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Speaker: Pastor Jeff Poush
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Title of sermon: **Stand Firm**

1 Peter 5:6-14 - NIV:

⁶Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. ⁷Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. ⁸Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. ⁹Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings. ¹⁰And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. ¹¹To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.

¹²With the help of Silas, whom I regard as a faithful brother, I have written to you briefly, encouraging you and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand fast in it. ¹³She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you her greetings, and so does my son Mark. ¹⁴Greet one another with a kiss of love. Peace to all of you who are in Christ.

Well, good evening! It's great to be with you! I want to start by addressing my foot. A couple weeks ago during our mid-week message, Pastor Mark and I commented on the fact that I was wearing a boot, and the outpouring of love and affection that you have shown to me has been overwhelming. I actually am fine. It sounded like I may have actually hurt myself while golfing -- okay? That is not true. That would be a really, really lame way to break your ankle. The reality is, I actually broke my ankle four months earlier doing something even dumber than just golfing, but that isn't what we're here to talk about tonight. I did break my ankle in two places in May, limped around for a while, finally went to the doctor, got an MRI, and the doctor said, "You're right! Your foot probably hurts. I would like you to wear this large boot, stay off it for three to four weeks, take it off, walk on it. Call me, if it still hurts, we're gonna have to do surgery." So, this trained professional, a medical doctor, gave me an action plan. He gave me a course of action to heal my foot. So, I wore the boot, for two days. And then I had a softball game, so -- you can't play softball with a big dumb boot on, so I took it off, and -- I just figured, ah, it'll get better. And -- it just never did. It's as if the doctor kind of knew what he was talking about. Well, it was on the golf trip a few weeks ago that I realized -- I can't stand up. Every time I step on a rock or a pine cone, I feel like I'm gonna go down. You see, my friends -- they hit the ball on that part of the golf course that's, like, got the beautiful green grass, and sometimes I'm on the part of the golf course that has the rocks and the pine cones -- and the rattlers -- so it was on the golf trip that I realized, "Man, I really can't stand very well, and I'm in constant pain. I can't even go up a hill any more. I'm only 48 years old, and I feel like I'm 148! Maybe I should do what the doctor told me to do." So, I came home and put the boot on, I followed the doctor's orders, and -- lo and behold, I can stand up straight! I can stand firm! I can jump around! I feel much better. And all the while, I'm realizing that my unwillingness to follow my doctor's order caused me pain. I suffered hardship. I was not able to stand firm because I was arrogant. And I thought I knew better than what the doctor had prescribed to me. I was given exactly what I needed to heal, but I didn't follow the plan, and it caused me prolonged unnecessary pain.

Well, we are all living in some crazy times right now. And we know it. We have so much stress, so many unknowns, so much turmoil that we're all dealing with. And it's having an adverse effect on us. We're starting to fight with each other, we're frustrated, and we're battling anxiety. I don't know about you, but I'm kind of getting sick of hearing the trite cliché, "We are living in unprecedented times." Enough of the unprecedented times! I'm ready for some precedented times, how about

you? Okay -- I'm ready for some precedented times. Well, the scriptures tonight -- the scripture that we're going to read tonight is just like my doctor's orders. My doctor gave me an action plan to help me deal with my pain and allow me to stand firm. Our text today is going to do that very same thing. It's going to talk about how we can deal with the pressure and stress that is associated with living in chaotic, troubling times. You see, I ignored my doctor's orders and I suffered. Friends, the implications are far too great for us to ignore the Word of God, because these words bring healing, comfort, and life to all who heed its instruction.

I'm going to be reading from 1 Peter chapter five, so if you brought your Bible, you can flip there, and it'll be up on the screen behind me. 1 Peter's an incredible book. Peter -- the apostle -- Peter wrote this book to a group of folks who had been run out of Jerusalem. They had been driven from their homes, and they were alienated from their communities. They were facing great persecution, and in some cases even death, because of their faith in Jesus Christ. His audience is referred to as the Diaspora Jews. These are Jewish converts to Christianity that had been scattered abroad. They were now aliens living in foreign lands suffering in chaotic and uncertain times. They knew what it was to suffer. Some of their struggles came from their neighbors, who had different cultural, religious, and social standards than what they were accustomed to. Some of their struggles came from the new foreign governmental system that they found themselves living under. And some of their struggles even came from within the faith community, because they differed on how to relate to their new environment. Do they assimilate or do they fight? Do you think any of these issues are relevant to us today? Does any of that sound familiar? Don't you just love it when people say that this book is archaic, irrelevant, and out of touch? Friends, there's nothing new under the sun. The issues that Peter was addressing 2000 years ago are almost a direct parallel to the issues that we are facing today. And Peter gives us a plan. He tells his friends exactly how they can deal with their anxiety, and tonight we have something to learn from this text, as well. Chapter five, verse six -- Peter says, "Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you. Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings. And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered for a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen."

Our action plan starts with a call to humility. He starts us off with a big challenge. It's tough to be humble. It's tough to acknowledge that someone else might have more information than you have. It's tough to take the humble position, because humility says "I need help. I don't have everything under control." Pride says, "I got this." Pride says, "I'm capable. I'm competent enough to deal with my struggles." You see, if I would have been more humble, if I would've followed my doctor's orders four months ago, I wouldn't have had to put up with all the pain and suffering. It was self-inflicted. I did it to myself. I wanted to do my own thing thinking I knew the best. But I needed to get lower so that God could do the heavy lifting. When a person takes a humble position, it's not just a character trait. Humility is not just a character trait, it's a posture. It's a posture of getting lower, and our text says that God will lift us up. He will exalt us if we are willing to take that low position. Because if we want to make progress in our spiritual lives, if we want to overcome our pain and our discomfort, if we want to endure the trials and hardships that we are facing -- it starts with the posture of humility.

When Peter references the mighty hand of God, he was drawing on an Old Testament concept, an Old Testament idea or phrase that was used all throughout the Old Testament, especially in the Book of Exodus. And that phrase "the mighty hand of God" would have reminded these Jewish Christians

about God's provision and His protection. That phrase was used all throughout Exodus as God brought the Israelites out of captivity and Egypt, and He led them into the promised land. And if you think about the nation of Israel living under captivity, living under the harsh hand of Pharaoh, I'm sure that there were times that those people thought that their suffering would never end. I'm sure that despair and heartache were commonplace among the people. But God heard the cries of His people. So at the perfect time, as part of His sovereign plan, God sent a rescuer. God redeemed His people. By His mighty hand He defeated Pharaoh's army. He parted the Red Sea, and He even endured the whining and the grumbling of the very people He was trying to rescue! There were many times that the people were called "stiff-necked" and they rebelled against God's plan. Why? Because they were arrogant! They didn't have that humble posture that said, "You got this. I will submit to your leadership." So God had to deal with their arrogance. They even thought at one point it was better to go back into Egypt! At one point they thought, "Man, maybe we should just go back and be slaves again, because -- at least they fed us well." They didn't like God's menu choices. How arrogant is that? They wanted to go back, because they thought they knew better. But God's mighty hand redeemed and rescued and restored those people in spite of their pride. So that is why now Peter is pushing this idea and encouraging them to take that posture of humility. Peter is urging his audience, and the text is urging us, to deal with our arrogance so that the mighty hand of God can have its place and have its way in our lives. Because God has a time that He will exalt the faithful.

You see, humbling yourself means submitting to God's pattern of suffering before exaltation. God's a God of order. God is not random and haphazard. God has an order to things. And all throughout the scripture, we see this pattern of suffering that comes before exaltation. The Israelites -- they had to wander in the desert before they entered the promised land. Jesus had to endure incredible suffering on the cross before He was lifted up and given the name above all names. And now, the church is enduring trials and persecution until Jesus chooses to come back and establish His eternal kingdom. We must wait as a sign of faith and trust in God's sovereign plan. We've got to look at the long game and not just the short game. Not just the current suffering and trials that we're under, but we need to have a long view of God's plan that is unfolding. Waiting is not easy. Waiting is not a natural thing. It is really, really hard to sit and to wait and be patient, because we want to do something. We want to be active. We want to be change agents. So, waiting is totally against our nature, which is why we need a change of nature. We need to address our instinct to follow the flesh and be led by the Spirit. The text tells us, it gives us a great phrase -- "Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time." When He wants to! When He is ready to! In due time God's going to take care of your struggles.

Next part of the action plan. What does Peter say? He says, "Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you." What a great piece of truth. How many fishermen do we have in the room? Okay, a few fishermen. How many of you guys know what fishing is? More of you. Okay. The first part of the fishing equation is to what? You cast the bait. Right? I love the imagery. You load up that bait -- imagine loading up your hook with a worm -- make your anxiety that worm. You throw that fancy brand new lure that cost you eight bucks that's gonna wind up in a tree, but you throw that lure out there. Well, what are you doing? You're launching it far away from where you are! You are rearing back and you are casting your anxiety far away. Now, notice -- it doesn't say "Go fishing with your anxiety," does it? Because then you reel it back in! Wouldn't that be dumb? Wouldn't that be silly and foolish to cast your anxiety out and then reel it back in? Doesn't say "Go fishing." It says, "Cast your anxiety on God." Why? "Because he's good, and he cares about you." What a beautiful image. How do I deal with my suffering? How do I deal with my anxiety? I rear back, I load up that hook, and I launch it far away from where I am. And then I leave it there. To

reel it back in would be foolish, but we all do it all the time. We keep recycling the same frustration and pain over and over again. We've got to hang onto that mental picture of casting our anxiety. We throw it out to the only one who can actually do anything about it! And when we cast it, we're casting it to a God who knows our struggles, and who cares for us. Stop trying to manage your anxiety on your own, because you'll just make yourself miserable. Trust the caring, mighty hand of God and He will rescue you from your burden. Because if that burden was heavy enough for you to want to cast it aside, we don't want to bring it back. We want to leave it out there. Because we may not have any control over the circumstances that are causing us trouble, but we can control what we do with our troubles. So once we've taken the humble posture, and we've acknowledged that God is both caring enough and powerful enough to deal with our anxiety, we are now introduced to another factor that has a major impact on our emotional and our spiritual well-being.

Peter then goes on to say -- "Be self-controlled and alert." Be self-controlled and alert. Why? "Because the enemy is like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour. Be watchful and alert. Keep your head on a swivel. Why? Because there's somebody out there like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour. Graphic language. That's a -- you know, casting, a -- you know, a fishing pole - - that's kinda cool, that's kinda fun. I'm out fishing. Then he changes to a very dramatic picture of a roaring lion waiting to eat you. C. S. Lewis is quoted as saying, "There's two mistakes people make when they talk about Satan. People either joke about him or they ignore him." And both of those options are bad. To joke about Satan diminishes his actual influence, and to ignore him leaves us vulnerable to his attacks.

Peter starts with addressing the internal things that cause us to have anxiety. Pride. And then he talks about an external influence that leads to anxiety and struggles. He says to watch out, because the enemy is scheming. He says that we ought to be alert and sober-minded. What is a sober mind? A sober mind is one that is clear thinking and ready for action. A sober mind is the opposite of a drunk mind, right? It's the first antonym, it's the first opposite that most of us probably think of. The opposite of sober is drunk. When a police officer pulls over a driver that he suspects might be intoxicated and under the influence, what does he do? He subjects that driver to what's called a field sobriety test. Why does he do that? Because he wants to determine the driver's mental acuity and his physical coordination. Does this person have what it takes to operate this motor vehicle safely? Because a drunk person behind the wheel of a car is a danger to themselves and a danger to others. We'd all agree that a sober-minded, alert driver is better than a driver who lacks attention to detail and is mentally impaired by some foreign influence. Right? So, to be watchful, to be sober-minded and alert when it comes to dealing with the schemes of the devil -- it means that if we are spiritually drowsy, if we are not spiritually alert, we are a danger to ourselves and to others. There's another place, earlier on -- I think it's in the first chapter -- where Peter uses a metaphor where he says, "Gird the loins of your mind for action." That's a weird phrase. No one knows what girding their loins means. Unless you are a lady who is used to wearing a skirt. Ladies, if you're wearing a skirt that's down below your knees and you gotta hustle, you're late for something -- what do you typically do? You grab that, you hike it up just above your knees so you don't trip yourself, right? That's called girding yourselves. Well, the dudes used to wear these long tunics, and when they were getting ready to go into battle it's not good to have a tunic down around your shins, right? So, they would take their belt, they would crank up their tunic up above their knees, and they would gird their loins so they'd be ready for action, ready to battle. That's the picture. We've got an enemy out there, we've got a battle. We've got somebody out there who wants to take us out! So we have to have minds that are ready, minds that are sober and alert. And ready for action.

The mighty hand of God, yes, is always protecting us. But we also need to be on guard, because divine protection does not eliminate the need for constant vigilance. Trusting God does not mean that we sit back passively and do nothing! Oliver Cromwell was a general in the English military, and he famously used to tell his troops, "Trust God and keep your powder dry." He didn't say, "Trust God to keep your powder dry." He said, "Trust God and you better be ready for battle, because if your powder gets wet, that bullet's not gonna shoot." Yes, God is in control! Yes, God's mighty hand is always protecting us. But friends, we've got work to do. We've got to be alert and sober-minded and ready for action, because the devil is roaring, and he's prowling, and he has one objective -- and that's to take you out. You see, vigilance is necessary if you're going to discern and defeat the schemes of the enemy. Remember who's writing -- Peter. Peter was told to be vigilant and watch. Remember when? In the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus said, "Peter, would you just watch and pray?" Peter fell asleep. He fell asleep at the wheel. And he learned a valuable lesson -- and now he cautions us against allowing ourselves to fall asleep on the job.

Now, I want to make this point as kindly and sensitively as I possibly can. Because I don't think I would be a good friend, and I don't think I would be a good pastor if I didn't communicate this next point with kindness and with clarity. In verse eight, Peter names our enemy. He names our adversary. Verse eight says, "Be self-controlled and alert." We just talked about why that's important. Your enemy the devil. Some of your translations may say, "Your adversary the devil." He names our enemy. Now, I searched -- I promise you, I really did this -- I searched 26 English translations and three Latin translations, and I could not find one translation that listed Kate Brown's name as our enemy. [Laughter] I searched those same 26 English and three Latin translations, and I could not find one that had Donald Trump's name listed as our enemy. Friends, they're not the enemy. We have one enemy, and his name is Satan.

Now, I know that we are in a season of life that there are so many hotly debated issues, and we are kicking them back and forth. We are fighting on so many different fronts. COVID and all the surrounding issues have made us crazy. We struggle to find a balance between affirming the right to peacefully protest and forcefully condemning lawless rioting. We feel frustrated by ambiguous, inconsistent, and ever-changing rules that seem to limit some groups and allow others to maintain business as usual. We're frustrated over the fact that we can't decide whether going back to school in person is better or going back online is better. There's a lot of things that we're debating, and guess what we get to look forward to for the next month? Political debates! We get to have another month of political ads, fact-checking, stone-throwing, that will surely incite more anxiety, anger and frustration for all of us. All of that is real. Battle lines have been drawn. Sides have been chosen. But we must remember who our enemy is. It is not your Facebook nemesis who posts things that you feel morally obligated to refute, revise, renounce, and repudiate! Your Facebook nemesis is not your enemy. We have one enemy, and it's the devil. Everyone else is someone that we are commanded to love. And we must take this point very seriously. Because the devil has one objective, and that's to take you out. He wants to render you useless, ineffective, and powerless, because he is afraid of how formidable the body of Christ would be if we actually focused our animosity on defeating him instead of inflicting wounds on each other. Well, what do we know about our adversary? What do we know about our enemy? Well, we know he's a liar. We know he's a deceiver. We know that he disguises himself as an angel of light even though he is the father of darkness. The devil is a master of disguise, of getting us distracted, getting our eye off the ball, making us think that one thing is true when actually it's false.

I've been watching the "Mission Impossible" movies. Anybody watch those? How many times have you been duped when Ethan Hunt pulls off the mask? Lots of times, right? I'm not saying Ethan

Hunt's the devil -- don't get me wrong -- but that's just how the enemy works. He disguises himself, and he tricks you. He makes you think that you're going down one path, and all the while he's led us down another. That's why we need to be sober-minded and alert and watchful, because the enemy is scheming, and he wants to take you out. He will do anything in his power to stand against Christ and dismantle His church. So, if Jesus wants unity, the devil wants to stir up conflict. If Jesus wants us to grow in the context of community, the devil wants us to feel isolated. If Jesus wants us humble, the devil will feed our ego and fill us with pride. And if Jesus wants us to experience His peace, the enemy will try to cripple us with fear. That's his strategy, and he's good at what he does.

Peter compares him to a lion seeking someone to devour. Why a lion? Well, because a lion's the king of the jungle, right? Lions are known for their stealth. They stalk their prey. Crouching in the tall grass and patiently waiting for the perfect time to pounce. So they catch their victim off-guard, and once they clamp their powerful jaws on their target, it's game over. Like a lion, Satan is a confident predator, a master at his craft. So, to resist him we must understand his strategy, and we must have a plan for a counter-attack. Peter continues to teach us how to do this by urging us to stand firm on the truth and resist the urge to fight. Verse nine, "Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of suffering." For some, that phrase "stand firm" might sound too passive. It sounds like "stand still," "stand aloof," or even "stand aside." It sounds like the scripture is telling us to just stand there and wait for the lion to attack. We want to mix things up, we want to get after it, we want to be involved in the battle, we want to do something. Because -- wouldn't that be just like Peter? Wouldn't that be just like Peter, the zealot, who drew his sword and cut off Malchus's ear when the Roman soldiers came to arrest Jesus? Peter knew all about that instinct, to rush in and fight, but he's the one who said "Stand firm."

Friends, standing firm IS doing something. It's not a passive term, it's an active defense. When I think of standing firm as an active defense rather than just this passive waiting, I think of the movie "Braveheart." There's a great scene in "Braveheart" where William Wallace has his army, his troops lined up -- it was back in the time where you got two teams and you just kind of lined up and said "Go" and stab each other. That was their strategy for war. Well, William Wallace has his guys all lined up, he's given them their inspirational speech. Somebody says "Go" -- the other army, the bad guys, they come running. They've got their weapons, they've got their spears and their swords, and they're bearing down on them. And William Wallace says "Hold." They're getting closer. William Wallace, "Hold." All the troops are getting a little antsy, because they've got a running start, and they're just kind of standing there vulnerable. They're kind of just standing firm and they feel like they're too passive, maybe like you feel standing firm is too passive. And as they get right up next to the army, William Wallace says "Hold" one last time, before he gives the order to reach down and pick up the spikes that cause the other army to basically just become human shish kabob. They were -- sorry if that was too graphic; PG 13 -- I'm actually kinda squeamish, I can't believe I said that! They stood firm as an active defense, not a passive waiting.

Friends, to stand firm is exactly what we are called to do. It's what is necessary for us to respond to the stealth attack of the roaring lion. I found a quote -- I would love to tell you who said it. I could not find who to give credit to. But it's a great line. Someone said, "People who go rushing into anything and everything rush into the lion's den and thrust their heads into his very mouth." See, one of the strategies of the enemy is to get us to panic and make poor decisions. I don't know about you, but when I'm panicked and stressed out, rarely do I, you know, invest in the stock market and make millions of dollars. When I'm stressed or when I'm angry, when I'm frustrated, when I feel like I'm under attack, I typically don't make great decisions. One of the things that the scripture tells us to do is to stand firm and to wait. We need to be wise in the way that we deal with the enemy. In

Ephesians we see the armor of God listed. Have you ever noticed that when you think about all the different elements of the armor of God, there's only one offensive weapon? The rest of them are all defensive. Because we're supposed to stand firm and to protect ourselves. There's only one offensive weapon, and that's the sword of the Spirit. To stand firm and to be watchful is doing something. It is not being passive. Because if we're not careful, if we're not self-controlled and restrained, we can play right into the enemy's hand. To be overaggressive rather than standing firm can take us down a path that leads right to the hungry lion -- lying in wait, seeking someone to devour.

Satan is a powerful adversary, and we need to be aware of his presence but we don't need to be afraid of him. Why? Because we're not standing firm on our own strength, friends. We're not standing firm on our own strength. The scripture tells us to stand firm in what? Stand firm in our faith, and our faith is rooted in the truth of the scriptures, and the scriptures tell us that Jesus Christ disarmed and defeated the devil when He died on the cross and rose again. The scriptures tell us that Jesus will never leave us nor forsake us, so we don't go into the battle alone. The scriptures tell us that there will be a glorious day that Jesus is going to come back and thump the devil's rump and establish His eternal kingdom forever. So, we stand firm on the truth of the gospel, we don't stand firm on our own strength! That's how we can respond to and defend ourselves against the scheme of the enemy.

Peter's final encouragement is to remind the believer that we can stand firm on the promise that we will be perfected through our suffering. The verse says -- "And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered for a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm, and steadfast." This COVID-19 has caused some of us to put on the COVID-19, right? Because lack of activity and lethargy leads to a flabby, soft body, right? Lethargy and inactivity leads to soft bodies, because only the body that's exercised can be fit, strong, and healthy. But it takes hard work to tone a flabby body, right? It's early mornings in the gym. It's long, sweaty walks on a treadmill. It's planking until that burn is unbearable. I'm up to eight seconds. [Laughter] Thank you. And the same is true in a spiritual sense. We can become out of shape spiritually through inactivity and passivity. So God actually refines us. He tones us through the testing of our faith. God uses trials to build endurance in us. He forges character in us through adversity and trials. And He drives us closer to community and closer to Himself through despair and loneliness. God tests us to refine and strengthen us, because He wants a robust, passionate church that will forcefully proclaim and live out the gospel message. Because we're strengthened when we are exercised spiritually. When we are forced to exercise our faith, and when we must resist the urge to rely on ourselves, we humbly bend our knee to the will of God. Verse 10 says that if we do this, if we allow God to exercise our faith through trials, we'll be made strong, firm, and steadfast.

You've been given a game plan to defeat our adversary. It starts with a humble heart. It's maintained by standing firm and it culminates in the eternal glory that is promised to us in Heaven. As believers, we have access to more power than most of us realize, and that terrifies the devil. That's why he wants to take us out! That's why he wants us distracted, angry, and divided, because then we're vulnerable. If you've ever watched the Discovery channel, you've likely seen a lion stalk his prey. They typically hide by a water hole and wait for their opportunity to attack. And as the herd of gazelles approaches to get a drink, which one is usually the one that gets picked off? It's always the one that's not paying attention! It's always the one who's off on its own program, distracted and vulnerable because he's not watchful. The one that isn't alert and sober-minded is the one that's vulnerable to the attack of the enemy. So he gets taken out. But there's strength in the pack. The herd can stand firm against the lurking lion because there's safety in numbers, and

there is protection to be found when the pack sticks together. Friends, we are strong when we're united. We are strong when we support and encourage each other. We are strong when we take the humble posture and allow the power of Christ to reign in us and help us stand firm against the attack of the enemy. The devil's crafty. The devil is real. And the devil wants to destroy us. But the schemes of the devil are no match for the Savior's power. Yes, these are troubling times. The devil is on the prowl. But church, we can stand firm because we are safe and secure under the mighty hand of God.

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