1 Peter 1:4–7
Hope in the storm

Hope Under Duress

They say that diamonds are made by the combined forces of tremendous heat and pressure coming to bear upon certain geological elements (rock) or an organic source of carbon – like coal. Under these extreme conditions a new type of rock, a diamond, is naturally formed miles underground, becoming a glass-like substance that is one of the densest, hardest, and most beautifully iridescent materials on earth! Pressure can create beauty and toughness!

I don't know how many of you saw the special 10-part documentary on ESPN called "**The Last Dance**". It is the story of the basketball legend Michael Jordan, whom most people say is the greatest player or all time (GOAT). But it becomes clear in the story that that Michael was not nice to his teammates during their practices. Many spoke of being goaded physically and verbally to point of being "bullied" by him on a continual basis during practices and games. ***But*** it also became clear that there was a purpose behind Jordan's trash talking and harsh treatment. He wanted to win championships! It is terribly difficult to win championships in a super-competitive NBA league! You go into a the city of your opposition and the fans would savage the visiting players with insults and name-calling, and often the refs were swayed by the crowd in the way they called the game. So Jordan's philosophy was that if a teammate couldn't take the pressure he applied in practice, the guy wouldn't be able to take the pressure of a hotly contested playoff game when the trash-talking and jeering was constant and the pressure to perform at their best was paramount! He said that he was seeing if they had it in them to rise above the duress, urgency, and strain of and NBA finals! Most of them didn't have it in them, so he was trying by force of will to build it into them! Some of his teammates are still bitter to this day,.. but on the other hand, they did win six coveted championships in 8 years with Michael Jordan leading his teams to victory each time! Knowing that he could not win championships on his own, he insisted that his teammates play with ***his*** all-out drive to win at any cost! And they did! He made them all better players than they would otherwise have been, ***and he made them champions*** with fascinating and exciting stories to tell their children and grandchildren. There isn't a current player alive today, that wouldn't have given anything to played on a Michael Jordan team - to have won just one championship with him! Or not even that! Just to say they had played with him! Most people, no matter how much they want to, will never even meet him!

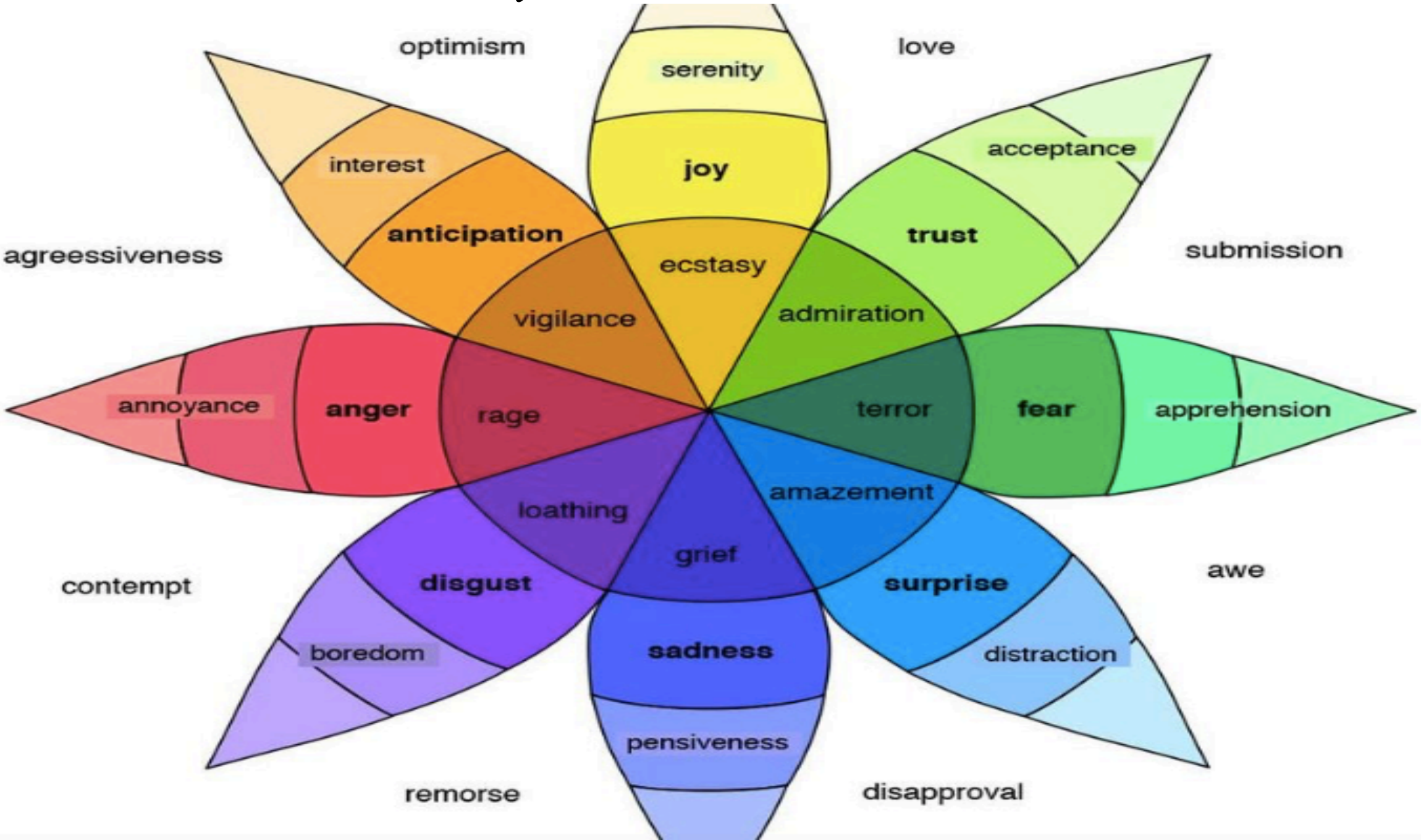
Like I said, most are not mentally prepared for pressure. People respond to extreme pressures in all kinds of different ways. My wife, Karen, performs amazingly under pressure. She is the first one to jump into action if someone is choking, or if she sees they are in danger in some other kind of way! Afterward, however, she might shake like a leaf! But in the moment when it matters, she has always risen to the occasion! Now, if I almost get in an accident in the car, but have managed to avoid it without a scratch, I am over it – immediately! I barely think about it. Nothing happened so why get scared by what ***didn'***t happen?! But on Karen's part, she can't get over it! Her heart will be racing, and she will shaken up for some time. And I'm like – "*Why*?!" And she's like, "*Why not! What's wrong with you! We could have been killed*!" And I'm like, "*But we weren't*"! And she's like "*Yeah, but we could have been*!" Isn't marriage fun sometimes?!

Pressures, tensions, stresses, danger reveal a lot about us as persons. Some of us are cautious, and some of us are daredevils. Some of us are timid, and some of us are bold. Some of us would run ***INTO*** danger, and others of us would run ***FROM*** it! It depends upon how we are wired. When I was young, I had a lot more capacity for extreme stress than I do now. When I was young I would encounter something stressful, deal with it, then go home and sleep like a baby. Now, I am awake half the night! But most of us are a mixture of bold and timid, bravery and cowardice! When Peter wrote this open letter to the churches of his time, he was writing to churches whose people were under many stresses and not all were reacting well to it! Being a Christian could be seriously hazardous to one's health and well-being! Christians were not liked, and not appreciated! Christians were resented, and indignities and real threats were heaped upon them! Unfortunately it was threatening to fracture the churches from within! They were taking it out upon each other! They were making bad decisions because people tend to make bad decisions under pressure – people do and say the darnedest things when they feel threatened or treated unjustly – when they are frustrated and feel marginalized!

But if people have **hope**, it changes things. They start thinking and reacting in a more level-headed manner. The church needed ***that*** from its people so it could survive and not implode! So Peter is reminding them of the wonder of the central figure of the faith - of the living Christ Jesus who is our ***everything***! In **vs. 4**, we have riches that other people do not have! Now, stick with me here for a few moment. This will require some concentration on our part. This list I am about to give you is your greatest treasure on earth – the things we get to take with us when we go. In fact, we ***must have them with us*** if we are to enter God's heaven! These are the things that we invest our hope in, things that never deteriorate like earthly things, as Peter points out here in **vs. 4**. They are things "***kept in heaven for us***" that do not spoil or corrode and which will greet us when we get to God's heaven! They are ours now, and they will be ours then! Being "***in Christ***" We have an inheritance ***in Him*** that enriches our lives here beyond measure and which are the only possessions we have that are eternal! If you check out **Eph. 1:1-13**, it has a partial list for us of the spiritual blessing we get or "***inheri***t" at the moment we come to faith in Jesus (**vs. 13**). We partake in His ancient "***choseness***" (**vs. 4**), we have <u>His</u> choseness and <u>His</u> "***predestination***" from before creation (**vs. 11**), we have <u>His</u> beloved status of "***sonship***", albeit *adopted* sonship. The apostles teaching explains that we were adopted by God as His children in our **physical being**, but <u>*conceived*</u> by His Spirit in our **spiritual being**, having been "***recreated"*** in our personhood/our core being to be like Jesus! By faith in the blood of Christ we are **transfused** with the DNA of God and so re-formed/remade in <u>His</u> image! The chapter explains that it was God's pleasure and His will to give us these blessings in Christ (**vs. 5**). Through being placed ***in Christ*** by faith we are imparted God's ***grace!*** This is unmerited favor/unwarranted love **(vs. 6)** regarding our part, but merited and earned on Christ's part! We simply get what He has earned by His incredible obedience to the mission He was sent to complete! We learned in the gospel records that He always deferred to God the Father who always deferred back to Him! Therefore God always function in complete agreement! It is our pattern also as God's children – to seek agreement with God in everything ***we*** do and say – in our **opinions and how we express them** with others, in the **conversations we have in our own head**, and in the **attitudes we harbor in our heart** and in the **emotions our attitudes cause**, and in our **behaviors that our emotions influence**!

Emotions! Hmmm. They are a central issue in following Jesus. Emotions really do a number on us! *Let me give you an example of how our emotion influence our words and behavior. If I am angry/my mind filled with that emotion, I can say and do things I don't mean to say or do. I am overtaken by a temporary insanity and I do damage while I am in its possession. The same with lust. Unbridled lust can fill a person with dark piggishness, and then we wake up and are filled with shame! The key is to bridle our emotions. Emotions are God-given *in their **proper** place*, but become very destructive forces when they rage in us in an uncontrolled manner! If you do not have a bit and bridle on a horse, the animal is much harder to control so you can get somewhere. If you do not involve Christ in your emotions, they are so much harder, maybe impossible, to control! So, we are always and forever inquiring of our God! "*God, are these strong feelings appropriate for me as your child, or are they inappropriate. If they are not right and I am not expressing them in a way you would not approve of, how do I change the way I feel, that I might change my attitude and my reactions and interactions with people to your liking?!*" **We ask God**! We are ***always*** in touch with God through the Holy Spirit, only losing touch when we let our emotions run wild/become ***un***bridled! Then we are on our own, and we behave ***as if*** we are on our own, and separated from God! We are ruled by our emotions and they cause us to go on to disgrace ourselves - ***and*** Him - and to cause damage to His beloved church and to His Kingdom purposes in our part of the world! Satan rejoices because he has won and succeeded in utilizing us, God's own, to inflict a wound, a setback, on God's purposes! He chuckles, knowing he has fooled you or me again! He has made us his "dupe" (a dupe is a person who has been swindled or tricked)! Emotions not coming under submission to the Holy Spirit are Satan's go-to method! He doesn't need the avowed **enemies** of God to do damage, when his obvious preference is to get **the friends of God** to do it!

Just look at the many emotions that can rule our heart and mind!



So we must stay in close contact with the Spirit of God! We are dependent creatures. It is how God created us to be – dependent upon Him! So, again, stay close! Always inquire of Him and when in doubt, practice the fruit of the Spirit - love, joy, peace, patience, etc… or else I guarantee that we end up pleasing Satan in hate, bitterness, turmoil, petulance, judgmentalism... and serve his purposes against the Kingdom of God! It is just the way it works! Either get with the program, or else!

Vs. 5 is amazing! It assures true Christ-followers that we are protected by God! When we are in His possession He will not ever let us go! The honors, titles, privileges of the Son of God, Jesus Christ, are reserved for us "***in Christ"*** for when we most need them. They are ours now, but we will utilize them fully when we get to heaven! That is when we truly realize what we have had in Christ! It is ***in*** **the vault of Jesus Himself -** waiting for when we see Him and He hands it to us!

Vs. 6, 7b says that this is something to celebrate! We are RICH beyond our wildest imaginations! We cannot know just ***how*** rich until it is "***revealed"*** upon our arrival in heaven when it is transferred over to us and ***becomes - our - ticket - in****!! Our ticket in is Jesus Himself and all He has achieved and then allocated over to us!*

But for now, Peter admits, there is some suffering to be endured! He calls them "***trials***" – and there are "***all kinds***" of them for these people, in fact! So while we wait for our riches in heaven, we might as well get with the program! Through all kinds of trials, God is working on our character. How can we learn to **love** as Jesus loved until someone is out to destroy us! How can we learn how to **forgive** as Jesus forgives unless or until someone is doing something terrible to us! How do we learn to **get past betrayal** as Jesus did until we are truly betrayed by someone! Jesus certainly got past Peter's betrayal and look how Peter was used in the Kingdom of God! How do we learn **courage** until we are faced with real danger! You see, it takes **stress**, **pressure**, **tension**, **fear**, and things that **distress** us, before we develop the strong character of Jesus that is fit for the purposes of God on this earth – before God is able to use us to do something truly great!