



DUDLEY'S MONTHLY MESSAGE

1 PETER 5

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Rule or Be Ruled

The deliriously happy couple married and expected to live to a ripe old age enjoying grandchildren and savoring their twilight years together. Cancer! She died at age 27. He was devastated.

Another young man studied hard and received good grades in hopes of getting a job with the large firm. Another less qualified candidate knew the CEO personally and was hired instead. He was downcast. It happens to all of us. What we expected didn't happen. What we wanted was not granted. Life surprised us with an unexpected turn. Our face fell. Our shoulders slumped. It's natural. We are not in control of everything, and we don't always interpret our hopes correctly. It is natural, but it is also dangerous. In that critical moment, we are faced with a choice, and the consequences of that choice are far-reaching. We are faced with an opportunity to identify as a victim, villain, or victor.

This crucial moment was highlighted early in the biblical story. In Genesis 4, the sons of Adam and Eve brought offerings to the Lord. Cain brought some grain from his fields. Abel brought an animal from his flocks. The Lord had regard for Abel's offering, but not for Cain's. As a result, Cain was dejected, and his countenance was sad. The Lord spoke to him, reminding him that he could choose to do what was right or he could give in to the power behind victimization. God had not forsaken him. He was speaking to him with encouragement to face the situation and choose to be responsible. We are well-aware of the choice Cain made. His victimization turned to bitterness which led to

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murder. Abel was killed, and Cain became a wanderer. The human race has been following the model of Cain ever since, warring and wandering.

THE FALSE COMFORT OF THE VICTIM

It feels good to take the victim's role, at least for a while. We find relief from the pain in extra attention, pity, excuses for deviant behavior, entitlement, etc. Claiming the identity of "victim" is one way of being in control. Victims claim rights they don't really have and protect them by accusing others of being cruel and insensitive. In today's culture, there is a mad competition to find more ways to be a victim, but the cost is deadly. The crouching tiger of sin is eager to get a foothold of self-justification and bitterness. When we refuse to actively address our anger and disappointment, hatred begins to spew, lies are told, and people are reduced to pawns—used merely to prop up the victim's agenda. To say that victims are not joyful is a massive understatement. Their countenance is sad, and the atmosphere around them is toxic. Anger instead of love becomes the motivation for decisions. Causes instead of people become priority. It never fails—anger unaddressed does not accomplish the purposes of God.

When we adopt the role of a victim, we expect those around us to give us leeway to act out our anger. We excuse bad behavior because we have been mistreated. For instance, we attach to the wrong people, indulge selfish desires, and manipulate others in an effort to find the joy that we think was taken from us by the perpetrator. Sour people and devastated marriages lie in the wake of a victim mentality. In fact, whole cultures can be destroyed when victims dictate what laws and norms are to be enacted.

THE HOPELESSNESS OF THE VILLAIN

The villain is certainly no better. He or she has fully identified with the sinful acts committed and concluded that his or her very nature is unredeemable. Villains are tuned into the voice of condemnation, which broadcasts 24/7 from hell's radio station. They wear toxic shame as their everyday garment. Interpreting every problem as evidence that they are both rejected and reject-able, they expect rejection and do whatever is necessary to assure they get it. They define reality based on what they feel and what seems to be the case, often declaring that they are being authentic. Concluding that they are bad, they disqualify themselves from meaningful

involvement in family, community, and human responsibility. The villain may cover his or her fears with a boisterous and intimidating persona, or may retire to the shadows with hopes of getting sympathy and thereby gaining some measure of leverage.

IDENTIFYING WITH THE VICTOR

The only hope for either the victim or the villain is the unconditional, unrelenting, unending love of God in Christ Jesus—The Victor. Only his love can break the stronghold of lies surrounding such perspectives. In the Gospel of Jesus lies the power of salvation.

Many years after the tragedy of Cain and Abel took place, the apostle Peter elaborated on the image of sin crouching close by to claim a victim. He referred to a lurking lion seeking someone vulnerable to destroy:

Humble yourselves, therefore under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same

kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.

(1 Peter 5:6–9 ESV)

Notice how he connects suffering to watchfulness. Suffering offers the opportunity to give in to dejection, becoming prey for the prowling lion to create a victim or a villain. Peter reminds the church, however, that suffering is part of the package when we share the life of Christ on this earth. Earlier in the letter, Peter has explained that Jesus gave us an example to follow as we suffer (see 1 Peter 2). Suffering is expected by Jesus. He warned his disciples that it was so. We are not entitled to smooth sailing on our way to heaven. We are privileged to display the very life of Christ in the midst of the turmoil around us because He is the Victor. Essentially Peter counsels us to resist the devil and return to the joy we have in knowing that we are never alone, and that Jesus enjoys being with us—even when we are sad or angry.

People relate to each other in healthy ways when they are not vying for control through victimization or domination. Joyful people can talk and even disagree without pulling the sword. God has taken the initiative in reconciling people to him,

and restoring what sin has distorted and destroyed.

All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.

(2 Corinthians 5:18–19 ESV)

People on the road to health are humbled by what has been done for them and by how much they don't yet grasp. They are eager to know more of Christ's love, and they recognize that he reveals it through the members of his body. Believing that they are truly forgiven and fully accepted, they rise to engage the mission they share with Jesus. Knowing they are already exalted in him, they are free to take the towel of service and wash the feet of those who might betray them, and those who are still very incomplete. They resist the lurking lion and reject the crouching tiger. They internalize the life of the Lamb.

Jesus promised that in this world we would have tribulation—that means trouble. We will be misunderstood. We will fail

to live up to even our own standards. We will get hurt, be angry, feel dejected, and sometimes want to die. We will want the relief that victimization and villainy falsely promise. Yet our Victor never leaves. He is here. He knows. He delights in us when we can find nothing in ourselves to bring delight.

If you have been slapped around some by life, refuse to entertain the crouching tiger and stand your ground against the lurking lion. Embrace the Lamb on the throne. His humility has overcome all the boasts of the enemy. We are safe in him, our Victor.



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