

## **Casting Your Cares**

May 21, 2023

### **Psalm 68:1-10**

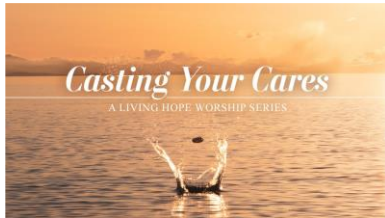
<sup>1</sup> Let God rise up, let his enemies be scattered; let those who hate him flee before him. <sup>2</sup> As smoke is driven away, so drive them away; as wax melts before the fire, let the wicked perish before God. <sup>3</sup> But let the righteous be joyful; let them exult before God; let them be jubilant with joy. <sup>4</sup> Sing to God, sing praises to his name; lift up a song to him who rides upon the clouds — his name is the LORD — be exultant before him. <sup>5</sup> Father of orphans and protector of widows is God in his holy habitation. <sup>6</sup> God gives the desolate a home to live in; he leads out the prisoners to prosperity, but the rebellious live in a parched land. <sup>7</sup> O God, when you went out before your people, when you marched through the wilderness, <sup>8</sup> the earth quaked, the heavens poured down rain at the presence of God, the God of Sinai, at the presence of God, the God of Israel. <sup>9</sup> Rain in abundance, O God, you showered abroad; you restored your heritage when it languished; <sup>10</sup> your flock found a dwelling in it; in your goodness, O God, you provided for the needy...

### **1<sup>st</sup> Peter 4:12-14, 5:6-11**

<sup>12</sup> Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that is taking place among you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. <sup>13</sup> But rejoice insofar as you are sharing Christ's sufferings, so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed. <sup>14</sup> If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory, which is the Spirit of God, is resting on you...

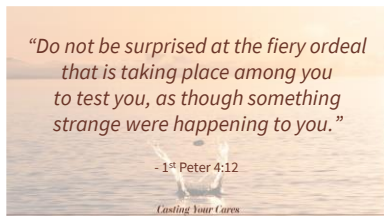
<sup>6</sup> Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time. <sup>7</sup> Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you. <sup>8</sup> Discipline yourselves, keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour. <sup>9</sup> Resist him, steadfast in your faith, for you know that your brothers and sisters in all the world are undergoing the same kinds of suffering.

<sup>10</sup> And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, support, strengthen, and establish you. <sup>11</sup> To him be the power forever and ever. Amen.



My friends, to hear the call to cast all of our anxiety away is a monumental task. Yet it is a powerful gift and promise. In our Epistle text for today, Peter is not telling us that the problem will just go away. He is inviting us to not let the suffering, the anxiety, or the cares control us. Peter is inviting us to cast away our tendency to worry. He is calling us to trust in the Lord because God cares for us. The Psalm invites us to sing of the goodness of God. Singing of God's goodness is a reminder that we do not face suffering or anxiety or anything else alone. It is a reminder that we are surrounded by God and by the caring community of faith all of the time. The mood or 'feel' of both the Psalm and our text from 1<sup>st</sup> Peter is one of joy. The call in both texts is to live in or to experience joy in the depth of our soul, no matter what our situation or circumstances. As we hear and respond to the call to cast our cares upon Jesus, let us begin with a word of prayer...

Our reading from 1<sup>st</sup> Peter comes from both chapters 4 and 5. In chapter 4, Peter speaks one last time about the trials that will inevitably come. In verse 12 he writes,



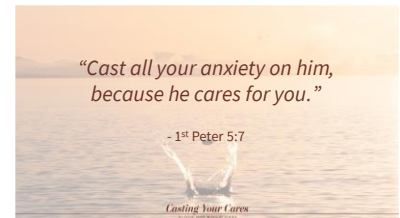
*"Do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that is taking place among you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you."* Peter is reminding these elect exiles and us living in the world today that when we live godly lives,

we can expect to face the hostility of the world.

And, as Peter has done again and again in this letter, in the next two verses he reminds all disciples that we should rejoice as we share in Christ's sufferings. We can rejoice because we know that we will be present when Christ's glory is revealed. And we know that we are blessed when *"reviled in the name of Christ"* – because then the Spirit of God rests upon us.

Turning to chapter 5, we pick up the passage in verse 6. In light of the fiery ordeal that often befalls followers of Christ, here Peter advises his readers and us to *"humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God"* because in humility we rely on God and not on ourselves. The end result is that we will be exalted *"in due time."* While this promise is one that we are certainly glad to receive, it does not remove the troubles of this time.

Speaking into this reality, Peter says in verse 7: *"Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you."* This may be a very familiar verse. It might even be one that you have had shared with you or that you have shared with another. We hear and think and maybe even pray this verse a lot of the time. But here are the real questions: How do we do it? And, can we do it?



Peter would not present us with this advice if it were impossible to accomplish the task. I do not believe that God is in the frustration business. God cares for us.

Yet casting our cares onto Jesus – even knowing that he cares for us – is an extremely difficult task. Especially when Peter has done such a great job telling these elect exiles and all who read these words that trials will come, that suffering will happen, that we will pay a price for obedient and faithful discipleship. Look at how Peter puts this in verse 8: *"Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls*



*around, looking for someone to devour.”* In our discipleship group book, Sarah Wright connects to this verse with this insight: “Now, let me offer a hypothetical situation... If while you are walking, someone frantically approaches you panicking because a wild lion has escaped from the zoo... Immediately you’d be painfully aware of your vulnerability and your inability to fight off a wild lion. You would run for shelter or look for an object to defend yourself... You would be on guard, watchful, and ready to run or fight! I believe this in the kind of reaction Peter wants us to have when we read this verse” (page 199.)

The reality is that Satan is on the prowl. Satan wants nothing more than to drive a wedge between us and our God. Our adversary will use any lie, any trick, and half-truth, any temptation, any fear or doubt or worry to create separation between us and the Lord. Our fears, our doubts, our worries, our anxiety – they are real. They can be overwhelming. So the real question becomes, how do we just cast them aside?

Peter offers us a solution to this question. In the first few verses from chapter 5’s text, Peter gives us three steps:  
*“humble yourselves... discipline yourselves... resist him.”*

Step 1: be humble. This is the necessary first step.

If we think that we can just forget or put aside our cares or anxieties on our own, we are fooling ourselves. As Sarah Wright shares, we must be ‘humbly aware of our own fragility and susceptibility – ready to run, battle, and seek refuge in God’s strength because once we are ensnared, this aggressive roaring, powerful enemy is bent on destroying us’ (page 200.)



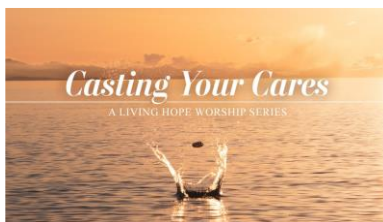
Next, we must discipline ourselves. There are many ways that we do this. Some are practical. We do not go to those places – whether physical or online – that hold temptations for us. We do not hang out with people who are likely to drag us into something we shouldn't be involved in. Some are spiritual. We read and study the scriptures. We come to church, and we grow in our faith. We surround ourselves with people who will help hold us accountable. We pray a lot. And then we pray some more. Prayer is such an essential discipline to practice. Just a quick word on prayer from the YouVersion devotional that I read on Tuesday morning. Here it is:

“What do we do once we come into the presence of God? We begin to open our hearts and minds to God through prayer and worship. The power of prayer is overly trivialized today and we fail to see the immense blessing that the very act of prayer imparts into our life. It does not need to be an elaborate dialogue with God made ornate with long yet meaningless words. It is simply the cry of your heart and an intimate conversation with your father and maker. While God already knows every little detail about your life, it is important to have this conversation because it comes from a place of surrender. This is you shifting the focus from your worry back to God, and as you begin to magnify and exalt God in that moment, everything else just becomes far less important compared to the assurance that God gives you.”

And, lastly, we resist when temptation comes our way. As Sarah Wright put it, we must be ‘on guard, watchful, and ready to run or fight!’ To be on guard means that we are aware of our own weaknesses. As we grow in our faith we come to realize where we are most likely to sin. For me one of my struggles is being judgmental or critical. Over time I have become more ‘on guard’ – I catch myself quicker, I repent faster. To be watchful means to be cognizant of our own desires and wants and weaknesses.

This too increases my resistance. And, when necessary, we must be prepared to run or to fight. It is often easiest to run (or at least walk quickly) when we find ourselves in a place that we should not be. But at times we must fight. We must call on the reserves that we build up as we practice our spiritual disciplines. And we can call on those trusted people, those accountability partners that we have found. And most importantly, we must turn to the only one with the power to save and defend us. Peter mentioned this in chapter 4.

In verse 14 Peter reminded us that *“the Spirit of God is resting upon you.”* This lifeline is a reminder that God is with us. We do not resist the devil alone. It is the Spirit that motivates and helps us in our times of need. Yes, the pain or grief is still there, but the Spirit brings us real comfort, tangible care and comfort, and companionship. The presence of God resting upon us, abiding in us, sustaining us – this presence carries us through when we resist or run, and it strengthens us when we are in the fight.



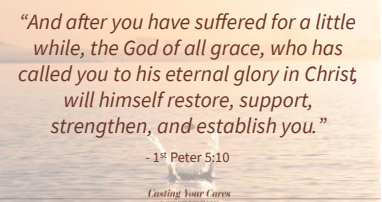
Turning to Psalm 68, we see a model for how to cast our cares or our anxiety or our fears on the one who cares for us. Verses 1 and 2 begin where we often do – bringing our prayers and our petitions to God. We long for God to *“scatter”* our adversaries. We want God to *“drive them away.”* We want to see *“the wicked perish.”* But the Psalm quickly shifts gears, in verse 3, providing a model for us to follow. Verse 3 begins with *“But.”* It is an important word. There is a choice. We, like the psalmist, can choose to stay in our fears, doubts, anxieties. We can choose to stay angry or hurt or resentful. Here is the better choice: *“But let the righteous be joyful... let them be jubilant with joy... Sing to God, sing praises to his name; lift up a song.”*



There is a choice to being joyful. It begins by describing God and then by telling what God has done and is doing for us and with us and through us.

And if we have trouble doing that because our situation or circumstance feels too much to bear or if it feels too much to bring to God, then we can turn to the bigger story. Like the psalmist does in verses 7-10, we can read the stories found in the Bible. We can remember the story of God's work on behalf and with the people of God. We can allow these stories to become the songs we sing, to be the hope we have in God. When we remember how God has been there again and again for the children of God, then maybe we can once again remember when God has been there for us. We can ask ourselves questions like these: What is going right today? Where have we recently experienced healing or restoration? When have the hungry been fed or the poor lifted up? Remembering the story of God in the Biblical account and then recalling God's activity in our lives, we can see that God is indeed alive and present – and that God can be trusted with our cares.

As we close, turn once again with me to 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 5. In verse 10 we read these words: *“And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, support, strengthen, and establish you.”* First, Peter reminds us that our suffering is but for a little while. Any suffering in this world is temporal, momentary, light, comparatively short. Second, we will be fully restored. All that has been broken, lost, destroyed, defeated, consumed – they will be made new again.



Once we are able to cast our cares upon the one who tells us not to worry, then we are able to witness to God's presence in our lives. It is possible to witness to the power of God at work in our lives and to testify about the one who does take our cares upon himself because the Lord restores, supports, strengthens, and establishes us in this life. Christ fights with us and for us. And when we let go of what we're afraid of or worried about, when we allow Christ to be fully present to us in Spirit, then we can begin to take hold of the vision and plan that God has for us. And when we live into God's purposes and plans, then we stop wondering about what God is doing. We stop because then we have begun to live as God's instruments, as Christ's hands and feet. *"To him be the power and glory forever."* May it be so for you and for me this week. Amen and amen.

### **GPS – Grow, Pray, Study**

- 1) *Grow*. In your walk of faith, when have you most needed to cast your cares upon Jesus? What was the outcome of doing this? What changed in your faith?
- 2) *Pray*. As you consider your current cares, fears, anxieties, what rises to the top of your mind or heart? Take these to the one who cares for you.
- 3) *Study*. Read Acts 1:1-11. When have you sensed Jesus or the Holy Spirit telling you to wait or to just be patient?