bound by love, and we must not take our relationship with each other for granted.

At the end of verse 14, notice Peter’s last sentence:

“Peace to all of you who are in Christ.”

That’s the way that he ends his letter. What a statement of hope! To be in Christ is to be at peace—even when the bottom falls out of life, when the adversary levels his attack against you, even when you don’t know what’s next.

Richard Fuller, a 19th-century minister, told of an old sea captain who said, “In fierce storms, we must put the ship in a certain position and keep her there.”
Fuller went on to say:

“This, Christian, is what you must do… You must put your soul in one position and keep it there. You must stay upon the Lord; and, come what may—winds, waves, cross seas, thunder, lightning, frowning rocks, roaring breakers—no matter what, you must hold fast your confidence in God’s faithfulness and His everlasting love in Christ Jesus.”

Is Christ your peace? When life’s struggles and pressures begin to build, when the adversary roars, and when doubts and fears assail, do you have peace? Peace is a Person with whom you can have a personal relationship. He gave His life on the cross to save you from your sin. He wants to give you eternal life so that you can share in His glory. The gospel says that no matter what my experience is in life, my hope is rock solid because I am standing on the Solid Rock. Do you have such confidence?

I’m a firm believer in a God who controls the situations and circumstances of our lives and uses them for His glory and our good. He is in control of life’s situations. God’s grace is more than sufficient for life’s struggles. He wants us to be assured of the fact that God’s promises to us through Jesus Christ provide an eternal hope that goes far beyond our struggles. This is our hope in a time of crisis.

If you don’t know Him today, let me tell you how you can…