



How we Cast Away Anxiety

Biblical Peace from First Peter 5:6-11

by
Jesse Campbell

How we Cast Away Anxiety

Biblical Peace from First Peter 5:6-11

By

Dr. Jesse Campbell

Copyright Jesse Campbell Ministries ©, 2020

JesseCampbellMinistries.com

Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from the Christian Standard Bible®, Copyright © 2017 by Holman Bible Publishers. Used by permission. Christian Standard Bible® and CSB® are federally registered trademarks of Holman Bible Publishers

Introduction

Jesus' call to worry not about tomorrow in Matthew 6:34 is equal parts timely and difficult. Anxiety disorder tripled and depressive disorder quadrupled year-over-year because of COVID-19.¹ Suicidal ideation doubled in 2020 from the rates of 2018.² Generations past weathered greater storms than these, but we the previously pampered and effete are taking our turn beneath the thunder and these particular storm winds blow primarily in our minds and hearts. The isolation factor has proven devastating for people who already suffered from mental illness and the literally endless parade of self-aggrandizing photos and posts in our social media feeds can actually exacerbate feelings of loneliness and comparison-induced covetousness. This is to speak only of those whose family members did not contract COVID-19. For over a year, the hurting people of the world sat in their homes with seemingly no direct company but that of demons.

I propose something radical. I believe that something good could come of this that would not have otherwise come about and that begins with you, my reader who is not *yet* a Christian. Right now, by that drawing on your heart from the Holy Spirit of God, confess Jesus as Lord over your life. Profess to God your full faith in the fact that He raised Jesus from the dead after dying on the cross to pay the full price for your sins. Be saved! Be the reason for this book! Then, let us know at jessecampbellministries@gmail.com!

I have an incredible Bible passage in mind that will lift our beleaguered heads to the stubborn hope on the heavenly horizon. It comes from the Book of First Peter and our verse-by-verse study of the entire book is available at JesseCampbellMinistries.com. For now, though, let's skip to the final chapter and find hope!

Note: This book is not clinical or medical in nature and does not serve as an authoritative diagnostic tool for anxiety disorders. Rather, it analyzes and applies 1 Peter 5:6-11 and provides a systematic theology for dealing with anxiety in general from a Christian perspective.

¹ Czeisler MÉ, Lane RI, Petrosky E, et al. Mental Health, Substance Use, and Suicidal Ideation During the COVID-19 Pandemic — United States, June 24–30, 2020. *MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep* 2020;69:1049–1057.

DOI: [http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm6932a1external icon](http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm6932a1external%20icon).

² Ibid.

The Context

We are all going to feel like pansies in heaven when we compare our stories to those shared by the Christians in heaven who endured the persecution brought upon the church by Roman Emperor Nero in A.D.64. Peter wrote to the scattered elect, the saved from Israel, in the underground congregations throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Bithynia, and Asia. This was modern day Turkey. One thing modern Christians will have in common with these first century Roman believers, however, is that both generations of Christians will know what it is like to have your views utterly misrepresented by culture at large.

Christians were labeled “cannibals” because, when taking Communion, they would supposedly gather to eat flesh and drink blood. Christians were labeled “incestuous” because brothers and sisters in Christ would marry one another. Ironically, Christians were labeled “atheists” because they disavowed belief in the Roman pantheon and believed only in the one true God. Nero was certifiable. He burned huge portions of Rome and blamed it on Christians. Christians were persecuted en masse. They were publicly eaten by animals in the Colosseum. They were lit on fire to illuminate Nero’s garden. Their congregations met in the catacombs, the open graves beneath the streets.

It was these persecuted Christians who invented what we colloquially call the “Jesus Fish” or *Ichthys*. A Christian would subtly draw one of the two arches forming the fish in the dirt. If the person speaking to you was a Christian as well, they would subtly draw the complementing arch to complete the fish and the two of you will have confirmed to one another that you are both Christians without having alerted the Roman Centurion on patrol nearby.

The Book of 1 Peter was originally, and still is in some countries, a top-secret piece of contraband that could get you thrown in prison just for possessing it. It was likely smuggled in by way of a canteen made from an animal’s bladder. Can you imagine the gut-wrenching excitement in the catacombs when they first read these words by torch light surrounded by the scorched bodies of their fellow church members? Imagine drawing the first straw and taking the first shift, entering the catacombs hours before the final person would join the hushed crowd – a tactic still used by the persecuted church in China today. Imagine if someone was late to his time to arrive. Hear the tear-filled whispered prayers as people imagined the worst and hear the gasps of relief when at last they saw the latecomer’s moonlit silhouette at the catacomb’s threshold.

To be read properly, 1 Peter must be whispered so as to not be overheard by the authorities outside – still a real and prevalent threat to Christianity today in some countries. It was written to a persecuted people and a mostly illiterate people. For this reason, Peter addressed groups at a time. This letter was contraband and

real blood was spilled so that you may read it freely today. It was written by a man who walked directly with Jesus and he had incredible words of hope for persecuted believers. While we will provide a video series teaching through every verse at JesseCampbellMinistries.com, here is the portion from the final chapter we will delve into for the purposes of this book:

Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you at the proper time, ⁷ casting all your cares on him, because he cares about you. ⁸ Be sober-minded, be alert. Your adversary the devil is prowling around like a roaring lion, looking for anyone he can devour. ⁹ Resist him, firm in the faith, knowing that the same kind of sufferings are being experienced by your fellow believers throughout the world. ¹⁰ The God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, establish, strengthen, and support you after you have suffered a little while. ¹¹ To him be dominion forever. Amen. – 1 Peter 5:6-11 (CSB)

If you are suffering from anxiety, my bride and I are right there with you. Even as I write, we are on the verge of losing everything, but God is at work on something new. In fact, that is why you are reading this. I know that a passage whose opening words tell you to humble yourself may even seem off-putting right now, but I know that there is healing in these words for hurting hearts. I know because these words have been healing for my heart time and time again.

So, ready your heart. Go before God. Pray to Him the way He taught us to pray (Matt. 6:9-13). Confess absolutely any lingering sin. Lay it bare before God because He saw it anyway and has just been waiting for you to be honest with Him. Categorically forgive everyone who has wronged you and watch your anxiety begin to evaporate even as you do. Invite God's perfect heavenly will to be done in these broken earthly circumstances. Consecrate yourself before God because He is going to do great things through you.

The Passage

6 Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you at the proper time

Peter was the perfect person to write this letter. He had come a long way from his past failures. He had grown immensely since his night of deepest shame when he thrice denied that he even knew Jesus before the crucifixion. This guy telling us, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, to humble ourselves was himself humbled under God's hand. He was also lifted up in the due time by God. The same disciple who would often put his foot in his mouth would later be used by God to launch the church into the New Testament era; boldly proclaiming the gospel to the crowd gathered in Jerusalem at Pentecost.

In the verses leading up to these, he was encouraging elders of the church to clothe themselves with humility toward one another. The penultimate verse before this verse is actually a quotation of Proverbs 3:34 which reads, "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble." This is the basis of the "therefore" in verse 6. So, position yourself in a place to receive grace—a posture of humility.

Because you have humbled yourself and not exalted yourself, you help reset the story properly in such a way that God is the one who may exalt you when the time is right. It seems bizarre, doesn't it, to read those words "he may exalt you?" As Christians, we live our lives exalting God, so it seems inappropriate, but this is the Word of God and it is saying something beautiful. To exalt something is to raise it up and lift it high. So, this verse could be misconstrued as though God were going to worship you, but that is not the case. Rather, because you humble yourself, you are in a position for Him to pick you back up again. Like John the Baptist, you have made yourself less so that He shines greater than you. When He lifts us up, it is perhaps most analogous to the way a father picks up his daughter when she has fallen and hurt her knee. *That* is the type of exaltation we are talking about here; God exalting us in a way that further proves He is God. We are lifted up like the diadem in the palm of God's hand in Isaiah 62:3.

When I envision the hand in this verse, I imagine it palm-up and lifting away all the things I was trying to carry on my own shoulders. If you picture the mighty hand of God hovering ominously over you palm-down, ready to squash you, that may reveal that you see yourself more as an enemy of God than as His child. That may have been the case before you read the introduction to this book and gave your life to Christ, but it will forevermore *not* be the case. What do you picture when you picture the mighty hand of God in this verse?

This is the mighty hand on the out-stretched arm described in Deuteronomy 11:2 that disciplined and delivered Israel. This is the hand that took the nails! This is the hand that smeared the mud on the blind man’s face to heal him. This is the hand of Isaiah 41:10, “Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be afraid, for I am your God. I will strengthen you; I will help you; I will hold on to you with my righteous right hand.” It is the hand belonging to the Faithful One. It is the very hand He lifted to the nations in defense of ancient Israel (Isa. 49:22). It is the very hand that holds the iron scepter in Revelation 19. It is the very right hand that is full of justice in Psalm 48:10. It is the very hand that created both the rich and the poor according to Job 34:19. It is the hand of Jesus into which God handed absolutely everything in John 13:3. By Luke 22:69, 1 Peter 3:22, Colossians 3:1, Ephesians 1:20, Acts 2:33, 5:31, 7:55 and 56, and Hebrews 1:3, 10:12, and 12:2 we know that it is the right hand of the power of God where Jesus himself currently resides and intercedes for us (Rom. 8:34)! Because we humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God, everything is taken out of our hands and put into His mighty hand. THAT is the mighty hand under which we are to rightly humble ourselves, my friends.

When we ourselves are sealed with the down payment of the Holy Spirit, the eternal security of our very souls is in this hand and nothing can snatch us from it. In John 10:27-30, Jesus said, “My sheep hear my voice, I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. **No one will snatch them out of my hand.** ²⁹ My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all. **No one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand.** ³⁰ I and the Father are one [emphasis mine].”

Peter knew this hand well. It was the hand that pulled him up when he too was stricken with anxiety at the sight of the wind and the waves that stirred the very water he walked on in pursuit of Jesus. “**Immediately Jesus reached out his hand**, caught hold of him, and said to him, ‘You of little faith, why did you doubt (Matthew 14:31, emphasis mine)?’” You and I lost sight of Jesus when we fell into anxiety. We took our eyes off of Him and focused instead on the wind and the waves. So, now like our earthly author Peter, we humble ourselves under His mighty hand as it pulls us back up from where we sank. The beautiful part of this story of Peter falling and being lifted back up is that everyone watching from the boat believed in Jesus as a result. So, even from our failings, God can bring about beautiful fruit. Even as He lifts us from anxiety with His mighty hand, we can see eternally significant fruit come about and look back on these anxiety-ridden days with a sense of purpose because we see the impact God had on others.

Let us, then, live out a testimony for an onlooking world demonstrating “this is how a Christian is lifted from anxiety.” It is not by our own hands, but by the mighty hand of God under whom we humble ourselves so that He alone receives all the credit for our redemption.

7 **casting all your cares on him, because he cares about you**

The lost art of cast-net fishing is something my dad passed onto my brother, my uncles, my cousins, and me. The lead line that forms the circumference of the net is woven with weights and you bear their combined burden literally on your shoulder when you distribute a portion of it over one shoulder to hold the rest in your hands and even a portion in your mouth. From this burdened posture, you swing the net backward and then sway forward, spinning the net with sufficient torsion to spread the weights around the epicenter so that the net lands as wide as you can throw it.

Peter was a fisherman and when a fisherman casts his net, he lets go of the whole thing. The command in verse 6 was to humble yourself. This is followed by the call to cast your anxiety on God. These two are inextricably linked. Because you have cast the net, it is not on you anymore which means that it is all on God. The idea that it would all be on God sounds good, but if we are honest, we want a little bit of it on us so we have more control and...wait for it...can take a little more credit for the awesome ending God may have written.

Look back over those words “he cares about you.” Then, look at them again. Let them burn into your retinas and brand your heart for life. Some of our anxiety comes from our forgetfulness over this clearly expressed and wholly scriptural truth. He cares about you. He said it himself, inspiring Peter to write it so that you would read it right here and right now in the midst of your anxiety. The enemy cannot change the fact that God cares for you, but he can make you forget it. So, forge the truth in steel. He cares about you. He does. Let not the enemy lie once more and convince you, like he momentarily convinced Naomi in the Book of Ruth, that God has turned His hand against you to permanently afflict you.

This is our God! Do not assail His character with accusations of betrayal. He is the One who went to the cross! Do not call His faithfulness into question because your carnal human instrument is currently overrun with cortisol. Worse yet, do not call His perfect faithfulness toward you into question if what you are experiencing is actually discipline for sin that you willfully committed. That would be an injustice against God, a wasted opportunity to grow, and a near guarantee that this will happen again.

The gospel is a covenant and the weight of that covenant is on God because we could not possibly bear it. We could not carry the cross a single step. Covenants work two ways. They are pacts between two parties. Search your heart, pray that God casts away demonic doubts, and see if you have accused God of wrongdoing. Have you been metacognitively analyzing your own anxiety through a fractured lens that would paint God as unfaithful to His end of the covenant He made with you regarding

salvation and grace? If so, correct the paradigm because any narrative that paints God as unfaithful or uncaring about you is nothing short of satanic. Remember Job, after having lost everything, did not sin by accusing God of wrongdoing (Job 1:22). He said himself in 1 Peter 5:7 that He cares about you, so do you or do you not believe that God means what He has said?

“When he has swallowed up death once and for all, the Lord God will wipe away the tears from every face and remove his people’s disgrace from the whole earth, for the Lord has spoken (Isa. 25:8).” He cares for you. He himself will wipe the tears from the faces of His formerly disgraced people and that includes you. Isaiah 25 was an apocalyptic prophecy whose fulfillment is foretold in Revelation. It is not only about Judah, but about *all* the people of God and that includes you, Christian. He cares about you. He spoke this beautiful promise first to the unfaithful nation of Judah whose worship had gone stale and insincere. They had committed atrocious acts of idolatry and He still said these beautiful words to them. You and I have failed God as well, but His grace for us is inexhaustible. His love for us is not conditional based on good behavior. It is a blood-bought covenant of grace and grace, by its very nature and definition, is loving treatment that is not earned or deserved.

Do not be surprised at the cares you carry. Remember, you signed up for war when you gave your life to Christ. You drew a line in the sand and picked a fight with sin and the devil. Just as Peter wrote elsewhere in this letter, this should not come as a surprise. It is not as though something strange has happened to us. We enlisted. We took up arms. We joined God’s mission on the front lines and fired upon the enemy. We ought not be surprised when he fires back and strikes us. We are at war.

“Dear friends, don’t be surprised when the fiery ordeal comes among you to test you, as if something unusual were happening to you. ¹³ Instead, rejoice as you share in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may also rejoice with great joy when his glory is revealed (1 Pet. 4:12,13).” If you can say in good conscience that the sufferings you face and the origins of your anxiety may be attributed directly to your Christian testimony, then there is actually a reason to rejoice built directly into the source of your anxiety. You resemble Christ and so you suffer. This is a form of casting your cares upon Him. You attribute the cause of persecution to Christ on the cross, thereby casting it upon Him. See Him there on the cross. Behold the full brutality of it. It is the greatest demonstration of love in the history of the universe. Do you see? He cares for you and he bears upon the cross the full burden of your sin and mine. So, casting your cares upon him in this regard is placing them back where they were before and bearing no longer an anxiety that Jesus already bore on our behalf.

Passages calling us to rejoice amidst trial and suffering are not invitations unto delusion. James 1:2, for example, is not an exhortation to convince yourself that your trial is actually joy. Rather, the joy comes from the eternally significant outcome: the sanctification. By humbling ourselves, we have cast our cares upon Him. By casting our cares upon Him, we are further humbled and matured, giving us cause to rejoice.

Consider Paul’s final letter. He had been betrayed by numerous people who proclaimed Christ. Like most ministries, it seemed that Paul’s ministry would end in awkwardness and tension and anxiety. Paul wrote not to the numerous churches he had planted and helped in their New Testament infancies. Rather, he wrote to his protégé Timothy.

“But as for you, exercise self-control in everything, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry (2 Tim. 4:5).” Enduring hardship was part of Timothy’s very calling. It is part and parcel of the Christian life, but especially for those who are called to make a significant impact for the kingdom of God; sacrificing their worldly joy in some capacity so as to add to their joy in their eternal life which is the truer and greater life.

Consider the raised hands of a Christian lost with utter abandon in corporate worship. Perhaps off-key, this saint belts out with passion an anthem of praise in spirit and truth. In such a worshipful state, we are lifted beyond the demon cloud and may see the world for what it is, even if just for a moment. It is our glimpse of the heavenly gift in Hebrews 6. It is our taste of the age to come. The hands on the cover of this book, reaching to the light amidst darkness are like the hands of a fisherman who has cast his net. You are free from the burden because you have cast it upon the Lord. Your hands are raised in faith as you reach upward to the One others cannot see, but whom your soul experiences intimately in the sacred worship moment. Our anxieties are eclipsed when our souls are reminded of who our God is. So, we raise our hands to Him.

“Don’t worry about anything, but in everything, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:6,7).” Paul wrote these words from a prison cell just as he wrote to Timothy from Mamertine Prison in Rome. The peace described in this verse surpasses understanding. How does it *surpass* worldly understanding? It surpasses because it comes from beyond what our senses can observe. It is heavenly and therefore meta-earthly. Thus, it is surpassing. It is not the utter abdication of the facts that would cause you to be anxious. Rather, it is peace despite the anxiety, peace in the very midst of anxiety.

If your definition of peace is the absence of all stressors, then you will be pursuing that peace to no avail your entire life. Rather, the peace which surpasses understanding, the peace that encompasses the beleaguered Christian’s heart right

there at the epicenter of anxiety and pain is the peace that is rooted in heaven and not earth. You should be stressed, but instead you feel peace. It makes no sense, but it is the Christian experience when we cast our cares upon Him.

“Yeah, Jesse, but what about anxiety that is brought about because of a chemical imbalance?” I know that Christian Scientists have derided the use of modern medicine but let me be the first to clarify that this is not consistent with orthodox Christianity. We live in a sin-stained and broken world. All of creation has been groaning since the fall in Genesis. This includes the human mind. My bride and I had a son born without a trachea. Our niece developed a tumor in her brain. Our bodies are fallible. Our eyes do not work properly. In the same way, our brains are subject to malfunction.

With proper diagnosis and under the supervision of a certified doctor, preferably one who also believes the gospel, let me bless the Christian who temporarily needs psychiatric drugs to right a chemical imbalance exacerbating anxiety, brought on by anxiety, or rendering the mind irrationally anxious. When your knee is injured, you use an ice pack to reduce its swelling and this practice in no way demonstrates a lack of faith. In fact, it proves that you believe you will heal. In the same way, if your mind experiences a chemical imbalance, then send anyone who would accuse you of lacking faith to me and I will set him or her straight. Cast absolutely all of your cares upon Him. He cares for you.

⁸ Be sober-minded, be alert. Your adversary the devil is prowling around like a roaring lion, looking for anyone he can devour.

We will later address the possibility that our anxiety may be self-inflicted, but it is also important to place blame where it truly belongs. We know that God is ultimately sovereign. However, He is not the author of chaos (1 Cor. 14). He is sovereign, but the devil is responsible. So, with a proper distinction in place between self-inflicted suffering and satanic attack, let's dive into this verse.

When I was a youth pastor, a young woman whose mother had just died that morning came to our worship service that very night. Her friend introduced her and explained that well-intending guidance counselors and a psychologist had already tried in vain to comfort her earlier that day. Knowing that this may have been a futile endeavor, I let Scripture have a turn nonetheless. It may seem like a verse that actually *induces* anxiety. There are probably not very many 1 Peter 5:8 tattoos out there – at least not on Christians. It seems like it would be of little comfort to tell someone, “Hey there, beware because the devil is prowling around to devour someone.” However, this verse was actually the only word that gave any modicum of comfort to that grieving daughter that day. “The devil is real. He is powerful and he hates you,” I said. “This is the only thing anyone has said today that makes absolutely *any* sense!” she replied. “Everyone keeps telling me, ‘It’s okay,’ when it is clearly not!” She was absolutely right. The only thing that brought her comfort was this darkly verse reminding us of our enemy’s existence; a fact often forgotten by grieving and anxiety-ridden Christians. How could we forget that we have an enemy?

In fact, forgetting that we have an enemy is forgetting the whole battle. “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this darkness, against evil, spiritual forces in the heavens (Eph. 6:12).” You are not battling the flesh and blood people who said the words or committed the deeds that wrought your anxiety upon you. Rather, your battle is against the spiritual forces that incited the whole conflict. Do not misdirect your ire toward the imperfect people whom God loves. Instead, place it where it belongs. Aim your crosshairs at the enemy who was camouflaged behind them. Then, in a pretty brutal moment of introspection, take inventory of past seasons in which you allowed yourself to give into temptation and be used by him to a similar end affecting someone else.

The effect of this reminder is the sobering of our minds as described in this verse. It is sobering to remember that you have a spiritual enemy about whom you had previously forgotten. Christians who are enraptured by the prosperity gospel and its false teachings can become drunk on the blessings of God, unacquainted with

Scripture’s teachings about the wrath and discipline of God, and assume that they have power over the enemy in their own rights. Then, when the enemy lands a fiery dart squarely in their hearts, they crumble. They should have been more sober-minded. They should have been more alert. Instead, they blame God for what the devil did and sin as they do. The spiritual battlefield is fraught with the corpses of formerly professing Christians who expected only good things from God and were shocked when He allowed the enemy to attack them.

It is personal. Satan hates you. You were made in the image of God and he cannot stand that about you. Neither he, nor any of the fallen angels in his army (an army half the size of God’s angel army) were made in the image of God the way you were. He wants God’s glory for himself. And so, he prowls.

When my family and I lived in Orlando, we had season tickets to all of the major theme parks. For a few years, I actually had jobs drumming for the parks so that my family could have the tickets for free. Disney’s Animal Kingdom was one of our favorites. We especially loved “Kilimanjaro Safaris,” a ride in a jacked-up bus through the animal preserve. Near the end of the ride, there is a “hidden Mickey” in the small island at the center of the flamingo exhibit. Then, the ride approaches something clearly intended to resemble a real-life “Pride Rock” from “The Lion King.” We must have taken this ride two dozen times over the years and we saw the lions move only once. On this one occasion, the male lion stood proudly over the other lions and let out a roar that could shake your chest cavity. It was incredible! I had to learn *why* lion’s roar in the first place. It turns out that it is sometimes an assertion of dominance over their territory.

Think about that. The lion roars so as to assert dominance, but this passage we are studying from 1 Peter ends with all dominion belonging to God! Do not be fooled by this particular lion’s roar. He is given a limited dominion. According to the opening chapters of Job, he has to go to God for permission to attack you and for parameters within which he must abide when he does attack. He may be roaring now, but he does not have the dominion he craves. Like the lion exhibit at Animal Kingdom, there is a design set in place to prevent the lion from eating you. Do not be fooled by the lion’s roar. His dominion will come to a fiery end and he knows this. He roars because he is striving and flailing to do as much damage as he can before his day arrives.

Now, what about the prowling? This is consistent with the description of the devil in the Book of Job. In Job 1:7, we get a glimpse behind the metaphysical curtain, “The Lord asked Satan, ‘Where have you come from?’ ‘From roaming through the earth,’ Satan answered him, ‘and walking around on it.’” That Satan must prowl indicates that he is not omnipresent. That attribute belongs exclusively to God. Even his prowling is indicative of his limitations and reminiscent of the curse proclaimed upon him by God in Eden to crawl all the days of his life.

There are limits to what Satan may do. He prowls and roars and looks for someone to devour, but he will never have his full will realized. It will seem that way when certain events in Revelation are fulfilled, but God's curse upon him is irrevocable and God's victory over him has already been written. He will not tempt you beyond what you can bear.

This is often misconstrued when ministering to people dealing with anxiety. "God will not give you more than you can handle," we are told. This is not biblical. The actual Scripture passage that well-meaning Christians sometimes share with those suffering from anxiety or grief is 1 Corinthians 10:13:

No temptation has come upon you except what is common to humanity. But God is faithful; he will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to bear it.

This passage is not about anxiety, but about temptation. God absolutely will allow us to face suffering that is beyond our capacity to handle with mere cognition, thereby setting the stage to deliver us and refine us and bring glory to himself. However, He will not allow us to face a temptation that is too intense for our self-control. The takeaway from this verse, then, is actually that we are all fully culpable for every last sin we have ever committed because we were given a way out, but chose to take temptation's bait instead.

Humbled under the mighty hand of God, having cast our cares upon Him, the roaring lion that sought to devour us is humiliated when the fulfillment of 1 Peter comes about and we are lifted up in the due time. The lion is limited. He is not omniscient and so he is "looking for anyone he can devour." He cannot see all things and so he must look. He does not have perfect knowledge, so he does not know. He is not omnipresent, and so he is forced to roam. Our God is the greater and truer Lion, the Lion of Judah as prophesied and fulfilled in Jesus. He is Lord over the lions. He is the creator of lions, the Tamer of the lions in Daniel's den, and Lord over your circumstances.

Call out to Him. Invite Him to rebuke the devil for you. Ask Him to wage war for you. Pray that He would dispatch archangels to every corner of your home while your family sleeps. Our battle is spiritual, but our enemy is outnumbered and overpowered in every way by our great God.

9 Resist him, firm in the faith, knowing that the same kind of sufferings are being experienced by your fellow believers throughout the world.

James 4:7 is consistent with this. “Resist the devil and he will flee from you.” When we resist the devil, it is important not to be swept into the self-aggrandizing notion that we have any power in our own right over rebellious spirits. They are demons because they rebelled. He is the devil because he rebelled in the first place. So, it is only in the name of Jesus and never in our own names that we resist the devil and his demons. They are not frightened of you. In fact, in the Book of Acts, the seven sons of Sceva literally get their pants beat off for trying to invoke the authority of Jesus secondhand through Paul:

Now some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists also attempted to pronounce the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, “I command you by the Jesus that Paul preaches!”¹⁴ Seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish high priest, were doing this.¹⁵ The evil spirit answered them, “I know Jesus, and I recognize Paul—but who are you?”¹⁶ Then the man who had the evil spirit jumped on them, overpowered them all, and prevailed against them, so that they ran out of that house naked and wounded. – Acts 19:13-16

That question asked by the demon, “Who are you?” should give any aspiring rookie exorcist pause. Resist the devil by taking the deliverance God provides from temptation. Resist the devil by doing God’s will instead of his. Resist the devil by cutting out of your life everything that causes you to stumble (Matt. 5:29). This is how you resist the devil; not by some sort of power that comes from within yourself.

This verse is also an incredible reminder of the global scale of Christian suffering and its millennia-long history. When we think about believers who were burned at the stake *by other believers* for believing what most Christians believe about Communion today, it should make us grateful. When we, especially as Americans, consider the plight of the underground Christians in the gulags of North Korea, it should make us grateful. When we remember the Christians in Rome who first read Peter’s letter and how they refused to say “Kaiser Kurios” or “Caesar is lord,” but instead confessed Jesus as Lord and were killed for it, it should make us grateful.

Gratitude is a powerful antidote to both pride and anxiety. When I served at a church just blocks away from the most expensive houses for sale in the country at the time, I met millionaires. It was always powerful to see them return home from a mission trip to Burundi, or Kenya, or even just from feeding the homeless downtown. Whatever brought them anxiety before just washes away in pure perspective upon their return from a reminder of the scale of other people’s suffering. Now, this is not

to diminish legitimate suffering by comparing it to greater suffering: there is no shortage of compassion to be shared. However, we are prone to catastrophizing our own sufferings when we forget how small they are compared to those of others. Granted, this is of little help when you legitimately are suffering more than others, but at least you know that you are not alone and that is the aim of this verse—to lift your eyes. Suffering is a bond shared by every generation of believers dating back through ancient Israel.

The author of Hebrews gave us some tough love that, if you are willing to accept it, can also help with your anxiety. Right after one of the multiple references to Christ's place at the mighty right hand of God, Hebrews 12:3 and 4 remind us, "For consider him who endured such hostility from sinners against himself, so that you won't grow weary and give up. In struggling against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood." That is a brutal reminder. For centuries, our fellow Christians have shed their blood for believing the same gospel we believe. In all likelihood, no one who reads this book will ever shed blood for the gospel and that is some humbling perspective.

Such persecution still exists today. Christians are still wrongfully imprisoned and indeed shedding their blood today. It is still happening, but there is a way you can minister to these persecuted Christians. Stay tuned. We have two more verses to dive into, a systematic theology on anxiety and suffering, and then I will share with you a way that you can send an encouraging message to a currently imprisoned Christian!

¹⁰ The God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, establish, strengthen, and support you after you have suffered a little while.

Let this title for God wash over your anxious soul for a moment. He is the God of all grace. What does this title reveal about God's nature? Does it illuminate something you have yet to uncover in your journey with Him? Does it resurface an attribute of His that has been corroded in your memory of Him; something that you once knew to be true of Him, but a truth has been overgrown with the barnacles of bitterness and heartache? He is the God of all grace and no other god could make such a claim. There is no loving person you will meet in this life as gracious as your God. There is no sweet grandmother more gracious than God. He is more gracious than you. Perhaps, He is more gracious toward you than you have been with yourself.

I know I tend to be harder on myself than God is...like a kid who has been released from timeout, but insists on staying because there is some virtue-signaling to be done in extending one's own time in the corner. He is the God of all grace and He has called you. That's what the text says, friend. Pride and anxiety are closely tied. That we are anxious often indicates that we felt like it was on our shoulders, like we were making it on our own strength and that is prideful of a Christian. To be able to perceive grace, we must first check our pride. The prideful one is anesthetized to the God of all grace because he realizes not that he needs grace at all. Moreover, this entire passage is predicated on the Proverb whose first couplet half tells us overtly that God is opposed to the proud. Be not the antithesis of a grace recipient. He is the God of all grace and His grace passes by the prideful unappreciated.

Note the scope of your calling as a Christian because that is where Peter lifts your chin to gaze. He called you into His eternal glory. Whose? His. You have been cordially invited to the table of the King; welcomed into His splendor forever and absolutely ever more. Your woes and anxious thoughts stretched to their utmost and thereafter magnified a billion times do not amount to one thousandth of one percent of the eternity where you will be forever redeemed with Him. You were called into *His* glory and you were called into His *eternal* glory. The glory that lasts forever utterly eclipses the source of your anxiety.

So, lift your eyes to the Son rise where your eternal salvation awaits. "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is going to be revealed to us (Rom. 8:18)." Indeed, compare eternity to your anxiety in linear fashion. The line representing your anxiety, no matter the length you assign it, disappears from view when compared to the endless line mapping out eternity. Thus, it is not even worth comparing. There is no anxiety we endure in this life that represents a meaningful quantum compared to the

incomprehensibly colossal grace whose volume exceeds that of all the galaxies of the universe combined. Even if your anxiety in particular legitimately exceeds that of everyone around you, it is not worth comparing to the eternal glory of your heavenly future.

If you work at the executive level of an organization, or at a company with multiple strata of hierarchy between yourself and the C.E.O., you know all about delegation. Because the leader of a large organization has limited time, he or she surrounds the president’s office with executives who have staffs of middle managers who have direct reports of their own and so-on. The C.E.O. stays at 30,000 feet above the actual work with an eye to the horizon for what is next and works *through* a team who works through teams. When an intern happens to share an elevator with the C.E.O., it could be his only opportunity to speak directly with the big boss, so every peon at a huge company has a 30 second “elevator pitch” at the ready just in case, but most elevator pitches never get past their bathroom mirror rehearsals. The C.E.O. has limited time and, for the good of the organization, he or she devotes that time exclusively to what yields maximum returns. Otherwise, the organization could lose its vision and all those executives, middle managers, professionals, administrators, and interns would lose their jobs. This verse turns that concept completely on its head, though, and it does so with an organization that is several million times the size of Amazon.

The text says that the Big Boss himself will restore you. The C.E.O. will come down from the executive suite to your cubicle, one of seven billion currently occupied, to put you back together again better than you were. He loves you. He has legions of angels at His disposal, but He does this incredibly important work *himself*. “Undercover Boss” has nothing on what this verse teaches us. Unlike an earthly C.E.O., God has unlimited time because He exists outside of time itself. He invented time. He didn’t just wind the clock, He manifested the clock into existence in the first place. He is not too busy for you. He takes this work of restoring you personally. Let’s look piece-by-piece at what the God of all grace wants to personally do in your heart according to this verse when your finite time of suffering is complete:

- **Restore**

- You will be made new once more, only wiser this time. His grace is new every morning. Blessed is the one whose sins will not be counted against him. That’s you. He remembers your sins no more. You have zero control over what others have done to you, but you can know that your own heart before God, which matters infinitely more, is in good-standing because of your restoration. Your restoration brings glory to God.

- **Establish**

- This is not a temporary restoration. This is not painting over the termite damage, or using a can of “Fix-a-Flat.” By this restorative work which the God of all grace will undertake personally and directly in your heart, as

you repent from and confess every last sin that contributed to your anxiety, you will be established once more. Even if you truly are the victim of circumstances beyond your control, your suffering is temporary and your restoration will be established with all the permanence you allow it to have.

- **Strengthen**

- Think of this in terms of post-traumatic-change. If you release from your grip every right you have to be bitter and choose sanity instead, you will be wiser because of this. You will be stronger. Do not mistake strength for hard-heartedness. Rather, this strength comes in your restoration as your emotional homeostasis is returned, bringing greater wisdom than you had before the trial. Christians especially can absolutely butcher their own, so having skin like iron can be a good thing, but make sure you still have a tender heart. That you would be willing to trust people again after this would be an indicator that you are being strengthened. It takes strength to take such a risk and risks will be necessary for growth. So, let the God of all grace make you stronger through this.

- **Support**

- God’s restorative work comes with a warranty. He will make you new again, establish you once more, make you stronger, and His Spirit will stay with you step-by-step as you move forward. He will never leave or abandon you. He will be with you wherever you go. This support is yours to abandon.

Your anxiety has to pass. It must. Even if you live all of your days in pain, walking faithfully with Christ, there is nothing in this life that compares to the eternal glory from whence the God of all glory beckons you now. Decide in this moment that you will emerge on the other side with a testimony. Be resolute in your faithfulness to Him because He who called you is forever faithful. Write the ending while you’re in pain. Believe that this verse is true. Know that God does everything He says He will and this verse proclaims His intentions to restore, establish, strengthen, and support you after your suffering passes.

Now, here is the hard part: “**after you have suffered a little while.**” Given that God is timeless and eternal, His perspective on what constitutes a little while is always longer than what we would prefer. However, let’s be honest—we would rather not suffer at all, so any length of time is too long for our tastes. While it is impossible for our finite and earthly minds to comprehend, let’s attempt and fail, but attempt nonetheless to see our times of suffering from God’s perspective. He holds all of time in His hands. He is the Alpha and the Omega. In His left hand is the beginning and in His right hand is the end and He sees every nanosecond experienced by every soul in between. Go with me on this: His perspective is the correct perspective. I know

that we would rather not suffer at all, but who are we to question God? To say that He is correct almost seems like an insulting understatement. He is more than merely correct: He is holy and sovereign and perfect. He knows. He has ordained your days. This means that He has already decided that there is an ending to your suffering.

He is, of course, able to end your anxiety this very moment, but if He has not yet done that, there is a reason for it. Your sanctification is at stake. A new chapter is being added to your testimony and the story will end in His glory as you one day tell others of His faithfulness to you as you endured what you now face. Do not waste the opportunity. Seize the reason. From His perspective, the true and greatest perspective, your suffering lasts only a little while. So, let not the sanctification opportunity pass you.

It is simultaneously futile and hypocritical of us to wish that God did not permit suffering. It is futile because God does allow it. Here we are. It is hypocritical because we as sinful people contribute to the body of evil and suffering we condemn. We have all been party to it at some point. Blaming God for what we have done is foolish. Moreover, it is a non-argument to say that a good God would not allow suffering. If God promised us that we would never suffer, then atheistic critics would have a point, but He didn't and so they don't. In fact, in John 16:33, Jesus reminded us, "I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. **You will have suffering in this world.** Be courageous! I have conquered the world (emphasis mine)." Read your Bible, expect suffering, and then suffer like a faithful Christian devoted to a faithful God.

This present suffering does come to an end. It does have a purpose and you are not alone as you walk through it. Let it be said of you that you resolved from the onset and even from the midst of the flames that God is with you in the furnace just as He was with His faithful three in Daniel 3.

11 To him be dominion forever. Amen.

Some ancient manuscripts read “To him be dominion and glory forever and ever. Amen.” These embellishments and flourishes were added by the Catholic Church’s Erasmus and his eager scribes and they even appear elsewhere in Scripture. This same doxology, which is recited by every high school football team in the deep south of the U.S., at the end of the Lord’s Prayer does not actually appear in the original Greek of Matthew 6.

All of this is to result in glory for God. He is simply sovereign, meaning that He reigns with authority over what transpires and that includes your season of anxiety. Encompassed within His dominion is every blessing He has poured out upon you in this life so far, the incalculable riches of heaven, and this temporary season of pain. As we saw in Job, Satan called you out to disprove your faith in God. He asked God for permission to sift you like wheat – a brutal process that involves a serious beating. When Peter was beaming with delusional pride and lack of self-awareness, Jesus brought him down a notch with this sobering reality-check: “Simon, Simon, look out. Satan has asked to sift you like wheat (Luk. 22:31).” Did you catch that? Satan *asked*. He had to ask because all dominion is God’s.

Even over your suffering, God is sovereign. It is futile and evidence of poor reading comprehension to wish things were not as they currently are. So, take comfort in the fact that God has all dominion and has it forever. Say “Amen,” which means “let it be so,” but be careful when you do. Do not say this particular “Amen” until you can do so with a good conscience. Buck up and suffer like your Savior, clench your teeth, believe hard in His coming restoration, and say “Amen.” This present suffering will come to an end and there is much ministry to be done hereafter. Let’s talk about what’s next:

Understanding Your Anxious Circumstances

The only place of indefinite suffering is hell and this life is not hell...not even close. So, at what point do you cross that invisible threshold whereupon you have officially spent too much time suffering in anxiety to the neglect of your redeemed future? It depends on what comes from your time of spiritual introspection. Repent immediately of any lingering sin, confess all that you have not, make peace with others as far as it depends upon you, forgive with full integrity all who have wronged you and go to the cross in prayer. Humble yourself under God's mighty hand and ask this question:

Are the circumstances leading to my anxiety...

- 1. ...God's discipline on my life for sin?**
- 2. ...a satanic attack which God allowed?**
- 3. ...the setup for a big miracle from God?**
- 4. ...God's pruning of my life?**
- 5. ...a mixture of some, or all of the above?**

If you were born a condemned object of wrath to fulfill some bleak prophecy and were just hated by God like the antichrist Beast in Revelation, you would not be reading this book. I doubt the antichrist will do a lot of introspection, considering what he may have done to offend God. So, one of these scenarios likely describes your story. (Though, funny enough, the first three scenarios would apply to the antichrist in a way...especially the third.)

Not all suffering is discipline, it is important to understand that, and you are going to be prone to some deep theological errors if you interpret *all* suffering as God's discipline. Simultaneously, if you have been staunchly unwilling to repent from a particular secret sin despite God's repeated calls to rid your life of it, you could be in for more cycles of discipline. We were born with sin natures and into a sin-stained world and the protracted fall-out from Eden will not cease its catastrophic cascade until God makes everything new one day. So, suffering in some form is an inevitability in this life. However, some suffering is ordained of God so that He would break through and save the day, resulting in glory for himself. Other instances of suffering are actually God pruning away fruitless wastes of energy in the Christian's life so that those energies would be invested in something that bears even more fruit. Moreover, the myriad possible permutations amalgamating all of these into your scenario are endless.

Scenario 1: When God disciplines His children

If your particular pain has come from God’s discipline upon you, know that God is not a sadist. His discipline achieves its purposes and applies only to His children. His is not an insatiable, or baseless wrath. As a common-sense policy, I do not discipline other people’s children. I discipline only my own children...because they are mine. Consider this teaching from Hebrews 12 which cites Proverbs 3:11,12 in the opening verses:

My son, do not take the Lord’s discipline lightly or lose heart when you are reprovved by him, ⁶ for the Lord disciplines the one he loves and punishes every son he receives. ⁷ Endure suffering as discipline: God is dealing with you as sons. For what son is there that a father does not discipline?

I recommend studying Hebrews 12 in-depth if you believe God is disciplining you for sin right now. It is an incredible passage immediately following the “Hall of Faith” in chapter 11. The subsequent verses point out the legitimacy of adoption that discipline conveys upon its recipient. Good earthly fathers discipline their children and that discipline comes to an end just like God’s discipline! God’s discipline results in holiness (v.10). Because of God’s discipline, that sin will not be a part of your life anymore! **“No discipline seems enjoyable at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it (v.11).”** This is a critical distinguishing factor in telling the difference between conviction from the Holy Spirit and shame which is satanic. God’s discipline results in peaceful fruit of righteousness and training. Shame, however, just devalues your soul in your own estimation. Shame makes you feel worse about you. It drags you down further and even reaches a rock-bottom point at which you feel like you might as well just continue in sin because that’s who you are. Shame brings us farther from the grace of God, but godly conviction sounds more like verses 12 and 13:

¹² Therefore, strengthen your tired hands and weakened knees, ¹³ and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated but healed instead.

Jesus said to the man he healed of paralysis in John 5:14b, “See, you are well. Do not sin anymore, so that something worse doesn’t happen to you.” Talk about strengthening his weakened knees! The purpose of discipline is so that you would get back up again walk a straight path hereafter. Did you see the word “healed” in verse 13? This is the point of God’s discipline.

Most anxiety is going to involve other people. If you have been wronged, guard your heart against bitterness – even if you believe this season is God’s discipline upon your life. You are down right now, but not for long. You will get up again when God’s discipline both runs its course and achieves its purpose. Consider this from the prophet Micah:

“Do not rejoice over me, my enemy! Though I have fallen, I will stand up; though I sit in darkness, the Lord will be my light. Because I have sinned against him, I must endure the Lord’s fury until he champions my cause and establishes justice for me. He will bring me into the light; I will see his salvation.” – Micah 7:8,9

David was disciplined severely for his sin when he committed adultery with Bathsheba and effectively murdered her husband Uriah. The sword did not depart from his family after that, but he was still beloved by God and used mightily by Him. In fact, God showed favor to an undeserving Judah because of His promises to the long-dead David. Many of the attacks suffered by God’s chosen people in the Old Testament were onslaughts incurred by God through pagan nations like Moab, Babylon, and Egypt. These were acts of discipline on His people followed by acts of retribution upon these nations themselves. Remember that God is sovereign and this is His right. He is unassailable in His holiness, so whether you feel convicted for sin, or beaten up by the devil, do not sin by accusing God of wrongdoing.

So, while it is important to know that not all suffering comes from God’s discipline, do you sense the Holy Spirit drawing your attention to unconfessed sin in your life to which you’ve held on stubbornly? Remember Micah 7:18,19:

Who is a God like you, forgiving iniquity and passing over rebellion for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not hold on to his anger forever because he delights in faithful love. He will again have compassion on us; he will vanquish our iniquities. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.

Your life is not over because of God’s discipline. In fact, the whole point of His discipline is to prepare you for what is next. His heart toward you has not changed. His covenant with you remains steadfast and even further proven by what has transpired. Psalm 30:5 salves our sore hearts, “For his anger lasts only a moment, but his favor, a lifetime. Weeping may stay overnight, but there is joy in the morning.” So, confess it all. Repent with brutality and abandon. Slaughter the sources of your sin and throw them away.

Finding that the circumstances precipitating your anxiety were incurred by God’s discipline for sin is liberating in that you may now have clarity. Repentance is freedom and your anxiety should be down for the count when you finally lay before God what you may have been attempting to conceal.

Scenario 2: When God allows Satan to attack:

If your conscience is clear before God and there remains no unconfessed sin, you ought to conduct yourself as one redeemed. Job was attacked *because he was righteous* and God rebuked his foolish friends who tried to convince him that he must have done something wrong to incur this. So, searching our hearts endlessly for some offending sin for which we experience discipline when what was visited upon us was actually a testing of our faith, we miss the point entirely and may drift into legalism and resentment toward God.

As James 1 instructs us, consider it joy that you are being refined in your faith and being made more mature. This is an opportunity to demonstrate faith and opportunities to demonstrate faith come exclusively through times of trial. There is no other way to grow faith. This is a test. Are you passing it?

See our sermon videos at JesseCampbellMinistries.com on the first chapter of 1 Peter for more on this, but for now consider a portion of how Peter opened the letter whose final chapter we've drawn from in this book:

You rejoice in this, even though now for a short time, if necessary, you suffer grief in various trials ⁷ so that the proven character of your faith—more valuable than gold which, though perishable, is refined by fire—may result in praise, glory, and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. – 1 Peter 1:6,7

Gold is refined by fire. It is heated to a molten state, drawing impurities to the surface until the goldsmith sees his reflection in it. Your faith is of even greater worth than gold and these refining fires will draw impurities from your walk until you more brilliantly reflect Christ.

The end result of all of this is God's glory. So, do not detract from His glory in the midst of your anxiety. Like Job, let your prime axiom be "Though he slay me, yet will I hope in Him (Job 13:15a, NIV)." Like Job, even as the devil is given expanded jurisdictions in attacking you, do not sin by accusing God of wrongdoing. Grasp the bloodied arrow that the enemy shot into your chest and tear it out, place it in God's bow, and watch Him wage war with it.

As Solomon wrote in Ecclesiastes, there is nothing new under the sun. Something like what has befallen you and caused your anxiety has befallen others in the past and will happen to others in the future. The difference is that you will be there and will have emerged from a similar pain with your testimony intact and refined. When you see your present anxieties reflected in another's eyes, reach out and disciple him or her through it. Watch as God uses this to bring some measure of healing to your anxious and grieving heart as you understand why God allowed it in the first place.

Scenario 3: When God sets the stage for a miracle

The man born blind in John 9 did absolutely nothing to deserve his blindness: Jesus said so. In fact, Jesus even clarified that the man's parents did not sin in a way that would inflict their child with blindness. Rather, the whole purpose was to set up the miracle that countless millions have read about in the Bible, the best-selling book of all-time.

So, your circumstances leading to your anxiety could be the setting of the stage for God to intervene in a miraculous way. Pray for it because it could be, but do not let your faith be contingent upon a miracle. Do not hold your belief in God hostage until He does as you demand. This is worse than futile. Instead, pray audaciously that God would do something phenomenal because He just might! How redeeming it would be to see your anxiety miraculously obliterated by God's intervention. Let your resolve be like that of Shadrach (whose real name was Hananiah), Meshach (whose real name was Mishael), and Abednego (whose real name was Azariah):

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego replied to the king, “Nebuchadnezzar, we don’t need to give you an answer to this question. ¹⁷ If the God we serve exists, then he can rescue us from the furnace of blazing fire, and he can rescue us from the power of you, the king. ¹⁸ But even if he does not rescue us, we want you as king to know that we will not serve your gods or worship the gold statue you set up. – Daniel 3:16-18

Proclaim in your heart that, even if God does not rescue you from your anxiety, you will not forsake Him. Pray to Him for a miracle, but let the matter be a foregone conclusion: you will be faithful to God no matter the outcome. Have the great faith to pray for a miracle, but have the greater faith to stay loyal to God even if He does not grant it.

I have heard and have been personally wounded by the false teaching that God's will is always a miraculous healing and the lack of a miracle stems from a lack of faith. This is satanic and patently unbiblical. It most certainly is not always God's will that a miracle take place and I say that from basic reading comprehension upon seeing what my Bible says. In Luke 4, Jesus said,

But I say to you, there were certainly many widows in Israel in Elijah's days, when the sky was shut up for three years and six months while a great famine came over all the land. ²⁶ Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them except a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. ²⁷ And in the prophet Elisha's time, there were many in Israel who had leprosy, and yet not one of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian. ²⁸ When they heard this, everyone in the synagogue was enraged. – Luke 4:15-28

Also, consider the example of Paul the Apostle who prayed in unmatched faith for God to heal him of what he referred to as his “thorn in the flesh,” multiple times, only to continue in suffering (2 Cor. 12:7). Biblically, it is not always God’s will that a miraculous healing take place. So, with this in mind, pray to God for a miracle in your circumstances, steadfastly faithful to God no matter the outcome. Even just the act of praying to God for the impossible has a way of stretching our faith.

Scenario 4: When God prunes your life

If the circumstances leading your anxiety were incurred by God stripping something precious and even good from your life, then it could be that God is pruning you. As the crucifixion approached, Jesus began to layout a series of awesome teachings that He knew His disciples could not yet understand. They did not see what was coming. He took a vine and showed them something profound:

I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. 2 Every branch in me that does not produce fruit he removes, and he prunes every branch that produces fruit so that it will produce more fruit.

– John 15:1,2

God prunes the branches that produce fruit so that they will produce more fruit. To prune a vine is to cut away the parts that do not bear fruit. If there is dead former growth on a branch, then the xylem and phloem waste precious minerals and water by sending resources to fruitless growth. By pruning the fruitless portions away, the nutrients are directed to the portions of the vine that bear fruit so that it may now bear even more fruit. This process of pruning for the Christian.

This pruning concept at first glance would seem to obviously apply to sin, but that is only a fraction of the picture in Jesus’ object lesson. Of course, sin does not bear fruit, but we already knew that. We already know to repent from sin. This pruning work could apply to investments of your time and energy that are benign and neutral. This pruning work could apply even to something objectively good in your life. Is it possible that you have experienced anxiety over the loss of something good and have not yet considered what beautiful and better *new* thing God may be doing because He pruned away what was not bearing fruit?

It could be relationships. It could be the idolizing of good grades in school. It could be God taking you out of one fruitful job so that He could put you in another *more* fruitful job. “Look, I am about to do something new; even now it is coming. Do you not see it? Indeed, I will make a way in the wilderness, rivers in the desert (Isa. 43:19).” If your anxiety stems from your attachment to what God has cut away, then you are overlooking the new and better investment of your heart and energy that God is bringing about right now. You cannot swim in the deep end with one foot in the shallows. Invite God’s pruning. Surrender to Him. He is indeed Lord in your life,

right? Watch anxiety abate when you let go of the fruitless branch God has pruned away, thank Him for the time you had it, and invest fully in what is next. For some anxious hearts, moving on to what is next is when healing begins and lingering too long in the pain prolongs our meaningless languishing to the detriment of what God has in store next.

Scenario 5: A mosaic of purposes in suffering

Romans 8:28 should be the anthem of hearts regardless of which scenario most resonates with our circumstances. God works *all* things together for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purposes. It is entirely possible that the circumstances incurring your anxiety could have come from a satanic attack which God allowed, resulting in the pruning away of something fruitless in your life, but setting the stage for God's miraculous intervention. It could be that God is disciplining you for sin by allowing Satan parameters within which to attack you. It could be all of these scenarios combined in your life whilst simultaneously intertwining with any combination of these in another person's life. God could be at work in another person in your church or family through your anxiety.

Reject Christian narcissism. Remember that your walk with Christ is not just about you and you alone. As a Christian, you were gifted by the Holy Spirit for service in God's church. We receive the Word of God not just directly from God to us on an individual level, but from God to all of God's people together. In fact, some books of the Bible make no sense when read as though they were directly to you. There is a complementarianism of giftings throughout the New Testament epistles. There is a deliberately designed beauty to the motley nature of our unique charismas (gifts). You were made for fellowship, so do not let your anxiety isolate you. Not only are you isolating your gifts from others, but you are isolating yourself from what could be the cure.

For this reason, peace is paramount. As far as it depends upon you, be at peace with your fellow Christians especially. Do what is in your power to reconcile and do not take communion until you have, lest you eat and drink judgment on yourself (1 Cor. 11). Guard your heart against bitterness and let love cover the multitude of wrongs at play in your story, including your own. *It is often a simple choice between forgiveness and insanity.* The bitter grudge you hold against the one who wronged you will have no effect on him or her, but it will be cancerous to your joy and peace. Especially if you are a Christian who speaks boldly with faithfulness to the Bible, Christians are going to be your biggest detractors. You are going to be in the business of forgiving Christians for betraying you until you get to heaven. In fact, most of the arrows you take in living a bold Christian life will be put there by other people who profess to believe in God. Of course, this is all the more disappointing because Christians who have the Holy Spirit of God know better, but sin against one another anyway. The only way the church works is with forgiveness, so forgive.

Remember what you deserve. Consider the damage you may have unknowingly done and extend grace to those who have hurt you without realizing it. This is incredibly basic, but often forgotten: the wages of sin is death. That is what you and I deserve because of our sin – eternity in hell. So, compared to what we deserve, what we are getting is actually quite gracious. If we are honest, our critics don't know the half of it, but God knows it all and loves you anyway. Let's be grateful that we are not held fully accountable for the full extent of our combined wretchedness. Hand over to God those who have wronged you with hard hearts. Let Him deal with them if they are His. The Church is not perfect, but she will be yet.

In the meantime, we have already been given the perfect tool for reconciliation between Christians and the restoration of a brother or sister who has sinned. In Matthew 18, Jesus gave us clear procedures, but I am utterly astounded at how frequently Christians either fumble or ignore these. If your brother or sister sins (and some manuscripts of Matthew 18 do not include the words “against you”) *go to him or her one-on-one*. Good grief I cannot believe how many times I have seen Christians skip this step. It is so basic, people. Do not go to Twitter first. Do not go to Facebook first. Do not email the news out first. *Go to the offending person first*. Then, if he or she confesses and repents, the matter is finished and it is sinful to spread the news further.

Should the offending brother or sister still not repent, then bring one or two other Christians. Believe it or not, I have personally seen Christians try to bring non-humans in as witnesses. So, to clarify, the witnesses need to be human beings. They need to be Christians. They need to be aware of the fact that you are referring to them as witnesses and they need to be present. Then, if the rebellious brother or sister in Christ repents, all of you drop the matter immediately and celebrate along with heaven because, just like you have at some point in your past, this Christian came home.

Finally, should a believer who has sinned and possibly sinned against you still not repent even after having been confronted individually and thereafter by two or three (human) witnesses, invite them before a larger body of believers. If he or she still does not repent, then Matthew 18 instructs us to treat him or her as we would a non-believer and that means that we start all over again with the gospel, revoking church membership if that applies. Someone who does not repent at this stage must not be saved.

When my bride and I were moved to Nashville by LifeWay, we had to join a church. The morning we visited one church, a pastor was confessing sin to the entire congregation. There were passionate shouts of “We love you!” from the balcony and a loving crowd embraced him even as he confessed. This third step of spiritual discipline, in my experience, is actually a beautiful outpouring of love. It is also a powerful and convicting testimony to those who witness it and secretly harbor the same sin. The sequence of steps that Jesus gave us in Matthew 18 are perfect.

So, What's Next?

“We are afflicted in every way but not crushed; we are perplexed but not in despair; we are persecuted but not abandoned; we are struck down but not destroyed (Cor, 4:8,9).” Everything you thought would have killed you evidently has not. You are anxious because you are afflicted, but you have not been crushed. You may be perplexed, and even more so after having read my book, but no heaven-bound Christian need linger in despair. God has allowed you to be persecuted, but He has not abandoned you. You may feel struck down, but this has not destroyed you because you're reading right now.

If you believe that God has disciplined you, then repent and move forward without that sin that held you back. His grace is inexhaustible and His love for you unabated.

If you have endured Satan's attack, then turn it into a new ministry and let every heart who experiences healing from your hut and every soul who saved by the gospel when you share it turn your anxiety into godly purpose.

If you believe God has set the stage for a miracle, then have the faith to pray for one, but have the greater faith to give Him glory even if He does not. Pray for a miracle; especially if you never have asked God to do something impossible.

If God has pruned your life, then surrender to Him what He asks of you because what He calls you to next will produce even more fruit.

In all of these scenarios, humble yourself under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your cares on him, because He cares about you.

Write a letter to a persecuted Christian at <https://www.prisoneralert.com/> *because of your anxiety*. Watch God do something beautiful that would not have come about were it not for your anxiety. Bookmark this page in your calendar in a recurring event that reminds you to revisit it every two months to see who else in the world needs encouragement from 1 Peter, the original letter of encouragement to persecuted believers. As you write, encourage them to connect with Jesse Campbell Ministries upon their release in Jesus' name! This way, we may hear back from them one day, host an interview at JesseCampbellMinistries.com, and together give them a gift to further their ministries. See godly purpose come from your anxiety and let it bring you healing.

If this book has blessed you, then let Jesse Campbell Ministries know on social media and share the news with your friends and family!