

# “Heaving Your Anxiety”

*Twelfth in a series on Peter's First Letter*

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1<sup>st</sup> Peter 5:5b-11

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Everyone, clothe yourselves with humility toward each other. God stands against the proud, but he gives grace to the humble.

Therefore, humble yourselves under God's mighty hand, so that he may raise you up at the right time. Throw all your anxiety onto him, because he cares about you. Be clearheaded. Keep alert. Your adversary, the devil, is on the prowl like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him. Standing firm in the faith. You know that your fellow believers are enduring the same suffering throughout the world. After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, the one who called you into his eternal glory in the Messiah Jesus, will himself restore, empower, strengthen, and establish you. To him be power forever and always. Amen.

My translation, using N. T. Wright's *Kingdom New Testament* and various commentaries.

Ever take a Masterclass? One of those online courses taught by experts. Well, you're doing one now.

A Masterclass in anxiety!

I can't see my friends? I can't visit my mother? Grocery store . . . scary! The arrows on the floor???

I forgot my mask? Do I have the right kind? See how that guy is wearing his!

First, "Will we run out of toilet paper?" Later, "Can we afford 2x4s?"

Worship online. Meetings online. Family online. Funerals online. Am I muted?

Make my pandemic productive! I'm going to read stacks. Take courses. Learn a skill! Bread-making. Bagpiping. Crocheting. Get fit. Pelaton! What do you mean, a Mediterranean diet isn't pizza and wine? Really, I've become an expert at Netflix and forgetting what day it is. I can't even do a pandemic right.

It was, "When can I get vaccinated?" Then, "Should I? Should I care which one? Will it

make me sick?" Then the online sign-up wouldn't work!

This is serious. Last December, record numbers of Canadians said they had anxiety disorders or depression. That was before wave 2! And 3!<sup>1</sup> Fear of getting sick. Getting sick. Worry for loved ones. Them dying. Other health concerns put on pause. (But no one the told cancer to wait.) Working from home. Your whole family working from home. Online schooling. In-classroom schooling. Your job. Your business. Recession. Now inflation. What news to trust? Which theory to believe?

And now . . . soon . . . maybe . . . returning to normal. Or, returning to new. Whatever that is. "Build back better." What if I get that wrong?

Apparently we've been so anxious, our dogs are too. Our best friends are also going on anxiety meds as never before.<sup>2</sup> Wait until we actually leave them alone!<sup>3</sup>

## II

*"Throw all your anxiety onto God . . ."* Whew! I like it.

I wish Peter stopped there.

But then he says: *"Be clearheaded! Keep alert!"* A soldier keeping watch, a sentinel ready to raise the alarm. Non-anxious? By the way, the Greek word for "keep alert" is *gregoreō*. Yes, that's me, always expecting something will go wrong. Anxiety!

Then this: *"Your adversary, the devil, is on the prowl like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour."*

Camp site. There's a noise. Squirrel? Raccoon? Bear!? No, lion!!

Sure . . . expect me to believe that? Next you'll say its some guy with horns, fire, and a pitch fork!

No, I won't. That's silly. But — and I talked about this last week — something is beyond and behind the evils we humans do. Something systemic and personal, vicious and

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ctvnews.ca/health/coronavirus/canadians-reporting-more-anxiety-and-depression-than-ever-before-poll-finds-1.5266911>

<sup>2</sup> Jason Micheli, "Beast of Burden," *Election Season: Reflections from First Peter* (Crackers and Grape Juice, 2020), 177.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2021/05/pandemic-puppies-will-be-alone-first-time/619024/>

wilful, twisting and corrupting, victimizing us and turning us to victimize others. I believe it because Jesus did. And I see it.

This Prowler, ready to devour. Out there. Close by.

Now, "*throw all your anxiety onto God.*"

Relax? No. "*Resist. Stand firm in the faith.*" We're not in this alone. It comes with the territory of belonging to Jesus.

Notice it doesn't say "*attack,*" "*go after them,*" "*fight lion with lion.*" Never forget that as we "seek justice and resist evil," people doing wrong are not what it wrong. The Prowler has got them. So resist them with love. If your resisting does violence, hates, dehumanizes, then the Lion has got you too.

"*Throw all your anxiety onto God. . .*" That doesn't protect from danger. Peter is clear about that.

But what if Greg is not *gregoreō*, falls asleep on watch, and now danger is running him down.

Anxiety!

### III

So we have "*Throw all your anxiety onto God. . .*" But then, a bunch of things that might make us anxious! What do we do with this?

I notice that, just before, Peter talks about being humble.<sup>4</sup>

Humility is set against pride.

It think there can be a good kind of pride. Let's call it "grateful pride." Grateful that God has made you, with all there is that is good about you. Grateful for the abilities and

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<sup>4</sup> In the Greco-Roman culture, being humble was most definitely *not* a virtue. Those of bottom-of-the-heap social status were humble, and no one wanted to be that. In fact, this word Peter uses comes from the work apron a slave wore. Basically, Peter is saying "*be like that.*" That being humble is now considered a good thing, is a sign of the abiding influence Jesus continues to have, even in our secular age. Dennis R. Edwards, 1 Peter, The Story of God Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 2017), 142, 202.

accomplishments God has given you, and the opportunities to use them well.<sup>5</sup> Grateful pride.

But there's what I'd call "puffed-up pride." We lift up and celebrate ourselves beyond who we are as God's creatures. Thomas Tarrants summarizes it as  
*an attitude of self-sufficiency, self-importance, and self-exaltation in relation to God. Toward others, it is an attitude of contempt and indifference.*<sup>6</sup>

Pride rockets you above others, and you look down on them. We think of pride as a problem of the rich and successful, powerful and famous.

#### IV

I'm anxious because I don't feel powerful. Successful? Barely. Puffed-up? No. Yet Peter talks about not being prideful (humble) together with not being anxious? Can anxiety be prideful?

Yes, it can.

When I tell myself this is all mine to figure out, mine to make happen, mine to carry, mine to ensure it works out well. It's still me, me, me. "You've got this!" they say. It's not all mine to "get." Thinking it is, is prideful. I fall for it all the time. I get so anxious, because I know "I don't got this." It's not a pride that boosts me up. It's a pride that beaks me apart.

C. S. Lewis said that pride *"is the complete anti-God state of mind. . . ."*<sup>7</sup> "Anti-God" sounds assertive, aggressive. Anti-God can also be anxious. It's acting like it's all on me and God is not real, denying what God is like, and refusing to trust what God promises.

*"Throw all your anxiety onto God, because God cares about you."*

God cares about you.

You forget that. Or you don't dare believe it. Or you don't think it matters.

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<sup>5</sup> In this sense, then, in a racist society "Black Pride" can be recovering the God-given dignity and beauty of the skin you're in. "Gay Pride" can be seeing the God-given gift of your sexual orientation, after being taught it's a perversion.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas A. Tarrants, III, "Pride and Humility" *Knowing & Doing* (Winter 2011). This is a publication of the C. S. Lewis Institute. [https://www.cslewisinstitute.org/webfm\\_send/890](https://www.cslewisinstitute.org/webfm_send/890)

<sup>7</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Simon & Schuster Touchstone edition, 1996), 109.

Whatever is your anxiousness, put it onto God. Heave it onto God!<sup>8</sup>

That doesn't end it for you. Remember, be clearheaded . . . keep alert . . . resist . . . stand firm in your faith . . . your trust in God. But without the anxious-pride of thinking its all up to you. God is carrying you, because God cares about you.

V

I'm saying this to myself, as much as to you. But then there is this problem. I want to heave my anxieties onto God, but I'm still anxious. I take medications. I've gone to therapy. That's good. They help.

Still anxious.

My faith, my trust in God is stronger than ever.

Still anxious.

I get anxious about being anxious, worried that I don't even have it in me to heave my anxieties right.

Then I read a sermon by Jason Micheli that set me right.<sup>9</sup>

*Throw all your anxiety onto God. . . .*

Peter doesn't give that as advice: "*I always find it works if you cast your anxieties onto the Lord.*" Nor as a strategy: "*Have you tried casting your anxieties . . . ?*" It's not a solution: "*If you give your anxieties to God, they'll go away.*" Or a command: "*A good Christian ought to cast their anxieties onto the Lord.*"<sup>10</sup>

If it's any of those, I fail. But it's none of them.

*Throw all your anxiety onto God. . . .*

It's a promise.

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<sup>8</sup> The same Greek word Peter uses, *epi-iptō* is used in Luke's account of Palm Sunday, when Jesus' disciples put their garments on the colt for him to ride on.

<sup>9</sup> Micheli, 179ff.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 180f.

It's not about me, or you, and what we need to do.

It's about what God is doing in you.

If you are able to fling all your anxiety away, or if you still can't stop tossing and turning, God is working in you. The same God who bore everything for you, in Jesus' body on the cross, is carrying all your anxieties.

So you don't have to.

And if you are anxious about that . . . God is carrying that anxiety too.

*The God of all grace,  
who called you into his eternal glory in the Messiah Jesus,  
will himself restore, empower, strengthen, and establish you.*

Don't you worry about that! Amen.