



A TALE OF TWO LIONS

**Life Lessons in Spiritual
Warfare from First Peter**

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Other Scripture quotations taken from:

KJV *King James Version*

LB *Living Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1979).

Msg *The Message* (Colorado Springs: Navpress, 1993).

NCV *New Century Version* (Dallas: Word Bibles, 1991).

NKJV *New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Inc., 1983).

NLT *New Living Translation* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1996).

TEV *Today's English Version* also called *Good News Translation* (New York: American Bible Society, 1992).

INTRODUCTION

One sunny day a rabbit came out of his den in the ground to enjoy the weather and some carrots. He became careless, and a fox sneaked up from behind and caught him.

“Ha ha, rabbit, I’m going to eat you for lunch!” said the fox.

“Wait!” replied the rabbit, “You can’t eat me now. I haven’t finished my Ph.D. thesis yet.”

“Hah! That’s a stupid excuse, said the fox. “What’s the title of your thesis anyway?”

“I’m writing my thesis on ‘The Superiority of Rabbits over Foxes and Wolves.’”

“Are you crazy? I should eat you up right now! Everybody knows that a fox will always win over a rabbit.”

“Not really, not according to my research. If you like, you can come to my den and read it for yourself. If you’re not convinced, you can go ahead and have me for lunch.”

Since the fox was curious and had nothing to lose, he went with the rabbit into his den. The fox was never seen again.

A few days later, the rabbit was again taking a break from writing, and a wolf quietly came out of the bushes and was ready to eat him.

“Wait!” yelled the rabbit. “You can’t eat me right now.”

“And why might that be, you fuzzy appetizer?”

“I’m not yet finished writing my Ph.D. thesis on ‘The Superiority of Rabbits over Foxes and Wolves.’”

The wolf laughed so hard that he almost lost his hold on the rabbit.

“Come read for yourself and you can eat me after that if you disagree with my conclusions.”

So the wolf went into the rabbit’s den and was never seen again.

Weeks later, the rabbit finished writing his thesis and was out celebrating in the lettuce fields. Another rabbit came by and asked, “What’s up? You seem to be very happy today.”

“Yup, I just finished writing my dissertation. I successfully defended it and today I am Dr. Rabbit!”

“Congratulations! What did you write about?”

“It’s titled ‘The Superiority of Rabbits over Foxes and Wolves.’”

“Are you sure? That doesn’t sound right.”

“Oh yes, you should come in and read for yourself.”

So they went together into the rabbit’s den. Inside the friend saw the typical graduate student abode, albeit a rather messy one after writing a thesis. The computer with the controversial dissertation was in one corner; on the right there was a pile of fox bones; on the left was a pile of wolf bones; and sitting in the middle was a very large lion.

The moral of the story is this: the title of your dissertation doesn’t matter. Even the research data doesn’t matter. All that really matters is who your advisor is.

You and I have two lions who both want to be our advisor. One is mentioned in the book of Revelation as the Lion of Judah—a picture of Jesus Christ. C. S. Lewis in his *Narnia* tales depicts him as Aslan, the strong but gentle lion. And the beavers make the powerful comment that he is not a safe lion but he is good.

In the book of Revelation, John turns to see the Lion of Judah and what he sees is a lamb. The message is that since Jesus overcomes evil not by being a Lion who hurts others, but by being a Lamb who absorbs hurt, so we too overcome evil in the world, not by inflicting more hurt, but by absorbing the hurt, even if it costs us our lives.

Satan tries to counterfeit everything of God. And so Peter, in his first letter, reminds us that there is another lion that is a destroyer and wants to devour you. He makes many deceptive promises and threats for you to follow him.

The real issue of life is: which lion will you choose for your advisor?

CHAPTER ONE

BE SELF-CONTROLLED AND ALERT

The letter of first Peter was written to 1st Century Christians who were suffering persecution—some very severely. Peter gives them a number of specific things to remember and observe:

- ❖ Don't be surprised when persecution comes
- ❖ Rejoice when you share in the sufferings of Jesus
- ❖ Persecution comes from Jesus in you
- ❖ Be sure your suffering comes from only doing good not from any evil
- ❖ Respond to suffering with the endurance and example of Jesus
- ❖ Repay evil and insult with blessing
- ❖ Be humble people and in God's time you will be exalted

The interesting thing is that this topic of suffering and persecution does not overshadow his general message of Christian living in a sinful world. Peter indicates that though we may suffer for Jesus in this world, we do not allow that to dominate our thinking and actions. Then at the very end of the content of his letter in Chapter 5 verses 8 and 9, he gives a serious warning:

Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.

Peter's final warning and message is that we must live in a state of vigilance and awareness. We should never let our guard down because we have an enemy who is out to destroy us. So he says: ***Be self-controlled and alert.***

This is a repeated concept in Peter's first letter. In Chapter 1 verses 10-12, he talks about how the prophets predicted by the Spirit that our salvation through Christ would involve his suffering and only then his glorification. He then concludes in verse 13, ***Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled.*** And the reason is so we can live holy lives as God has called us to live (verses 14-15).

In Chapter 4 verse 7, Peter uses the expression a second time. Here he indicates that the end of the world is near: ***Therefore, be clear-minded and self-controlled so that you can pray.*** Obviously, things will be so chaotic when the end comes, that unless we are alert and self-controlled we will not even know how to pray effectively.

Now for the third and final time, Peter uses the expression again. But this time in an even more somber note because we have an enemy—Satan, who though posing as an angel of light, is really a roaring, devouring lion.

The word "Satan," in both Hebrew and Greek, means **adversary**—one who is an enemy; one who opposes another. In his desire to be like God, he sought to usurp the position that can only belong to the one true God.

In a most effective way, C. S. Lewis tries to bring this point across in his renowned book *The Screwtape Letters*. It would please Satan if we only consider him to be an evil influence underlying human nature or recognize him to be nothing more than ancient people's ignorant explanation for wickedness surrounding them.

On the other hand, Satan has also deceived those who acknowledge him into believing he is God's equal, God's opposite. He cannot be God's counterpart because he himself was created by God. Satan as a fallen angel can be understood better as the opposite of Michael the Archangel. He is **not** omnipresent and has only limited power.

At the same time, we should not identify "the enemy" as one particular government or person or other religion. While we are to pray for protection from wicked and evil men who do not have faith (1 Thessalonians 3:2), we also must be aware that wicked and evil men are not our greatest enemy. They are merely human pawns of the supreme enemy, Satan, himself. We thus recognize there is a power beyond human institutions that fights against God and His plans for the world through His church (Ephesians 6:12).

The Bible speaks often about our enemy Satan. Seven books in the Old Testament and every writer in the New Testament refer to him. Of the 29 references in the New Testament, Jesus is speaking in 25 of them. We need to know for sure what the Bible teaches about this enemy whom the Bible calls "***a sinner from the beginning***" (1 John 3:8). Paul wrote that we should not let Satan take advantage of us by being ignorant of his devices (2 Corinthians 2:11).

And now Peter tells us that because of him, we need to be self-controlled and alert!

CHAPTER TWO

THE ROARING LION WANTS TO DEVOUR YOU

Our self-control and alertness are for the purpose of discerning the tactics that our enemy Satan uses against us.

China's house church leaders, representing more than ten million members, met some years ago for a conference to discuss the main problems facing their churches. They ranked their top three problems, and came up with strategies to solve them.

At the top of the list was **gossip**. Leader after leader told stories of how their ministries had been compromised by this subtle sin. Problem two was **materialism** and problem three was **heresy**.

One Chinese house church leader from Henan Province shared the following personal experience: "I went into an area to lead Bible studies for coworkers and they wouldn't let me into the house where we were to hold the seminar. I asked them through the closed door what the problem was, but they wouldn't tell me. They just told me to go away. It was winter and I went a little ways outside the town, knowing I must start a fire to sleep beside or I would freeze to death. I wondered what on earth could have made those brothers and sisters turn me away on such a cold night without a word of explanation.

"But a brother took pity on me and brought me secretly to his home. I eventually pried the truth out of him. The leaders in the area had received an anonymous letter denouncing me as a 'lover of many women.' Try as hard as I might, I could not get them to listen to me or let me see the letter.

"Later in another part of the country, I learned the letter had been sent by a brother I had disciplined for moral laxity, and he had sent it out of spite.

"I went to him and he repented. He sent another letter, but because the first one was unsigned, they didn't believe him. Both of us offered to go there, but we weren't welcomed. The testimony of the church was ruined. I still have to explain myself wherever I go. It's a victory for the devil.

"I went with the offending brother out to the countryside and told him to pluck a chicken. We walked along while he did. The wind blew the feathers far over the fields. When he was finished, he asked, 'What now?' I told him, 'Pick up every feather, and put it back on the chicken.' He said, 'That's impossible.' I replied, 'You are right. It is impossible, just as the damage your words have done cannot be repaired.'"

The house church leaders pledged to be more loving, and to hold more face-to-face meetings with each other to minimize the sin of gossip.

So what does Satan throw at us today in the western world? An anonymous writer, who perhaps was inspired by C. S. Lewis' *The Screwtape Letters*, visualized the following scenario:

Satan called a worldwide convention. In his opening address to his evil angels, he said, "We can't keep them from reading their Bibles and knowing the truth. We can't even keep them from family values. But we can do something else. We can keep them from forming an intimate, abiding experience in Christ.

"If they gain that connection with Jesus, our power over them is broken. So let them go to church, let them have their conservative lifestyles, but steal their time so they can't gain that experience in Jesus Christ.

“This is what I want you to do, my angels. Distract them from gaining hold of their Savior and maintaining that vital connection throughout their day.”

“How shall we do this?” shouted the evil angels.

“Keep them busy in the non-essentials of life and invent unnumbered schemes to occupy their minds,” he answered.

“Tempt them to spend, spend, spend, then borrow, borrow, borrow. Persuade the wives to go to work and the husbands to work 6 or 7 days a week, 10-12 hours a day, so they can afford their lifestyles. Keep them from spending time with their children. As their family fragments, soon their homes will offer no escape from the pressures of work.

“Overstimulate their minds so that they cannot hear that still, small voice. Entice them to play the radio or cassette whenever they drive, to keep the TV, the VCR, and their CDs going constantly in their homes. Tempt them to spend more time on their computers, especially watching Internet pornography.

“And see to it that every store and restaurant in the world plays music constantly. This will jam their minds and break that union with Christ.

“Fill their coffee tables with magazines and newspapers. Pound their minds with the news 24 hours a day. Invade their driving moments with billboards. Flood their mailboxes with junk mail, sweepstakes, mail order catalogues, and every kind of newsletter and promotional offering, free products, services and false hopes.

“Even in their recreation, let them be excessive. Have them return from their recreation exhausted, disquieted and unprepared for the coming week. Don't let them go out in nature. Send them to amusement parks, sporting events, concerts and movies instead. And when they meet for spiritual fellowship, involve them in gossip and small talk so that they leave with troubled consciences and unsettled emotions.

“Let them be involved in soul-winning. But crowd their lives with so many good causes they have no time to seek power from Christ. Soon they will be working in their own strength, sacrificing their health and family unity for the good of the cause.”

It was quite a convention in the end. And the evil angels went eagerly to their assignments causing Christians everywhere to get busy, busy, busy and rush here and there and spend, spend, spend!

Satan's tactics are both internal and external. But they all can be categorized in the general areas of: deceit and intimidation. The 1st Century Christians to whom Peter was writing were facing mostly external attacks from Satan in the form of persecutions. In the western world, Satan's attacks against us are much more subtle and usually internal. So much so that a Christian leader in Norway says, **“We in the western world do not suffer persecution, we are simply seduced!”**

CHAPTER THREE

SATAN'S INTERNAL TACTICS

Some teachers describe Satan's internal tactics as "the enemy wearing socks." He quietly sneaks up on us and we're often not aware he's right behind us. Also, when he isolates us from the encouragement and assistance of the local body of Christ, he feels he has us right where he can more easily attack us. He achieves this by pointing out our personal sins or weaknesses and playing on every selfish motivation with which he can tempt us. There are many internal tactics. Here we look at just three significant one.

PRIDE

We each have to come to terms with Satan's deadliest tactic, which the Bible calls **pride**. Ever since the Garden of Eden, Satan has promulgated The Great Lie: "***You will be like God***" (Genesis 3:5b). We all must learn to overcome pride, which was Satan's own initial sin and which is his pervasive and repetitive tactic against us.

Over and over again, we are reminded in the Bible of God's utter disdain for a prideful spirit. Why does God have so much to say about this issue? Because, ultimately, a prideful person is saying, "I don't need God. I can do it on my own." As our Creator and Sustainer, God has the perfect plan laid out before us. Attempting to "go it alone" will only lead us down a path of self-destruction. No one knows that better than God—He has seen pride destroy the lives of His creations throughout eternity.

Peter, here in his first letter, repeats the warning from Proverbs 3:34 that "***God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble***" (1 Peter 5:5). Pride is so devastating because of its deceptiveness. C. S. Lewis said, "A proud man is always looking down on things and people; and, of course, as long as you're looking down, you can't see something that's above you." We may easily point out pride in the life of someone else, completely oblivious to the stranglehold that pride may have in our own lives. Pride causes us to focus solely on being "better" than someone else. Don't compare yourself to others; compare yourself to Christ. Remember where you came from, and recall what God has saved you from.

FEAR

It is natural for people to be afraid. We especially fear the unknown, being hurt, death and even other people. There is nothing our adversary would like more than to see us paralyzed with fear—just like King Saul was when he faced the Philistines and Goliath (see 1 Samuel 17).

Personal fears

Why do we allow fear to control us? On the one hand, we have past experiences that we don't want to relive, and on the other hand, we are very hesitant about what might lay

ahead. But often the events and situations creating the most fear in people have no basis in reality.

All fear is based on perception. Thus **FEAR** has been defined in the English language as an acronym for “**F**alse **E**vidence **A**ppearing **R**eal.” If we could consciously remember this, it would help us to allay many of our fears. But that false evidence sometimes is so convincing! However, we must always realize that dread and fear, like other tactics of the enemy, are based on a lie. This is why throughout the Scriptures we are repeatedly commanded to “*fear not.*” It is intensely liberating for our witness when we personally overcome the fear of death. This allows us to focus on Christ and His kingdom.

Fear of death

For many in our world today, our number one fear is public speaking. Our number two fear is death. One comedian commented, “That means that if you are at a funeral, you are better off in the coffin than giving the eulogy.”

When Jeremiah was still a child, he was called by the Lord to speak to the spiritual leaders of the nation. It appears he was fearful of the assignment when he said, “*I do not know how to speak; I am only a child.*” But the Lord said to him, “*Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you...*” (see Jeremiah 1:6-8). One translation has this wording: “*Be not afraid of their faces: for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the LORD*” (KJV). Looking at the eyes of people while we speak, especially to a group, is for many people an intimidating process. We may wonder whether they like us and agree with our words, or if they are going to turn against us and harm us.

Virtually every fear has a relationship to death and a connection to dying. For example, why are we afraid of flying? The plane may crash and we may die. That is why Christians around the world take great comfort in the words of our Lord when He said, “*Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell*” (Matthew 10:28).

A significant factor in dealing with the fear of dying is realizing that we are **already dead** in Christ (Galatians 2:20). Open Doors colleague Hector Tamez says that this concept is clearly seen in the lives of Christians living in war zones of Latin America. The Christians caught in the civil war between the government and Shining Path guerrillas in Peru are a classic example for us. Here is how Hector expresses their commitment:

They know that they are going to be killed. And they say, “In order to be a Christian here, you have to recognize that you are already dead in Christ. Once you recognize this, then any day that passes by in your life is a gain.”

In some countries, surviving one day or one year means that you have one God-given day or year to testify not only with your words but with your deeds. Fear should not control your life! Christ should control your life!

Chinese house church leaders when asked why their churches grow so fast respond that they have learned how to suffer; they do not need buildings; and they are not afraid

to die for Jesus. This lack of fear makes them powerful witnesses of the truth of God's Word. A Christian who has lost his or her fear of death and is walking in the power of the Holy Spirit is unstoppable!

One hundred years ago in India a young Sikh holy man, a Sadhu, came to faith in Jesus Christ. He kept wearing his holy robes and traveled all through Asia preaching the gospel. Sadhu Sundar Singh was reportedly the first to cross the Himalayas and take the gospel to Nepal and Tibet. At 36 years of age he made his last trip over the mountains. He never returned and is assumed to have been a martyr for Jesus.

In his diary he wrote, "It is easy to die for Christ. It is hard to live for Him. Dying takes only a few minutes--or at worst an hour or two--but to live for Christ means to die daily to myself."

Combating fear

The only positive fear the Bible repeatedly talks about is the fear of God. And this fear is a key to combating other fears. Oswald Chambers says, "The remarkable thing about fearing God is that, when you fear God, you fear nothing else; whereas, if you do not fear God, you fear everything else." And so to fear God makes a hero but to fear man makes a coward.

The Christian must be solidly anchored on seven biblical pillars to combat fear:

- **God is in control.** He will only allow us to experience what He knows is best for us. We must trust Him as we're encouraged to do in Psalm 91. See also Mark 4:35-41; Philippians 4:6-7; and Acts 27:23-25.
- **Focus on fearing God and dying to self.** When fear of God is our focus we can more easily understand Paul's teaching that since I have been crucified with Jesus, everyday I must die repeatedly die to myself and my own desires. See Acts 5:29 and Galatians 2:20.
- **We are only pilgrims and strangers on this earth.** Our real home is heaven. Some of us may be called to enter our heavenly home earlier than we expect. We must be ready. See Hebrews 10: 32-39.
- **God always brings good from evil** as we're told in Romans 8:28. Joseph told his brothers, "*You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good....*" (Genesis 50:20)
- **The enemy can only harm our bodies, not our eternal condition** (Luke 12:4-5). Jesus advised us to get our priorities straight when He said, "*Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.*" (Matthew 10:28)

- **To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.** The New Testament writer repeatedly assure us that as believers, leaving this body means to be in the presence of the Lord. See 2 Corinthians 5:8 and 2 Timothy 2:11-12.
- **There is a crown of life for the believer faithful unto death.** See Revelation 2:10.

Fear in crisis situations



Satan also delights in causing “panic attacks” in a crisis situation. The Chinese have an interesting lesson in the two characters chosen for their word “**crisis.**” One character is **danger** and the other is **opportunity**. The inference is that in every crisis experience, both elements are present. So a crisis is a dangerous situation presenting an opportunity.

When you focus on just the danger, you become paralyzed by fear. Focusing on the opportunity, however, enables you to fly with wings of faith. It is we, ourselves, who choose on which of the two we will focus.

Fear of speaking out against injustice and sin

Similar reasons for our personal fears also keep us from being the voice of God in a fallen world on behalf of His church. There is a time for Christians to speak out forcefully against the injustices and sinfulness of our own society and culture. This is especially true in situations where we can help our brothers and sisters who suffer. But fear can keep us tongue-tied. As the church, we must learn to speak out and not be cowed by fear.

But remember, when we are fearful, we can claim the promise of Scripture: “**For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline**” (2 Timothy 1:7). We must always remember who has won the ultimate victory and what Satan’s final outcome will be (Revelation 20:10).

MATERIALISM

Satan subtly promotes the attitude that says money, property, possessions, physical comforts, as well as worldly fame and honor are the most important things in life.

While God created all things and is the source of all we have, He does not condone our allowing things and money to usurp His first place in our lives. The prosperity that he so freely gives us, and wants us to have, is indeed a blessing until it takes the place of God. Materialism is thus the attitude that says money, property, possessions, physical comforts, as well as worldly fame and honor, are the most important things in life. Not to say, “There is no God,” but to say, “We don’t have any need for God!” You can have all the externals of Christianity but still be a complete materialist in your heart.

For Christians, materialism is much like the frog in a pan of water that is slowly being heated. He boils to death because he does not realize the danger quickly enough to jump out of the pot before it is too late.

A church leader from the country of Romania, which was once a communist-dominated land and is now free, commented, “In my experience, 95% of the believers who face the test of external persecution pass it, while 95% of those who face the test of prosperity fail it!”

Satan is ecstatic when he succeeds in luring us into this trap. This is the dark side to money and possessions that many Christians are either unaware of, or unwilling to face. As a result, the spiritual vitality of many has been sapped and the church as a whole has been weakened spiritually. Like fire, money is a good servant but a destructive master. If the church is to survive this challenge, there is an urgent need to be aware of the true nature of materialism. Unfortunately, it has become such a vital part of our culture that Christians are often unaware of its control.

In Jesus’ day, a rich person was one who had more food than needed for the day and who had more than one set of clothing. By the standard of the people around Jesus, many of today’s so-called poor are very rich as well as almost all those of us in free societies. Being rich is not in itself wrong. Materialism, however, has the following characteristics:

Materialism has extremely seductive power

Riches are dangerous because their seductive power often causes people to reject Christ and His kingdom. The rich young ruler who turned sadly away after being told that he had to part with his riches to inherit salvation prompted Jesus’ statement, “***How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God***” (Luke 18:24; Mark 10:23; Matthew 19:23).

Materialism can cause people to do almost anything

There are two opposing masters on earth: God and money. You are a slave to the one you obey (Matthew 6:24; Romans 6:16). A desire for riches can cause people to do almost anything—even to the extent of selling their souls. The result, Scripture warns, is anguish now and damnation later (1 Timothy 6:9-10). An abundance of possessions can easily lead us to forget that God is the Source of all good things. The people of Israel were warned of this before they entered the Promised Land (Deuteronomy 8:11-17).

The pursuit of wealth often results in wars. James 4:1-2 says this clearly and it is amply confirmed from world history. Instead of fostering more compassion toward the poor, riches often harden the hearts of the wealthy. Rich persons are often unconcerned about the poor at their doorstep (Luke 16:19-31; Isaiah 5:8-10; Amos 6:4-7; James 5:1-5).

Materialism is insatiable

Money is not neutral. It is a power with a life of its own. It is a power that is even demonic in character. When Jesus uses the Aramaic *mammon*, translated as *money* in the NIV (Matthew 6:24), to refer to wealth, he gave it a personal and spiritual character as a rival god. Mammon is a power that seeks to dominate us.

Hence, money is an active agent. It is a law unto itself—capable of inspiring devotion. It is tremendously instructive to stand back and observe the frantic scramble of people for money. And this does not occur just among the poor and starving. Even the super rich still seek it furiously. The middle class continue to buy more houses, acquire more cars and purchase more clothes than they need. If money were only a medium of exchange, it would make no sense at all to attach such prestige to it. We value people in relation to their income. We give people status and honor in relation to how much money they have or appear to have.

Materialism is powerful, but it can be overcome

How is the god mammon conquered? The Bible offers a perspective from which to view all of life's economic decisions. The Holy Spirit is with us; Jesus is our present Teacher. The following are some suggestions.

- **Get in touch with our feelings about money.** Get in touch with our fear, insecurity, guilt, pride or envy. We are afraid to be short of money. And our fears, though irrational, are real. We need to face up to these feelings before we can apply God's promises to our financial situation.
- **Stop denying our wealth.** Instead of seeing the small picture of our situation, let us become world citizens, looking at ourselves in relation to all humanity.
- **Create an atmosphere in which confession is possible.** Much of our preaching about money has been either to condemn it or to praise it but not to help each other relate to it. Many of us feel isolated and alone. How much better if we could confess our fears and temptations by praying, "Forgive me, for I have sinned; money has captured my heart!"
- **Discover one other person who will struggle with you through the money maze.** Together covenant to help each other detect when the seductive power of money is beginning to win. This needs to be done in a spirit of love and graciousness. We need people who will help us, rebuke us, encourage us or prod us.
- **Discover ways to get in touch with the poor.** One of the damaging results of affluence is allowing us to distance ourselves from the poor so that we no longer see their pain. We need to be among the poor, not to preach to them but to learn from them.
- **Give with glad and generous hearts.** Giving has a way of rooting out the tough old miser within us. Even the poor need to know that they too can give. Just the very act of letting go of money, or some other treasure, does something within us. It destroys the sin of greed.

In our struggle against the power of mammon, let us view God as a friend who wants to help us, rather than as an enemy who condemns us. This journey toward a simpler lifestyle begins with prayer; that is, telling the Lord that we want to follow him all the way. The rest is obedience, as he directs and instructs.

As mentioned above, Chinese house church leaders met together to discuss their problems. They concluded that their number two problem (after gossip) was money and the lure of materialism. There are two main sources of this. One is the rising standard of living in the coastal areas, which is tempting good teachers into commerce, depriving the church of much-needed leaders. The other is the kind, but often indiscriminate, giving of some wealthier Christians and missions to house church networks. One group of churches from Europe gave a house church leader U. S. \$10,000 to start an underground seminary. [Note: This is equivalent to receiving an amount (in cash) equal to one hundred **months** of one's current monthly income!] The house church leader used only a third of it for that purpose. He emigrated with the rest.

His supervisor noted, "Few of us can handle that kind of temptation, especially as we have been very poor all our lives. But he should not have been put into that situation—the money was given privately, without accountability."

Church leaders came up with a number of strategies for ensuring greater accountability among the pastors. They also issued a plea to Christians: "Please pray very carefully before you give money, and try to give it mainly through established missions that have a history of contact with house church movements. Keep private giving to a minimum."

It is important to know our enemy and it can be depressing to let our minds dwell on his power. Yet Jesus saw Satan fall as lightning from heaven when the disciples ministered in divine strength (Luke 10:17-20).

The Apostle John promised Satan's final defeat (1 John 3:8). Although the churches of John's day were suffering at the hands of the enemy, torn by false doctrine, plagued by the unholy living of some of its members and the complacency of others, still Satan could not prevail (Revelation 3:8-10; 12:10-11; 20:10).

The enemy is cruel and strong. We must recognize him as such. But we can still be victorious, for the Bible says, "***Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ***" (1 Corinthians 15:57). Eugene Peterson's paraphrase of John 1:5 in *The Message* reads: "***The Life-light blazed out in the darkness, the darkness couldn't put it out.***" Yes! We can be victorious no matter how dark the times become.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESIST HIM STANDING FIRM IN THE FAITH

After warning us of Satan's desire to devour us, Peter quickly and simply states the solution to our enemy's advances against us.

Resist him

There is something powerful in the acknowledged presence of Christ within the believer. And Peter says that all we need to do is resist the devil. He writes this in the context of declaring that we must be humble as God opposes those who are proud (1 Peter 5:5). It reminds us of James' letter in which he writes also in the same context of humility, quoting the same verse from Proverbs 3:34: ***God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you*** (James 4:6-7).

So the solution to ridding ourselves of Satan is to humbly acknowledge our own utter helplessness and rely on the power of God's Spirit within us. In this strength we can proactively resist Satan and he then leaves us alone realizing we stand covered in the righteousness of Jesus Christ through which he cannot penetrate.

It is interesting to note that when our enemy tries to make us afraid and we show no fear, then he becomes intimidated. I think of Pastor Gabriel in Colombia who has a calling from God to share the gospel with the many tough guerrilla soldiers of his extremely violent country. He walks into their camps with boxes of Bibles and preaches the gospel to them. Many times a tough soldier will put his big AK-47 in Gabriel's face and say, "I don't like what you're doing here. Get out or I'll kill you."

Gabriel shows no fear. He says, "No you won't kill me. Not until God allows you to." That kind of boldness and lack of fear puts the soldier then on the defensive and he becomes intimidated when his threats have no meaning and somehow his own fear of God will not let him pull the trigger.

So it is with our enemy Satan when we boldly stand against him. He becomes intimidated and he runs!

Standing firm in the faith

Standing firm in our faith is the essence of good discipleship in following Jesus. At the end of his 'Sermon on the Mount' in Matthew 5-7, Jesus summarizes that those who hear his words and obey them are like the man who built a house on rock. When the storms of life arose, the house stood firm. Unlike the man who built his house on sand—a man who did not obey the words and teachings of Jesus.

When the Apostle Paul discusses the whole armor of God given for us to stand against the devil's schemes in Ephesians Chapter 6, he states the armor is put on so ***you may be able to stand your ground*** (verse 13).

Peter here in Chapter 5 verse 9 connects standing firm in the faith with our suffering brothers around the world. We are one body. We stand firm and we stand together. Peter writes this statement as a causal relationship. Why do we stand firm in our faith? ***Because***

you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.

There was comfort and strength for the 1st Century Christians in knowing they were not facing Satan's attacks alone. This was something all believers were experiencing all over the known world at the time. It was encouraging to them to stand in unity and community.

If Peter were writing this for the first time to 21st Century Christians, I think he would change it only slightly. I think he would write, "Stand firm in your faith because you know many of your brothers and sister around the world are going through even more suffering than you. If they can stand strong, you can stand strong!"

CHAPTER FIVE

OTHER BROTHERS AND SISTERS' SUFFERINGS

With the incredible speed of communication media today, we can easily be kept up-to-date on what is happening with our brothers and sisters around the world. And often the news is not good.

Even though the church is growing most quickly in countries like Nepal, Vietnam and China, we soon realize that this rapid growth is in the face of much opposition. The Persecuted Church is facing much opposition from Satan who is using the external tactics of physical and psychological pressures against them. And yet, in spite of these pressures many of them are able to demonstrate their ability to resist Satan and stand firm in their faith.

In countries such as Sudan where war has been a part of life for years and years, believers are suffering from planned starvation programs and/or physical attacks. And many have been captured or sold into slavery.

Countries and regions such as Iran, southern Sudan, and India have tried to eliminate Christian leadership by martyrdom. In Saudi Arabia and North Korea, Christians have been imprisoned, tortured and publicly executed.

In Chiapas, southern Mexico, more than 35,000 Christians have been unjustly and forcibly driven from their homes just because they are evangelical Christians. Thousands have also been murdered and viciously mistreated. Many homes have been burned to the ground.

In Peru, China, Sudan, Cuba, Vietnam, Laos and numerous other countries, Christians unjustly spend time in prison for their activities, which often includes attending secret, unregistered worship meetings. Eritrea in East Africa does the same, keeping some of these prisoners in inhumane metal shipping containers.

Across the nation of Indonesia, hundreds of churches have been burned and many Christians martyred by Muslim extremists.

Nepali Christians are facing threats from a Maoist insurgency group. They are also concerned by petitions organized by Hindu militants asking the government to deal more strictly with churches in the country, which are rapidly growing. The president of the National Christian Fellowship of Nepal has called on believers around the world to pray this move against Christians will not succeed.

Five churches were destroyed in the eastern part of Nepal after local Hindus and Buddhists became angered by the number of people becoming Christians. Although there were no known Christians in the country in the 1950s, through a sovereign move of the Holy Spirit, there are now about 800,000.

Nepali authorities have largely ignored laws that prohibit evangelism or conversion, but the window of opportunity could close at any time. Christians have been arrested and held in jail from time to time for witnessing. Many Christians face social and economic persecution, finding it hard to get employment.

Often, in areas such as the southern Philippines, Pakistan and Peru, children from Christian families are abducted. Perhaps this is the worst form of persecution to bear.

Sometimes a Christian's own family turns against them. At public meetings, Christians may be criticized or even attacked by their neighbors and former friends—and

also by members of their families. Only a strong commitment to the Lord can resist this kind of psychological weapon used by the enemy. In the Old Testament book of Job, Job's own wife advised him to "***curse God and die***" (Job 2:9).

Magazines from ministries like Open Doors keep you aware and up-to-date on specific persecution and what you can do about it.

Remember that none of this catches God by surprise. The coming storm clouds of persecution—though perhaps not as severe—are quickly moving toward many societies that are currently free societies. Request our booklet *Red Skies @ Dawn*.

The positive aspect of all this lies in the individual testimonies of members of the Persecuted Church. Sister Chang, an itinerant evangelist from rural China, is a good example. One morning as she read her Bible, the Holy Spirit spoke to her and said, "Take your Bible, go to the front steps of the police station in your town and preach the gospel publicly."

Her response was, "But Lord that's illegal in my country."

Again the Spirit spoke and she responded in obedience. Sister Chang began to preach the gospel on the front steps of the police station. It lasted about three minutes. She was quickly arrested, dragged into the police station, charged and sentenced to six months in a women's prison where there were 6,000 other women.

After six months there, Sister Chang led 800 women to personal faith in Jesus Christ. The warden was so impressed with the change that came over the prison, on her day of release he offered her a full-time job with living quarters, a vehicle and a monthly salary—all things she had never known.

She sent an e-mail prayer to heaven and quickly realized the offer was a tactic of Satan to make her ineffective. She responded, "Thank you warden, but no thank you. I only work for Jesus." Today she is back in the countryside as an itinerant evangelist.

When our persecuted brothers and sisters around the world stand firm in their faith, it shows us we can also stand firm no matter what Satan throws at us.

CONCLUSION

There are two lions wanting your allegiance. You have a choice which one you will follow and serve. Peter is convinced the Lion of Judah can empower you to stand strong against the roaring, devouring lion's tactics, lies and schemes.

And Peter thus concludes the content of his first letter with these powerful words:

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. To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.

God uses problems and persecution to **DIRECT** you.

Sometimes it seems as though God lights a fire under us to get us moving. Problems and pressures often point us in a new direction and motivate us to change. Is God trying to get your attention? *“Sometimes it takes a painful situation to make us change our ways”* (Proverbs 20:30, TEV).

God uses problems and persecution to **INSPECT** you.

People are like teabags—if you want to know how strong they are, just drop them in hot water! Has God ever tested your faith with a problem? What do problems reveal about you? *“When you have many kinds of troubles, you should be full of joy, because you know that these troubles test your faith, and this will give you patience”* (James 1:2-3, NCV).

God uses problems and persecution to **CORRECT** you.

Some lessons we learn only through pain and failure. Perhaps when you were a child, your parents told you not to touch a hot stove. But you probably learned by touching the stove and getting burned. David says that the punishment God gave him *“was the best thing that could have happened to me, for it taught me to pay attention to your laws”* (Psalm 119:71-72, LB).

God uses problems and persecution to **PROTECT** you.

A problem can be a blessing in disguise if it prevents you from being harmed by something more serious. Last year, a friend was fired from his job for refusing to do something that was wrong that his boss had asked him to do. His unemployment was a problem—but it saved him from being convicted and sent to prison a year later when management's actions were eventually discovered. *“You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good...”* (Genesis 50:20).

God uses problems and persecution to **PERFECT** you.

Problems, when responded to correctly, are character builders. God is far more interested in your character than your comfort. Your relationship to God and your character are two things you are going to take with you into eternity. ***“We can rejoice when we run into problems...they help us learn to be patient. And patience develops strength of character in us and helps us trust God more each time we use it until finally our hope and faith are strong and steady”*** (Romans 5:3-4, LB).

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. As an enemy of God, how does Satan carry on his subversive activities within your church and family? What tactics does he employ against you?
2. Discuss how the following would help us understand who Satan really is?
 - ❖ *“the ruler of the kingdom of the air”* - Ephesians 2:2.
 - ❖ *“the prince of this world”* - John 14:30.
 - ❖ *“the god of this age”* - 2 Corinthians 4:4.
3. Sometimes people act as if Satan is just an evil influence. How do we know he is a real being? Why does this distinction matter?
4. What are ways in which evil is masked as good, but in the end it destroys?
5. People have said, "Satan cannot harm a Christian." Do you agree? What does the book of Hebrews teach about this? (Hebrews 11: 32-39)
6. How does our adversary try to use fellow Christians against us?
7. How does Satan use “fear” to increase pressure and persecution in your life today? How does *“perfect love cast out fear”*? (see 1 John 4:18)
8. Discuss how **you** can use the following biblical defenses against “fear.”
 - Mark 4:35-41
 - Philippians 4:6-7 and Acts 27:23-25
 - Acts 5:29 and Galatians 2:20
 - Hebrews 10: 32-39
 - Romans 8:28
 - Luke 12:4-5 and Matthew 10:28
 - 2 Corinthians 5:8 and 2 Timothy 2:11-12
 - Revelation 2:10
9. Explain how the following can counter Satan’s accusations, deceptions and murders (see Revelation 12:11).
 - The Blood of the Lamb
 - The Word of Testimony
 - Sacrificial Love – willingly giving even your life
10. You are traveling in a restricted nation and money is scarce. Bibles and other spiritual training materials are in very short supply. One day you hear that a well-meaning western Christian leader has promised a local pastor that if

he can plant new churches, there will be much more money available. They come and ask your advice on the offer.

- What guidelines and safeguards would you offer the local church leaders to ensure proper accountability of resources for both the giver and receiver?
- To whom should money be given: an individual or a committee?
- What accountability procedures should be established?

11. If materialism is the “subtlest trap” of Satan (because we can have all the Christian externals and yet be complete materialists in our hearts), and if as one church leader from Romania observed: “95% of the believers who face the test of external persecution pass it, while 95% of those who face the test of prosperity fail it,” how do **you** overcome materialism and what do you teach others about it without becoming legalistic?
12. Since materialism is paralyzing the growth of the church in many free societies, what can **you**, as one individual Christian, do about it? How do we live by the principle of Romans 13:8?
13. What is the biblical response of Christians to the sufferings of brothers and sisters around the world?
14. Why should you keep up-to-date on the Persecuted Church around the world? What can you do to help them? How is their plight linked to yours?
15. How do you keep pride from being the controlling factor of your life?

