

Lenten Devotions

Living for Christ in Today's World

February 17 — April 3, 2021

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Introduction

Several years ago, our Thursday Afternoon Ladies Bible Study did an intense study of the 12 disciples using as our guide an amazing book called *Twelve Ordinary Men* by John MacArthur. Over the years, these men have been elevated to a place of honor. However, when Jesus called these individuals to leave everything to follow Him, they were just ordinary men — some fishermen, a tax collector, a political zealot, one who became a traitor, and some whom we know only by name. They were not religious leaders. Most were unlearned men with no formal education. They had one thing in common — they had all heard the call from Jesus to leave everything and follow Him, and they did exactly that. They left homes, occupations, and livelihoods behind to become His disciples or followers.

In the fall of 2019, the Lord laid a challenge on my heart to begin a study of the life of Peter, one of Jesus' disciples, and to share the results in Bible Study format at the Vilas Home. Later the Lord challenged me to share this study in devotional format for last year's Lenten Devotions. What a powerful and rich study that was!

When we were first introduced to Peter, we found a brash, burly fisherman who did not mince words. He was outspoken, impetuous, impulsive, and a man of extremes. One minute he would gladly proclaim that Christ was the Son of the Living God, and yet in the very next breath, he would tell Jesus that He, Jesus, did not know what He was talking about. Indeed, Peter was a man of extremes, but he left everything to follow Jesus and be taught and trained by Him. The time that Peter spent learning at the feet of Jesus would prove invaluable in shaping and molding Peter into an individual and a leader whom God could and would use mightily. It was not until after Jesus' death and resurrection, however, that Peter fully experienced the power and gift of God's forgiveness and grace in a special encounter with the resurrected Lord along the Sea of Galilee when Jesus confronted him about his love for Jesus and his denial of Jesus. It wasn't until later, when the Holy Spirit was poured out on the disciples at Pentecost, that Peter fully and completely experienced and knew the power of a life changed and empowered by God Himself.

This Lenten season, we will continue our focus on Peter and the letters he wrote to the early believers. These letters contain many of the lessons Peter and the other disciples learned sitting at Jesus' feet and learning from Him. The lessons contained in these 2 little letters or epistles contain many wonderful and powerful truths that are relevant to the world in which we are living today. May God guide us through this study and through this Lenten season!

Wednesday, February 17

Peter the Apostle

1 Peter 1:1— “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ. . . .”

When you and I write letters, we normally begin by addressing the one to whom we are writing — “Dear Sue” or “Dear John.” Then we close the letter with our name or signature. It’s interesting to note that in Biblical times, letters began with the name of the one writing the letter and then addressed the recipient of the letter. Following that address there was usually a greeting as in Peter’s letter — “Grace and peace be yours in abundance.” (1 Peter 1:2)

This little letter or epistle begins with the addressee: “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ. . . .” Biblical scholars argue over the validity of Peter as the author of the 2 little epistles attributed to him, but we are not going to go into those arguments here. There is, however, enough evidence in these two letters to indicate that they were indeed written by somebody who had been with Jesus, had been taught by Him, and was an eyewitness to the events of Jesus’ life.

It’s interesting to note how Peter introduced himself to the recipients of these letters — “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ.” Peter was one of the original 12 who had been chosen by Jesus to become one of His disciples. A disciple was one who had been chosen to follow and learn from a teacher, rabbi, mentor, or other wise person. They would leave family and livelihood to follow and learn from their teacher or master. The 12 faithfully left everything to follow Jesus and learn from Him, His teachings, and His example.

An apostle, on the other hand, was a messenger or ambassador and was sent to deliver those teachings to others. The term apostle came to be used of the 12 disciples after the Ascension of Jesus. It must also be noted that following Jesus’ death and resurrection, Jesus gave His disciples the following challenge: “Again Jesus said, ‘Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.’ And with that he breathed on them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.’” (John 20:21-23) What a challenge: “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” The disciples had learned at the feet of Jesus and had been equipped to take over His work when He was gone. They had learned from Him and would later be sent out to teach others as Apostles. As Peter penned these 2 letters, this was what he was endeavoring to do — pass on those truths and teachings that had been entrusted to him by Jesus — his Master.

As Jesus’ followers, we likewise have been charged with the task of sharing with others what Jesus has done for us so that they, too, might know and follow Him.

Thursday, February 18

Remember Whose You Are

1 Peter 1:1-2 — “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To God’s elect, strangers in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood.”

We are living in very troubled times. A pandemic caused by a little virus, Covid-19, is spreading like wildfire across our communities, states, nation, and globe. Adding to the anxiety of the virus, the media is playing on people’s anxieties by fueling fear and panic. Political tension and turmoil, fueled by accusations of corruption from both political parties during the recent election, is inciting fear and panic and violence across the nation, but particularly in the nation’s capital. We are indeed living in very troubled times.

Peter, in his two letters, was writing to people who were likewise living in very troubled times. As we will discover over the next few devotionals, they had been scattered far and wide due to persecution and increasing violence because of their faith in Jesus Christ and their desire to follow in His ways.

But notice how Peter addressed the recipients of his letter. “to God’s elect.” Now, we can discuss forever and a day the meaning of this term, and we can argue whether or not some have been predestined to heaven and some to hell, or we can marvel at the fact that Christ’s followers have been specially chosen by Him. Along this same line, the Apostle Paul wrote: “And you also are among those who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.” (Romans 1:6) We have been chosen by God and we have been called to belong. Now, isn’t that wonderful? As such, we are His children, His beloved, His holy ones.

As we continue, we need to remember that Jesus never told His followers that by following Him, their lives would be exempt from trouble. On the contrary, He warned them that they would be mistreated and persecuted even as He had been. Likewise, Peter did not tell his readers that they would never face trouble. In fact, troubles, trials, and difficulties would mark the lives of Christ’s followers. The good news, however, revolved around their relationship with Jesus Christ. No matter what they faced, they could rest in the assurance that they were His, that they were chosen by Him, and that they belonged to Him. Nothing that happened to them could change that wonderful truth. What wonderful hope that knowledge gave them!

The same is true for us. No matter what we face in this life, we can rest in the assurance that we belong to the Lord. Nothing can change that. We are His, and He will take care of us!

Friday, February 19

Scattered Ones

1 Peter 1:1-2 — “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To God’s elect, strangers in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia. . . .”

A number of years ago, I led a Bible Study on the book of Acts at the Vilas Home, a local assisted Living Home. One of the individuals who faithfully attended the Bible Study was a retired Catholic priest. One day in our study, we came across a passage from Acts 8 which made reference to this thought of Jesus’ followers being scattered among the nations. As we discussed why those early followers of Christ were scattered far and wide, the priest shared a profound thought. He shared with us that if those early believers had remained in that central hub in Jerusalem, Christianity would have just become a Jewish religion or sect. However, as those believers were scattered beyond Jerusalem, the Gospel message also went out far and wide and eventually spread to all the world. His eyes sparkled with joy as he added the thought, “And just think, because of that, the Gospel message even came to us, and we, too, have believed and been saved.”

What caused those early believers to be scattered? The answer to that question is actually two-fold. First there came the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. On that day, there were those from all over who had come to celebrate the Old Testament festival known as Pentecost. When the Holy Spirit came upon those followers of Jesus in that upper room, the resulting chaos spilled out into the streets, and all of those gathered for that special festival heard the Gospel message being proclaimed in their own native languages. Nobody could deny that God was doing something special. Peter got up and preached a powerful message explaining what was happening. Those who heard and accepted that message were baptized, and about three thousand people were added to their number that day. As they returned to their native lands, the joy and excitement of what they had witnessed and experienced, along with the testimony of what God had done, went with them.

Second, there came a wave of persecution. The religious leaders were jealous of the new-found following the followers of Jesus had attained. We read in **Acts 8:1** — “On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.” That persecution did not deter them. Instead, it made them even more determined. We read in **Acts 8:4** — “Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went.” As those early believers struggled with persecution, and as they were scattered far and wide, they took the Gospel message with them. As they shared that message, more and more people came to an understanding of who Jesus was, and the early church continued to grow.

Just think, God works in strange ways to accomplish His plans and His purposes. Even difficult times and persecution can be used by God to help spread the Gospel message.

Saturday, February 20

Living as Strangers in the World

1 Peter 1:1-2 — “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To God’s elect, strangers in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood.”

Have you ever been in a place where you felt like a complete stranger? Maybe you were in a crowd of people in which you knew absolutely nobody. Maybe you were in an unfamiliar place and felt completely out of place. Sometimes, though, the greatest sense of loneliness comes when you are with people you know, yet you have this overwhelming feeling of disconnect, like you’re a complete stranger who does not fit in.

When I arrived on the campus of United Wesleyan College in Allentown, Pennsylvania, in the fall of 1987, I knew nobody — absolutely nobody. The first person I met on campus was a young man who had lost a leg in a tragic accident in Brazil where his parents had served as missionaries. Everybody knew where they were going and knew their way around campus, but I felt completely lost. That hardest part was that nobody offered to help me. Loneliness overwhelmed me. I felt like a complete stranger on that college campus until one day at lunch, a distinguished looking, older couple came over to the table where I was sitting and introduced themselves as Shirley and John. They welcomed me to United Wesleyan College and asked where I was from and why I had decided to attend UWC. We enjoyed a wonderful conversation as we shared lunch together that day. It wasn’t until later that I discovered that John was actually Dr. John Ragsdale, the president of the college, and Shirley was his wife. That pleasant encounter helped tremendously in making me feel like I fit in on that college campus.

In studying the life of the Apostle Peter and his epistles to the early church, I have been struck by the thought that Peter reminded his readers that, even though as Christians they were God’s elect and God’s chosen people, they were living as strangers in a world that was often hostile to the Gospel message and the Christian way of life.

Yes, they had been chosen by God. Yes, they had been sanctified — made holy and set apart by the Holy Spirit. As such, they were to live separate and distinct lives in the world instead of following or living according to the pattern of the world. The principles those early believers lived by were not the same principles and standards as those followed by those living in the world. As believers in, and as followers of Jesus Christ, they would indeed be misunderstood, mistreated, and maligned for their faith, but no matter what they faced, nothing could change the fact of Who they belonged to and what God had so graciously done for them through Jesus Christ and through the indwelling Holy Spirit.

May this truth help edify our hearts as we likewise live in a world in which we feel like strangers! May this truth help us as we live in a world that is becoming increasingly hostile to the Christian way of life!

Sunday, February 21

A Living Hope

1 Peter 1:3 — “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”

Imagine with me for a moment the hopeless despair that overwhelmed the hearts of the disciples and early followers of Jesus after His arrest, unfair trial, and subsequent crucifixion and death. They had left everything to become His disciples. They had left their livelihoods, homes, and families to follow Jesus. With His death, they were overcome with grief, pain, heartache, despair, and hopelessness. In their hearts and in their minds, they agonized that it was not supposed to end that way. For two of the disciples, the pain was especially excruciating. Judas, who had betrayed Jesus for 30 measly pieces of silver, was so distraught over his actions and the death of his master that he went out and hung himself. Peter, who had denied 3 times that he even knew Jesus, struggled with the guilt and shame of his actions. There seemed to be no way out of that gloom and despair and hopeless misery. But just think, you and I know the rest of the story, but they did not. Not yet, anyway.

As Peter penned the words of this letter, however, he burst into a wonderful note of praise as he remembered what God had done. Peter wonderfully and powerfully declared: “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” Out of the hopelessness and despair of their loss came renewed hope and joy. From death came life — new life. Why? What made the difference? Because the One whose death they had mourned had been wondrously, gloriously, and miraculously raised to life in a mighty, powerful way by God Himself. The tomb was empty. Not only was the tomb empty, but Jesus was alive. Those disciples had seen Jesus with their own eyes. They had seen the resurrected Jesus. They had seen the nail-prints in His hands, and they had touched Him. They had fellowshiped with Him. They had dined with Him. He was alive, and they knew it.

Peter himself had a life-transforming experience on the shore of Galilee when Jesus took him aside from the rest of the disciples and showed him amazing love and unfathomable grace. Three times, Jesus addressed Peter, asking him if he loved Him. Three times he affirmed that he did. Three times, Jesus confirmed His call on Peter’s life — “Feed my lambs. Take care of my sheep. Feed my sheep.” So what did Jesus really do for Peter in that encounter on the seashore? He extended mercy and grace. He gave Peter new hope — a living hope. He validated His claims on Peter’s life and renewed His call to follow Him and serve Him. The results were life-changing for Peter.

The clarion call and the central message for the early church was centered around a new theme — the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Wherever the Gospel message went, the Good News was preached. Where the Good News was preached, lives were changed. And so it continues even today! We have a living hope, because Jesus was raised from the dead.

Monday, February 22

A Glorious Inheritance

1 Peter 1:4 — “and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you.”

Have you ever been the recipient of an inheritance? Have you ever had a loved one die and leave you money or property or even a dwelling place? When my in-laws passed away, my husband received a monetary inheritance. With some of the money, he purchased a new truck — a beautiful, maroon Toyota Tacoma. The rest was put in an account for future use.

Receiving an inheritance is wonderful and can even be a tremendous blessing, but it has one down-side. Money is soon spent. Material possessions are soon used up, rotted, or rusted out. In fact, we enjoyed the truck for a number of years until it was recalled by Toyota for a rusty frame. We drove it right up until the time we had to turn it in to the car dealership. A few days later, Rudy called to tell me that they had driven the truck up on the car hauler to take it away, and as they went to fasten it down, the frame broke right in two. It had rusted and rotted. That’s what happens with material things, isn’t it? They don’t last forever.

Charles R. Swindoll, in his book *Hope Again: When Life Hurts and Dreams Fade*, reminds us of a better inheritance. He wrote: “We also can rejoice through suffering because we have a permanent inheritance — a secure home in heaven. And our place there is reserved under the safekeeping, under the constant, omnipotent surveillance of Almighty God. Nothing can destroy it, defile it, diminish it, or displace it. Isn’t that a great relief?” (p. 16)

One of my mother’s favorite songs was found in a little Making Melody songbook that we used many years ago in Sunday School. She always insisted that this song be sung at her funeral. The song was entitled “This World Is Not My Home.” The words that stood out to her are as follows:

“This world is not my home, I’m just a passing through.
My treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue.
The angels beckon me from Heaven’s open door,
And I can’t feel at home in this world any more.”

We do live an earthly existence, but that’s not all there is. For those of us who have accepted Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord, this world is just a temporary dwelling place. We have been promised eternal life in His presence forevermore. We have a home in heaven that can never perish, spoil, or fade. Now, that is a guarantee we can hold on to as we go through life’s earthly trials and struggles.

But let me ask, what are you holding on to? Are you holding on to the things of this world so tightly that you’ve lost sight of what God has planned for you? Or are you keeping your focus on heaven and holding on to the things that have eternal value? May God help each of us to keep our focus in the right place.

Tuesday, February 23

Protected by God's Power

1 Peter 1:5 — “who through faith are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.”

For years now, I have had a recurring dream that always leaves me unsettled. I dream I am at my parents home, an intruder is trying to break in, and no matter how many locks I try to lock, the intruder still gains access. There is no protection and no escape.

Now isn't that how we feel when troubles come? It seems like no matter what we do or how hard we try, we cannot keep the troubles at bay. They still come in all their might and fury.

In his book *Hope Again: When Life Hurts and Dreams Fade*, Charles R. Swindoll reminds us that “Under heaven’s lock and key, we are protected by the most efficient security system available — the power of God.” (p. 17) Now, isn't that a wonderful word picture? Read those words again. “Under heaven’s lock and key, we are protected by the most efficient security system available — the power of God.” He goes on to add: “There is no way we will be lost in the process of suffering. No disorder, no disease, not even death itself can weaken or threaten God’s ultimate protection over our lives. No matter what the calamity, no matter what the disappointment or depth of pain, no matter what kind of destruction occurs in our bodies at the time of death, our souls are divinely protected.” (p. 17)

God has promised to protect His children by His mighty power, but let's not overlook the powerful truth at the beginning of this verse. Peter began, “who through faith are shielded by God’s power.”

When the Apostle Paul described the various pieces of the armor of God in Ephesians 6, he mentioned the shield of faith. In, Ephesians 6:16, we read: “In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.” The shield in Roman times was not like the shield that super-heroes like Captain America are pictured with today. No, they were large, like a door, and they would protect the entire body and all the vital organs. They would offer protection from the enemy’s fiery darts. Soldiers would even stand side by side and back to back with their shields in front of them to find mutual protection from the enemy. There would also be some soldiers who would hold their shields above them to protect them from aerial attacks. The shield offered invaluable protection in the event of an attack.

Peter reminds us, that our faith in God is to be used as a shield to protect us from our enemy’s attacks. Now, our faith may not always seem strong or adequate to us, but, in reality, it's not the measure of our faith that is important. No, what's important is who we put our faith in. Our faith is in a mighty, all-powerful, all-wise, all-loving God, and He is the One who will protect us until His salvation is revealed at the coming of Jesus Christ.

So, Peter challenged his readers and us to keep our faith in God. He is mighty! He is all-powerful! Through our faith in Him, we will be protected and shielded from the attack of the enemy.

Wednesday, February 24

Refined by Fire

1 Peter 1:6-7 — “In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.”

It’s so difficult to see the proverbial light at the end of the tunnel when you are in the midst of a difficult trial or a stormy season in life. Trials can cause so much untold grief, pain, heart-ache, and suffering. It’s hard to rejoice when your whole world is falling apart. Sometimes, the season of suffering is so intense that it’s a struggle to even hold on to one’s faith. Back in 2006, we lost my oldest niece, Lori, to complications from lupus, my Aunt Betty (my mother’s sister) to cancer, and then my mother to a brain bleed. On top of that, I had been involved in a car accident in which the car I was driving was rear-ended at a stop light. Life is like that sometimes, isn’t it? One tragedy or trial comes right on top of the last. There seems to be no relief or answers. In those times, it’s hard to maintain our perspective and our faith.

When Peter penned the words of 1 Peter 1:3-9, believe me, Peter was speaking from personal experience. As a disciple, of Jesus, he had faced numerous trials and times of testing as he was being taught and trained by Jesus. In fact, as the time for Jesus’ crucifixion was drawing near, Jesus had warned Peter that Satan had asked to sift him as wheat, but He assured Peter of His prayers for him. He prayed specifically that no matter what happened, Peter’s faith would not fail. Yet what happened? Three times, Peter had vehemently declared that he did not know Jesus. When he heard the rooster crow, and when he saw the gaze of Jesus, his heart broke with anguish and pain knowing that he had been unfaithful to his Master. With great sorrow and regret, he went out and wept bitterly.

After Pentecost, the tests and trials came in the form of opposition and persecution. Even in the face of that opposition and persecution, as a follower of Jesus, and as a leader in the early church, he faithfully proclaimed the good news of Jesus’ resurrection from the dead. He held steady in his faith. As a result, many people came to faith in Jesus because of his faithful ministry.

In this letter, Peter reminded his readers that trials would come. In fact, many of them had already suffered grief in all kinds of trials. He also assured them that those trials had a purpose — that just as gold is purified and refined through a fiery process, their faith was being tested and refined to prove that it was genuine. The tests they faced would prove that their faith was the real deal — the real thing. They would grow and become steadfast through those difficult times. The end result would be glory and honor and praise given at the time Jesus is revealed.

So, when the tests come, and your faith is being sorely tested, don’t despair. Hold steady! God is using those hard times to refine you, purify you, and prove that your faith is real and genuine. Let Him work in you!

Thursday, February 25

The Goal of the Refining Process

2 Corinthians 3:18 — “And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”

In Malachi 3:3, we find an interesting picture: “He [God] will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver. . .” This verse puzzled some ladies attending a Bible Study, and they wondered what these words could possibly mean. Why and for what purpose would the Lord sit as a refiner and purifier of silver? What was He seeking to accomplish in His people? One of the women offered to find out more about that process of refining silver. That week, she contacted a silversmith and made an appointment to observe him at work. She didn’t tell him the reason for her interest, just that she was curious about the refining process.

As she observed the silversmith, she noticed that he would hold a piece of silver over the fire and let it heat up. He explained to her that in refining silver, he needed to hold the silver in the middle of the fire where the flames were hottest. He also explained that the purpose of the refining process was to burn away all impurities. She asked the silversmith if it was necessary for him to sit there in front of the fire the entire time the silver was being refined. The silversmith assured her it was. He also explained to her that it was not only necessary to sit there holding the silver, he had to keep his eye on the silver the entire time it was in the fire. If the silver was left in the fire too long, it would be destroyed. The woman continued to watch the process in silence, and then quietly asked, “How do you know when the silver is fully refined?” Good question! He smiled at her and answered, “Oh, that’s easy — when I see my image in it.” Wow! Now what an amazing lesson that was for that woman!

In yesterday’s devotional, we saw that the Lord *allows* His people to be tested and refined through fiery trials and difficult circumstances to prove that their faith is genuine. We are reminded today of another aspect of that process. He tests us and refines us by fire to burn away any and all impurities. What, might we ask, is He seeking to accomplish? How will He know when He has accomplished it? It’s simple. He refines us with fire until he can see His own image in us. Through those fiery trials, He seeks to transform us into the very image of His own dear Son.

Just think, God is not a refiner of silver, but He is the refiner of hearts and lives. Are you feeling the heat today? Do you feel like you are in the middle of a fiery trial? Don’t despair! God is at work in ways you may not be aware of to transform you into His own likeness.

Friday, February 26

Faith — Believing Without Seeing

1 Peter 1:8 — “Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.”

It’s hard for us to imagine the experiences those early disciples had witnessed as they walked with Jesus and were taught by Him. They had seen firsthand the most amazing miracles — the 5 loaves and 2 small fish that had been multiplied to feed over 5000 people; the miraculous raising of Lazarus who had been dead for 4 days; the storm-tossed sea whose rough waters had been instantly calmed; and the many blind, deaf, and lame who had experienced healing. Those 12 disciples had witnessed so many miracles.

Not only had the disciples witnessed mighty miracles, they had also sat under the teaching ministry of Jesus. They had been taught by Him and had learned from Him. They had even been sent out to minister in His name. How blessed they had been to learn from the Master Teacher and to be trained by Him

However, the people to whom Peter wrote this letter had not had that privilege. They had not seen Jesus. They had not met Him. They had not seen His miracles or sat under His teaching ministry. Yet, they loved Him. And even though they could not presently see Him, they believed in Him. Their hearts and lives were filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy. Even though they were undergoing tremendous suffering through exceedingly difficult trials, their faith and confidence were in Jesus Christ and their hearts were filled with great joy. Why? Why such joy? Because they were receiving the goal of their faith, the salvation of their souls. What a powerful and moving testimony!

Now think about it for a moment. None of us have seen Jesus either! Neither you nor I were there when Jesus walked on the water without sinking into the depths of the sea. We weren’t there when He fed the multitudes with a young lad’s lunch. We weren’t there when He raised to life the young son of a widow. We did not hear Him teaching the disciples on the mountain. We were not eyewitnesses to His majesty when He was transfigured before His disciples — nor were we given the joy and wonder of witnessing His resurrection from the dead.

Yet, because of the testimony of those eyewitnesses who were there, who saw with their own eyes, and who shared those accounts, we, too, have believed. Yes, you and I have believed even though we did not have the privilege of being eyewitnesses of those events. And, oh, what inexpressible and glorious joy we have known as we have accepted by faith what God had done. Yes, and what amazing joy is ours as we allow Him to work His work of love and grace in our hearts and lives as we walk with Him even through the darkest valleys. Indeed, without having seen, we have believed, and we, too, are receiving the goal of our faith — the salvation of our souls. Hallelujah! Amen!

Saturday, February 27

The Witness of the Prophets

1 Peter 1:10-12 — “Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things.”

It’s interesting to note here that Peter, after having praised his readers for their faith in Jesus even though they had not seen him, now briefly turned his attention to the witness of the prophets of old. There is a wonderful lesson here for us just as there was for Peter’s first readers.

Peter was no doubt addressing Jewish Christians when he reminded them of another witness — the prophets of old who had taken great pains to know and understand what God had shown them regarding the sufferings of Christ. They had heard the words of God and had faithfully proclaimed them to the people of their day even though they did not fully understand them. They had even recorded those prophecies which were then passed on from generation to generation and were compiled in the Old Testament Scriptures. Even though they did not fully comprehend what God had revealed to them, they knew that God was planning something wonderful for His people. Those same prophecies held a lot of weight for those who had been raised on them.

Now, Peter reminded his readers that those prophecies had found their fulfillment in Christ. Not only did the people of Peter’s day have the witness of the disciples, they also had the witness of the prophecies of old having been fulfilled in and through the life of Jesus. What had been spoken by the prophets of old had wondrously been confirmed in and through the life of Jesus!

Sunday, February 28

Prepare Your Minds for Action

1 Peter 1:13-16 — “Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed. As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: ‘Be holy, because I am holy.’”

I cannot begin to tell you how many times as a pastor people have said to me, “If only God had taken me Home to be with Him when I gave my heart to Jesus. . . .” That expression of longing didn’t have so much to do with a desire to go to heaven but rather a longing to avoid the struggles, temptations, and pitfalls of living a Christian life in a very un-Christian world.

Admittedly, accepting Jesus as Savior and Lord is merely the first step — actually a baby step — in living the Christian life. We start the Christian life by a simple act of faith then learn to live seeking and trusting God’s guidance for every area of our lives. In this passage, Peter challenged his readers to not sit back passively just hoping for the best. No, he gave them instructions on how to live and act that would help them to live out the Christian life in a world that did not live by Christian standards or teachings. With that in mind, he gave them several challenges. “Prepare your minds for action.” “Set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed.” “As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had” “Be holy in all you do.”

Peter first admonished his readers to actively prepare their minds for action. A lot of how we live begins in the mind. In **Philippians 4:8**, Paul encouraged the Christians in Philippi, “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy — think about such things.” In a very real sense, we are what we fill our minds with. The old computer saying, GIGO — Garbage In, Garbage Out — applies to the mind as much as to computers. If we fill our minds with pornography, violence, evil, and even depressing thoughts, then that’s what’s going to come out. However, if we fill our minds with things that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely, and admirable such as the truths from God’s Word, then the result will be more pleasing and beneficial for us. As we fill our minds with these things, we will be preparing and equipping our minds for action and for godly living.

This challenge also means we are to be sober, focused, and alert. We cannot let down our guard for, when we do, we leave ourselves wide open to the work of the enemy. Along with filling our minds with good thoughts and being alert, we must exercise self-control. Now self-control is listed in Galatians 5:22-23 in the list of the fruit of the Spirit — the characteristics the Holy Spirit of God seeks to develop in Christ’s followers. This self-control involves the disciplined use of our minds, bodies, and emotions.

A life that honors God begins with a mind that is prepared for action and that is brought under the control and discipline of the Spirit of God.

Monday, March 1

Set Your Hope on the Grace of God

1 Peter 1:13 — “Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed.”

This past year has been a real struggle for a lot of people. I remember hearing the story of a man who came home from work one day at the beginning of the pandemic to find that his son had locked himself in the bathroom and was sitting there with his head in his hands shaking in terror. The boy, unable to attend school due to the pandemic, was struggling intensely with fear, depression, and hopelessness. The dad finally quit his job to help his son through the crisis.

Now there is something about trying times that test us and leave us feeling helpless, hopeless, afraid, overwhelmed, and lost. Another word I’ve heard lately to describe this present dilemma is “STUCK!” We feel stuck when we’re in the middle of a crisis we cannot control. Any crisis in life can do that; it doesn’t have to be a pandemic to send us into a tailspin. Other factors can be the death of a loved one, a divorce, the loss of a job, or physical issues. Any of these can quickly turn our world upside down.

In this verse, Peter gave a challenge to his readers to “set your hope fully on the grace given you when Jesus Christ is revealed.” To be honest with you, any hope this world offers is quickly shattered. It’s just a temporary solution or reprieve. The only real hope is found in Jesus Christ. In **Hebrews 6:19-20**, we find this amazing promise in regard to hope. “We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.”

Peter urged his readers to set their hope on something more substantial than the things of this life. He urged them to set their hope fully, completely, 100% on the grace of God. He urged them to set their hope on things eternal — the hope that had been attained through Christ’s death and resurrection.

Are you struggling with fear, anxiety, depression, helplessness, and hopelessness? Are you stuck in a crisis or in a state of inner turmoil? Where are you looking for answers? Will you choose right now to set your hope fully on God’s grace? Will you choose to look beyond the things of this world and set your hope on that which is eternal? If you do so, you will not only find your hope renewed, but you will be filled anew with His peace, strength, and grace.

Tuesday, March 2

Do Not Conform to This World

1 Peter 1:14 — “As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance.”

Romans 12:1-2 — “Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”

Back when I was growing up — just a few years ago — every woman had at least one Jell-O mold in her kitchen. Now Jell-O was a common and tasty treat back then. You would empty the contents of a package of Jell-O into a container, add boiling water, stir until all of the Jell-O was dissolved, add cold water, and then let it set up until it became firm. If you accidentally spilled it onto the counter, it would make a slimy mess, but once it was poured into a mold and refrigerated, it would set up, taking the shape of the mold, and become a nice, cool treat.

Peter, in 1 Peter 1:14 challenged his readers: “As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance.” As children of God, their lives were to be marked by obedience or adherence to God’s standards. They were to no longer live as they had before they accepted Christ. They had been forgiven, saved, redeemed, and made new. Their lives were now to reflect that change.

In Romans 12:2, the Apostle Paul not only reminded his readers to not be conformed to the pattern of this world, but to be transformed or changed by the renewing of their minds. As they surrendered themselves to God, God would transform them, change their way of thinking, and renew their minds. They needed God to mold them and shape them into His image so that they could now live lives that were honoring and glorifying to Him. They were to no longer live as they had lived, but having been changed by His power at work in them, they were called to live differently.

J. B. Phillips translated Romans 12:2 as follows: “Don’t let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold.” Allow me for a moment to paraphrase this here as, “Don’t be like Jell-O shaped by the world into its mold.” As children of God, we are not to allow the world to squeeze or shape us into its mold. We are not to become like the un-Christian world around us. As one individual wrote, “We should not allow ourselves to be pressed into following the corrupt customs, ungodly principles, or evil plans of action promoted by worldly men.”

If we, as Christians living in an un-Christian world, want to maintain a witness and testimony to those around us, then we must live distinctly different lives from them. We can’t win others to Jesus if we live no differently than they do. People need to see something different in us. They need to see lives that have been changed and transformed. Actually, they need to see Christ in us. They need to see Christ’s love and grace lived out in our lives.

What do others see when they look at your life? Do they see Jesus?

Wednesday, March 3

A Call to Holiness

1 Peter 1:15-16 — “But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: ‘Be holy, because I am holy.’”

What is holiness? What does it mean to be holy?

Throughout history, people have done many things — or refrained from doing certain things — in an attempt to be holy. My roommate in college attended a church that measured holiness by outward things. They would literally have somebody stationed at the door to measure the length of the hair of the young ladies as they came into the church. They would also measure the length of their skirts or dresses and how far they came from the floor. Likewise, sleeves on the dresses or blouses had to be a certain length.

When I was growing up, holiness was measured by adherence to a list of do’s and don’ts. The wearing of jewelry was frowned upon and forbidden. Sundays were the Lord’s day. We had to sit in church absolutely quiet and motionless. Stores and restaurants were closed on Sundays out of respect for the Lord’s day.

Again, let me ask, what is holiness? Can holiness really be measured or attained by external things? Can holiness really be attained by following a strict list of do’s and don’ts?

The word holy actually means “to be set apart.” As God’s people, we are set apart by God and for God and for His holy purposes. Even though God had given commandments to His people in the Old Testament on how to live, they could never fully measure up to God’s holy and righteous standards. No matter how hard they tried, they always fell short. Likewise, we will always fall short.

However, the writer of Hebrews makes it clear how we are made holy. Jesus died on the cross so that our sins could be forgiven. He died so that we could receive the wonderful gift of salvation and the hope of eternal life. The writer of Hebrews adds that through Christ’s death on the cross, we are also made holy once and for all. Consider the following verses: **Hebrews 10:10** — “And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.” **Hebrews 10:14** — “because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.” We are not made holy by following a list of things to do or not do. Nor are we made holy by living a certain way. We are made holy by God’s work in our hearts and lives as we receive Christ as Savior, Lord, and Sanctifier.

Now, this truth is so freeing, isn’t it? Holiness isn’t up to me or you. Holiness is accomplished by God working in my heart and life as I accept what was accomplished through Jesus’ death on the cross. And just think, as He works in me, and as He works in you, we are not only made holy by our position in Christ, but we also become more and more like Him. Wow! God is so good!

Thursday, March 4

Redeemed by the Blood of Jesus

1 Peter 1:18-21 — “For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.”

From the time Rudy and I were married back in 1994, we have chosen a different devotional book to read each year. This year we are reading Billy Graham’s devotional book *Wisdom for Each Day*. In the reading for February 6, Billy Graham shared an interesting incident he had read in a biography of Queen Victoria.

Queen Victoria (Alexandrina Victoria; 24 May 1819 – 22 January 1901) was Queen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland from June 1837 until her death. Known as the Victorian era, her reign of 63 years and seven months was longer than that of any of her predecessors. Sometimes, Queen Victoria would go into the slums of London. One day, she went into the home of an elderly woman and enjoyed tea with her. When she got ready to leave, she asked the lady, “Is there anything I can do for you?” The woman responded, “Yes, Your Majesty. You can meet me in heaven.” The queen turned to her, and, speaking softly, replied, “Yes. I’ll be there, but only because of the blood that was shed on the cross for you and me.” Just think, even Queen Victoria, the most powerful woman in the world in her day, had to depend on the blood of Jesus for her salvation, just as we need to do today.

Peter reminded his readers that they had not been redeemed from the empty way of life that had been handed down to them from their forefathers by perishable things such as silver and gold. Money could not redeem them or save them. Good works could not save them. God — and only God — provided the solution for their dilemma. You see, God in His wonderful love and grace provided salvation and redemption through the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. God allowed His own holy, righteous, and sinless Son to be put to death on the cross to provide salvation for all who believe in Him. Jesus was not only put to death for our sins, but He was raised to life to give all who believe in Him new life. Now that is wonderful news!

But what about you? Will I meet you in heaven? Have you accepted God’s offer of redemption and salvation through His Son? If you have, then you are promised a home in heaven, and, thanks to Jesus, you will enjoy the wonderful blessings awaiting you there. If you have not, will you do so today? There is only one way to be saved and that is through putting your faith in Jesus who died on the cross for your sins.

Friday, March 5

Love One Another Deeply

1 Peter 1:22 — “Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart.”

In John 13, we see a beautiful picture of love. John began this chapter with these precious words: “It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. *Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love.*” (John 13:1) How did Jesus show His love to His own? In this chapter, John described Jesus humbling Himself by taking off His outer garment, wrapping a towel around His waist, pouring water into a basin, and stooping to wash His disciples’ feet. Usually, a lowly servant would be designated for that task. As people would enter a home, that servant would wash the dusty feet of those entering. On that particular occasion, there had been no one appointed for that task. Finally, Jesus, seeing the need and seizing the opportunity to teach His disciples a lesson, bowed to the task. When He had finished washing the feet of His disciples, He urged them to follow His example and to serve one another. A short time later, Jesus would show them the full extent of His love by going to the cross and dying on that cross for their sins and for the salvation of their souls.

Jesus not only urged His disciples to follow His example, but He also told them that He was giving them a new commandment. We read His words in **John 13:34-35**: “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

What a challenge and inspiration Jesus’ words were! Jesus wasn’t talking about love as a warm, fuzzy feeling. He was talking about love as an action word. John, in 1 John 3:16 wrote: “This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.” Then two verses later, John added, “Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but in action and in truth.” (1 John 3:18)

Going back to 1 Peter, Peter urged his readers who had accepted Jesus as Savior and Lord and who had received the wonderful gift of redemption, to now live that out by loving others deeply, from the heart. Now I grant you that some people are easier to love than others, but the bottom line is this: We are to love others, not because of who they are or what they have done for us or to us, but because of what Jesus did for us, and because of His love in our hearts. We are to love others in the same way and in the same measure as He loved us.

The powerful lesson that Jesus left with His disciples was that those watching their lives would know for sure that they were His disciples or followers because of the love they had for one another. There is no greater testimony or witness than to see Christians loving and caring for one another — and even Christians loving and caring for those who are not Christian.

Pray about it for a moment. Is your life marked by love — Christ’s love? Will others know you are a follower of Christ as they watch your life?

Saturday, March 6

You Have Been Born Again

1 Peter 1:23-25 — “For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. For, ‘All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord stands forever.’ And this is the word that was preached to you.”

A number of years ago, a lady by the name of Ruth faithfully attended a Bible Study I led at Beekman Towers and then later at the Vilas Home. She questioned me over and over again about why she needed to be born again. After all, she had grown up in the church and for many years had served the Lord through women’s ministries and other areas in the church. I shared numerous Scriptures with her explaining the need to be born again. I also shared numerous articles and books with her about the need to be born again. Nothing clicked. Nothing made her aware of her need, until

One day, as we were studying through the Gospel of John at the Vilas Home, we came to John 3 and the account of the encounter between Jesus and Nicodemus. Nicodemus was a Pharisee and a member of the Jewish ruling council. He had heard about Jesus. He knew by the accounts that he was hearing that Jesus had to be a man of God. After all, He surpassed all of the teachers of His day with His amazing teaching, and He had also performed many miraculous signs. Nicodemus knew there was something different about Jesus, so one night, he decided to seek out Jesus in order to find out for himself who this Man really was. After Nicodemus had praised Jesus, Jesus turned the conversation to the topic of being born again. Jesus had sensed a hunger, a longing, and a desire in Nicodemus for something more than the rituals he was accustomed to. Jesus said to him, “I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.” (John 3:3) This totally confused Nicodemus. He could not understand how a grown man could re-enter his mother’s womb and be born all over again. Jesus explained that it wasn’t about going back into his mother’s womb, but of being born again by the Spirit of God simply by trusting in Jesus. A new birth meant a new life and the hope and promise of knowing and receiving the wonderful gift of eternal life. The key was accepting Jesus for who He was.

As I shared this account in Bible Study that day, it struck me what Jesus was seeking to do. He was seeking to take this outstanding, religious leader of His day to the next step — or the next level. Yes, Nicodemus was a religious leader. The background had been laid from the time he was young. He knew the Law and the prophets. He was serving God and His people, but something was still missing. He had to take another step — the step of putting His faith in Jesus and choosing to follow Him. Jesus gave Him that invitation of taking the next step and being born again by trusting in Jesus.

At that moment, the Lord opened my eyes to see that that was exactly what I had to do with Ruth — invite her to take the next step. The result was that a number of people, including Ruth and a Catholic priest, took that next step by putting their faith completely in Jesus. That very day they were born again.

How about you? Have you been born again? Maybe you were raised in the church, but do you know Jesus? Have you received new life in Him?

Sunday, March 7

Changed Lives

1 Peter 2:1-3 — “Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.”

In yesterday’s devotional, we considered the account of Nicodemus and the need to be born again. The result of putting one’s faith in Jesus as Savior and Lord is being born again in a spiritual sense and receiving new spiritual life as a result. That new birth and that new life need to then culminate in a new way of living. The Apostle Paul put it this way in **Ephesians 4:20-24**: “You, however, did not come to know Christ that way. Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.”

As a result of being born again and receiving new life, we need to put off the old, sinful way of living. We need to get rid of such things as malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander. These need to be left in the past and no longer practiced in our hearts and lives. We need to be made new. Realizing that such things were part of the old, sinful life and can no longer exist in the new life, we allow God to change us and make us new in the attitude of our minds and in the way in which we live. **2 Corinthians 5:17** testifies: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” What a powerful testimony that is of the life-changing power of the new birth!

Peter added another thought here as well. There is a growth process that needs to take place after one is born again. Those who receive Jesus as Savior and Lord are likened to newborn babies. Now newborn babies crave milk and need milk in order to grow. Without that milk, they would not be able to survive. They would literally die.

New Christians need to crave the pure spiritual milk of God’s Word so that they can grow up in their salvation. Coming to faith in Jesus Christ is a good first step, but it’s merely one step toward all the good things God has to offer us in His Word. As we read and study the Bible, we hunger for it more and more. As we read it, study it, and apply it to our hearts and lives, it helps us to grow. As we grow, we become more and more like Jesus Christ. The result will be changed lives — lives changed by the goodness, grace, and power of God.

What about you? Have you put off the old way of life to put on the new? Are you faithfully feeding on the life-changing Word of God? Is God still working His work in your life? May God help you!

Monday, March 8

Living Stones

1 Peter 2:4-8 — “As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him — you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For in Scripture it says: ‘See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.’ Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, “The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone,”” and, “A stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.” They stumble because they disobey the message—which is also what they were destined for.”

Now having grown up on farmland outside of Plattsburgh, I must admit I know quite a bit about stones. Every spring when it came time to prepare the soil for planting the garden, my father would plow the land, and then my brothers and I would have to go through and pick out the stones, rocks, and boulders. This process would be repeated several times before the ground was ready for us to plant the potatoes, corn, beans, tomatoes, peas, and other vegetables we counted on to provide food for our large family. Every year without fail, we would repeat that process. If you were to drive by my father’s old house today, you would see numerous stonewalls still marking the property. Those stonewalls were the result all of the stones cleared each spring to make way for planting.

Where did all of those stones come from? One of my science teachers explained to us that all of those stones had been deposited when glaciers moved through the area eons ago. Regardless of how they got here, and regardless of the number of stones I picked growing up, I have never seen a *living* stone. All of the stones I picked were inanimate, lifeless objects.

Peter, in the passage above, described Jesus as the Living Stone that has been rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him. The Apostle Paul, used this same analogy in **Ephesians 2:19-22** — “Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.” What did Peter and Paul mean?

The metaphor being used here is of a building — more specifically, a temple or church. Christ is the chief cornerstone, and we, His children, are the living stones being built up together as a spiritual house in which God dwells by His Spirit. Every time someone accepts Christ, another stone is added to the building. What a beautiful picture we are given here!

The heart of this picture is one of unity. Christ is the chief cornerstone that holds the whole building together, but in Christ, we become one building built and united together as His Holy people and His holy dwelling. As such, may we, as His people, stand strong as a united witness to the world around us.

Tuesday, March 9

Chosen for a Purpose

1 Peter 2:9-10 — “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”

Do you remember what it was like in school to be divided up into teams for a game of volleyball or softball? Oftentimes, two leaders would be chosen to pick teams. The best players were always chosen first, then the good players, and then there were the rest of us. It was so discouraging to see everybody else being chosen to be a part of a team and to stand there watching and waiting and hoping, yet ultimately knowing you would only be picked just because you had to be included somewhere — anywhere.

In this passage, Peter described Christ’s followers with some powerful imagery. “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God.” Wow! These are such amazing descriptions of God’s people. Just think, God has chosen each one of us who believe in Him to be a part of something far greater than ourselves. We are called and chosen by Him to be His chosen people. Just think, He chose us — you and me — to belong to His family!

He also called us to be a royal priesthood. In the Old Testament, it was only those from the tribe of Levi who were called to serve as priests leading God’s people in worship and celebration and sacrifices. In the New Testament, we find a new concept — the priesthood of [all] believers. As those who have been redeemed by the blood of Jesus, we are called to serve God in a new and wonderful way — praising Him, praying for others, and serving Him and others as He leads. We have become a part of a holy nation — a people not only redeemed by the blood of Jesus, but a people made holy by the blood of Jesus. We have also been chosen and called to belong to God. Wow! What beautiful, amazing, and powerful imagery this is!

Peter goes on to describe the purpose of that calling: “that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.” Those of us who have been delivered from the darkness and depravity of sin have so much to praise God for! We have not only been brought out of the darkness of sin; we have also been brought into His wonderful and glorious, life-giving light. Once we were not a people. Once we did not belong. But now we belong to God. Once we had not known or received mercy, but now we have received the mercy of God. That change is so drastic and so wonderful. From darkness to light. From not belonging to being God’s specially chosen people. From living in hopeless despair to receiving His mercy, being forgiven, and living new lives.

I encourage you to pause for a few moments today to praise God for all He has done for you! You have finally been chosen —and you really do belong! The God who created all things wants YOU!

Wednesday, March 10

Living for Christ

1 Peter 2:11-12 — “Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.”

Have you ever traveled to a foreign country — perhaps a country in which English was not the native tongue or main language? Have you ever visited a place whose customs were far different from those you were accustomed to? It can seem quite strange to be in such a place, can't it? Sometimes as Christians, it seems like we, too, are living in a foreign land.

Several times in this little epistle, Peter described his Christian readers as strangers or aliens living in a world that operated quite differently than they did as Christians. We find this in 1 Peter 2:11-12. Peter once again described his readers as aliens and strangers in the world. He urged them, “as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul.” The world system operates on a different plane. The world system does not follow the same principles and the same way of life as we do as Christians. Simply put, Peter urged those early Christians to not live like those around them but to abstain from seeking to fulfill their sinful desires by following the ways of the world.

The bottom line was this: they were living in a world with all kinds of allures and temptations — things that appealed to their natural desires and sinful natures. They had choices to make every day. How they responded to those choices was vitally important for their own personal spiritual welfare and for their Christian witness.

He also urged them to live such good lives among the pagans that even if they were accused of doing wrong, their actions would speak for themselves. They were to live in such a way that others might truly see their good deeds and glorify and praise God in heaven.

As followers of Jesus, they had to realize that other people were watching their lives very closely. People were watching the choices they made. They were listening to the words they spoke. They were paying attention to how they acted and reacted. What did they see? How were others impacted by what they saw? Did they see Christ lived out in the lives of those early Christians? Did those watching see consistency between their lives and the testimony they shared?

Let's make this personal. What do those around you see as they observe your life? Is your life a living testimony of the One you say you believe in and follow? Does your testimony and life bear a powerful witness to those around you? Or are there inconsistencies between your testimony and your lifestyle?

It may be a challenge at times to live for Christ in an un-Christian world, and there may be times we face opposition and persecution, but what an opportunity we have to not only live for Christ in this world, but to live in such a way that others might come to know Him. Are you willing to be that kind of witness where God has placed you?

Thursday, March 11

A Heart Like Christ's

Matthew 11:28-30 — “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

I recently came across a book entitled *Gentle and Lowly: The Heart of Christ for Sinners and Sufferers* by Dana Ortlund. What drew me to the book was the thesis that the heart of Christ is summed up in the words of Matthew 11:29 — “for I am gentle and humble [lowly] in heart.” As Jesus ministered to the people of His day, He was not proud and arrogant. He was not self-serving. He was certainly not boorish or rude. He had a heart of love and compassion for people — for sinners, for the hurting, and for the down-trodden. In fact, in this passage from Matthew, Jesus invited all who were weary and burdened to come to Him, and He would care for them and give them the rest they so desperately longed for and needed. He also assured them that when they took His yoke upon themselves and learned from Him, they would not find a burden that was hard and painful but one that was light and easy to bear. He would not be a mean or hard taskmaster.

What I find interesting as we work our way through Peter's letters is that Peter urged that same kind of attitude and heart toward others. As those who had been saved and sanctified by the blood of Jesus, and as those who were Christ-followers, they were now being called to demonstrate that same gentleness and lowliness or humility of heart and character in their interactions and relationships with others. They were being called to a lifestyle that would stand out in a dog-eat-dog world.

Just think, the people in our own lives and in our own world are just as desperate for kindness and compassion and gentleness and love. That includes our spouses, our children, our co-workers, and those we connect with in the marketplace. There are many people in our lives who are hurting, struggling, anxious, and down-trodden. They need somebody to demonstrate the love and kindness and grace of God to them in their own broken lives. They need for us to be Christ with skin on.

Will you allow God to use you to exhibit this same attitude toward those you come in contact with on a regular basis? Will you allow God to use you to also show that same gentleness and humility to those you randomly come in contact with? As we continue in the book of I Peter, let's ask God how we can be people who will exhibit the heart and mind of Christ to those around us.

Friday, March 12

Our Attitude Toward Those in Leadership

1 Peter 2:13-17 — “Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. For it is God’s will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men. Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God. Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honor the king.”

We have just come through the most difficult national election I have seen in my lifetime. Not only was one candidate pitted against the other candidate, and one political party pitted against another political party, but these major divisions sparked rioting, looting, and chaos across the nation.

As I have observed all that has taken place in 2020 and now into 2021, I can’t help but wonder, what is our place as Christians in all of this? Should we be observers who sit back and do nothing? Should we be actively engaged in the political realm? How should we respond when the one we voted for did not win? How should we respond when the one we voted for did win? As Christians, how should we respond to all the turmoil in the political realm?

Peter admonished his readers to “Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every authority instituted among men.” That admonishment to submit to those in authority comes with the qualifying clause — “for the Lord’s sake.” What we do when we submit to earthly authorities, we do out of respect for the ultimate authority. Who is that? It is none other than God Himself. The ultimate authority we are to submit to is God Himself! Regardless of who is on the earthly throne or in earthly positions of leadership, God is still on His throne; He is still in control; and He still rules over all.

Every other leader is ultimately under God’s authority and holds their position only because God has allowed it. **Romans 13:1-2** — “Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves.” Regardless of how we feel toward those in authority, we need to trust God and what He is doing.

We also need to pray for everyone — including those in positions of leadership. **1 Timothy 2:1-4** — “I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone — for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.”

These are challenging times in which we are living, but as Christ-followers, we are to do what is right, respect and submit to earthly leaders, pray for them, and in all things live peaceful and quiet lives.

Saturday, March 13

Submitting to Masters

1 Peter 2:18-21 — “Slaves, submit yourselves to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh. For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God. But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.”

As we consider this passage from 1 Peter 2, our minds struggle to understand the concept of slave and master. In regards to slavery, there has been so much in the history of our nation — and our world, for that matter — that wreaks of cruelty and abuse. We cannot begin to fathom or undo the atrocities that were committed in times past. However, as we consider this passage, we need to do so in the context of the time and culture in which it was written.

Let’s pause for a moment to consider the historical context in which this letter was written. Most of Peter’s readers were scattered throughout the Roman Empire. The Roman Empire was certainly not a benevolent monarchy. It was a dictatorship ruled by Nero who was notorious for his wickedness and especially for his cruelty to Christians. Many of the recipients of Peter’s letters had suffered great persecution — some at the hands of their masters and some at the hands of cruel leaders.

“In the time of the early church . . . there were as many as 60,000,000 slaves in the Roman Empire. It wasn’t just menial tasks that were done by slaves. Doctors, teachers, musicians, actors, secretaries, stewards were slaves. In fact, all the work of Rome was done by slaves. Roman attitude was that there was no point in being master of the world and doing one’s own work. Let the slaves do that and let the citizens live in pampered idleness. The supply of slaves would never run out.” (William Barclay, *Letters of James and Peter*) In other words, a slave in Peter’s day was one who worked for another person, much like an employee today works for an employer.

So how should they as Christians respond? In this letter, Peter emphasized the value of submission toward and proper respect of the slave to his master — regardless of how the master treated him. Even Peter admitted that it is much easier to show respect toward someone who is good and considerate than it is to show respect to someone who is harsh. He assured them that is commendable for a person to bear up under the pain of unjust suffering because he or she is conscious of God. He also reminded them that as they suffered, they were following in the footsteps of Christ. As hard as it was to deal with the harsh treatment, they were to live lives that were honoring and glorifying to God.

So, what does this mean for us? After all, we are living in a different culture and time period. First, as Christians, when we work for somebody else, we must guard our hearts and our attitudes and remember to do what we are doing as if we were doing it for the Lord Himself. Second, we need to stand firm in our faith, even in the midst of unjust suffering. Third, we need to remember that God sees, knows, and understands what we are facing.

Sunday, March 14

The Right Kind of Beauty

1 Peter 3:1-6 — “Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives. Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God’s sight. For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful. They were submissive to their own husbands, like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her master. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear.”

Several things intrigue me as we come to this passage in which Peter focuses on instructions for wives and husbands. Like the Apostle Paul, who wrote in Ephesians 5:22 — “Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord,” Peter admonished wives to be submissive to their husbands. The Apostle Paul focused on relationships. However, Peter’s focus was slightly different from Paul’s. Peter’s emphasis was on godly character and Christ-honoring lives that have a positive influence on others. In this passage, Peter urged wives to live in such a way that their lives would be a positive, powerful, and godly influence on their husbands so that, if their husbands were not already believers, they would be drawn to Christ by the purity and reverence of their lives.

Peter also addressed the matter of beauty. It goes without saying that many people find outward beauty attractive. However, we all know that outward beauty does not last. Gorgeous blonde or brown hair will turn gray or fall out. It comes with age, but some turn gray a lot younger than others. Flawless skin will eventually become wrinkled or covered with age spots. Now, cosmetics and hair color can cover up some of the effects of aging, but they cannot change what is underneath.

Peter stressed that real beauty is not a matter of externals; it’s a matter of the heart. He encouraged wives not to seek to attain beauty through external things such as braided hair or the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. Please note that he did not forbid these things. No, instead he sought to remind his readers that real beauty — unfading beauty — comes from within and has to do with our inner character and not what we put on our bodies. Real beauty is also not boorish or obnoxious or mean. Not at all! No, real beauty comes from a gentle and quiet spirit. Such beauty is of great worth in God’s sight.

So, women, whether you are married or not, the challenge given by Peter is for each one of you. As a woman after God’s own heart, the challenge here is to live in such a way that your inner beauty will show through and will be a powerful witness to those around you. Will you allow God to so work in your heart and life that others will be drawn to the Lord as the result of the inner beauty of your life?

Monday, March 15

Unhindered Prayer

1 Peter 3:7 — “Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.”

Now being a woman, I understand a bit about what a woman wants in a relationship with her husband. A woman wants to be loved! Now that’s the bottom line. A woman wants to feel safe and secure and protected. A woman wants to be cherished for who she is. A woman wants to feel special. It’s interesting to note, however, that as Peter addressed the men, in particular, the husbands, he didn’t address any of these things.

To better understand Peter’s instructions here, we need to remember that Peter was writing in and from a very male-dominated, patriarchal society. Knowing that will better help us to understand what he wrote.

Peter’s first challenge to the men was to be considerate as you live with your wives. “*As you live with your wives!*” Peter is not referring to just living in the same house, but rather living in “close togetherness.” There is a connectedness and a bond in marriage that goes beyond being roommates. Be considerate as you live with your wives. Don’t leave your dirty socks or clothes laying around. Don’t leave dirty dishes in the living room — or den. Don’t just think about yourself. Be considerate of your wife and her needs.

Treat your wife with respect — as the weaker partner. Now some women might find this offensive. After all, women display a great deal of strength and tenacity in giving birth to children and caring for the needs of their families. Remember, however, that the focal point is on the man and not on a woman’s strength. Peter urged the men to respect their wives, to be sensitive to their needs, to care for them, and to protect them. He wasn’t urging them to be macho but to pay special attention to their wives needs and to care for her in a respectful way.

There is also a beautiful reminder here: “as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life.” God’s gift of life offered through His Son Jesus Christ was available to all. Men and women alike could receive this gift through faith in Jesus Christ. Husbands and wives alike could be heirs of that wonderful gift and of the heavenly reward. Allow me to add this thought. As precious as a marriage relationship is, how much more precious is a marriage relationship built on the foundation of Jesus Christ and with the hope of sharing in a heavenly inheritance. That adds another whole dimension to the bond of marriage.

Peter concluded this verse with a warning — “so that nothing will hinder your prayers.” Perhaps the entire verse is a warning. Treat your wife right, be considerate of her needs, show her proper respect, protect her and care for her, so that nothing will hinder your prayers. So, could how a husband treats his wife really affect whether or not his prayers are heard? Without a doubt it is possible. How we treat others is indeed a reflection of our relationship with God. A man’s true and genuine love for God will be evident in his care and treatment of his wife. Unbroken fellowship either way would certainly improve and empower a man’s prayer life.

The bottom line: men, guard both your relationship with God and your relationship with your wife very carefully! You will be blessed as you do!

Tuesday, March 16

Live in Harmony

1 Peter 3:8-12 — “Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble. Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. For, “Whoever would love life and see good days must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from deceitful speech. He must turn from evil and do good; he must seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.”

James Duvall shared in an on-line forum that a number of years ago he had the privilege of attending a Hillsong Conference in London. The Hillsong conferences were known for exciting and creative musical openings. He wrote: “That night was no exception. I was captivated by the power of the message. A music conductor stood center stage holding a tuning fork. All around him were a large number of musicians, each holding one of a variety of instruments. As the conductor struck the tuning fork, the musicians responded by playing their instruments and tuning to the resonating pitch.” As the instruments were being tuned, a narrator went on to share the words of A. W. Tozer: “Has it ever occurred to you that one hundred pianos all tuned to the same [tuning] fork are automatically tuned to each other? They are of one accord by being tuned, not to each other, but to another standard to which one must individually bow.”

What an amazing thought! All instruments tuned to the same tuning fork will be in tune or in harmony with all of the other instruments. Yes, each instrument has its own unique sound, but when all of the instruments in an orchestra are in perfect tune or harmony, what a beautiful and enjoyable sound they produce.

Now let’s take that thought and turn our attention to the church. Every one of us is different and unique. We each have different personalities. We each have different talents, gifts, and abilities. We also have different callings and different places to fill in the body. However, when each one of us is in tune with our Savior and filling the role He has called us to fill, then we can live in tune or in harmony with one another. No, we are not all alike. No, we don’t think the same. We don’t dress the same. We don’t act the same. Now, that’s probably a good thing. But when we live in unity, worship in harmony, and serve the Lord in one accord, what a beautiful witness and testimony is presented to a watching world.

Wednesday, March 17

An Up-to-Date Testimony

I Peter 3:15 — “But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.”

Years ago, I heard a story about a man who had had a wonderful conversion experience. The Lord had wonderfully and powerfully saved him from a life of sin. The man was so grateful for what God had done in his life that he had written his testimony on a piece of paper and stored it away for safe-keeping. Every time a guest would stop by, he would run upstairs and get his written testimony to share with them. One day, he went upstairs to get his testimony to share with a friend, and he could not find it. He looked and looked, but, alas, it was nowhere to be found. He came downstairs, and with a look of dismay on his face, and with despair in his voice, he cried out in frustration, “I have lost my testimony.”

The sad part of this story was that this man had become so enamored with what God had done for him years before, that he had lost more than a written copy of his testimony; he had ultimately failed to maintain his walk with the Lord and have a current relationship with the Lord and an up-to-date testimony.

Peter had urged his readers, “but in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord.” It wasn’t enough to know about Jesus; they had to exalt Him as Lord in their hearts. Peter went on to admonish them, “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.”

In contrast to the story of this man, I heard an amazing testimony just a few days ago. A pastor was preparing to do the funeral for a man he did not know, but he knew the family. The man had been a Christian and loved the Lord. However, the man had a son who was involved in witchcraft. This son had been told that he could not perform any of his own rituals at the funeral parlor while the viewing or service was going on. Instead of complying, he came in dressed in full wizard regalia and was doing some of his own rituals while family and friends were gathered there. The pastor was beside himself. He walked around the room praying for God’s wisdom and guidance on how to handle the situation. During the service, a 16 year old girl stood up to share the eulogy in the absence of the person who was to give it. As she did, God took over. The pastor testified that the girl powerfully shared the Gospel message in no uncertain terms. The atmosphere in the room changed, and God spoke through her in an amazing way.

What a wonderful witness and testimony came from the heart of that teenage girl! She not only knew about the Lord. She knew the Lord! She had a relationship and walk with the Lord! Her testimony was current and up-to-date!

What about you? Are you relying on an out-of-date testimony of what God did in your heart and life years ago? Or are you maintaining a close relationship with the Lord? Do you have a current testimony of what God is doing right here and right now in your heart and life? Are you ready to share it with others?

Thursday, March 18

Serving With Our Gifts

1 Peter 4:10-11 — “Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.”

Over the years, God has graciously given me the opportunity to be ministered to by those whose heart’s desire was to serve God and others. Some, like Florence Reed and Edith Banker, taught children’s Sunday School classes. Others, like David Sanger, had a heart for young people, and served in youth ministry. Some, like Ruth Miller, set a generous table filled with all kinds of delicious baked goods to bless the college students who attended Zion Wesleyan Church in Pt. Phillip, PA. Still others, like Walter LaPlante, served by cleaning the church and keeping the little church in West Chazy supplied with firewood. Each and every one of these, and many, many more, used their gifts, abilities, and talents to serve others.

In the verses prior to these, Peter addressed various aspects of what it means to live for God. Since much of this is repetitive to thoughts we have already considered in this devotional booklet, we want to focus our attention specifically on verses 10-11. New Testament writers remind us that God has given various spiritual gifts to those throughout the church. To some He gave the ability to preach. To others He gave the ability to encourage and uplift. To still others, He gave the ability to perform miracles. Those spiritual gifts and others were not given for an individual’s own personal benefit but for the good of the church.

The Apostle Paul addressed the matter of spiritual gifts in more detail in 1 Corinthians 12. He likened the church to the human body. He emphasized the fact that in the church, we are all part of one body. We are not separate entities. Not at all. We are part of a whole — part of one body. Each of us is different, just as each of the various parts of the human body is different. Each has its own place and its own role to play. Some may seem more important than others. Some may appear to be rather insignificant. However, small or insignificant one is, each part belongs and has a role to play. If you don’t believe me, then stub your little toe on a piece of furniture and see how that affects the rest of the body.

Likewise, those within the body of Christ have been bestowed with various gifts as part of the ministry of the church. Whatever gift we have been given, we must use it to serve others and to honor and glorify God. Whatever role we have been given to fill, we must fill it humbly and use it as an opportunity to serve others. We must do so with the strength and grace which God provides.

Are you faithfully filling your place in the body of Christ? Are you using the gifts God has given you to serve others? Are you doing so to serve others or for selfish purposes? Are you looking for praise for yourself, or are you seeking to bring glory and honor and praise to God? May God use each of us to build up His body, the church.

Friday, March 19

Hope in Suffering

1 Peter 4:12-13 — “Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.”

Recently, as I was preparing a lesson for our Thursday Afternoon Women of God Bible Study, I came across the story of Corrie ten Boom. Corrie’s father, Casper ten Boom, was an elderly, Dutch Christian watchmaker. As part of the Dutch Underground, he and his family courageously helped many Jews escape from the Nazis during the Holocaust in World War II by hiding them in a secret room in their home. Eventually, he was caught, having been betrayed by a man he had tutored years before. He was arrested and sent to a concentration camp where he soon died. Corrie and her sister Betsie were also arrested and sent to Ravensbruck, one of Hitler’s most horrific concentration camps. Both Corrie and Betsie witnessed and suffered the most inhumane atrocities there. Betsie could not escape the awful jaws of death in that camp. By the grace of God Corrie survived and, as the result of a clerical error, was released. She went on to become a “Tramp for the Lord” who shared the message of God’s forgiveness and grace around the world.

As I ponder her story, I cannot help but think of Peter’s words. “Do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ.” (1 Peter 4:12-13) “Don’t be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering.” Honestly, trials come to all of us, Christian and non-Christian alike. Some trials are a lot more intense than others. Some are minor, but some bring untold suffering and pain. Jesus had warned His disciples that they would share in His suffering because of their connection to Him.

Peter, however, encouraged his readers to rejoice in their sufferings. Why? Why rejoice in those hard and difficult problems and struggles in life? Because those trials have a purpose in our lives. Yes, they are meant to test us and to help us grow and mature, but Peter added another reason: “so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.” God does allow trials to test us, but He also uses those difficulties to help us keep our focus on the good things He has prepared for us in glory.

Peter added this warning in **1 Peter 4:14-16** — “If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.” Some suffering comes as a result of living for Christ, but some suffering comes as a result of doing wrong. If we suffer for doing wrong, we get what we deserve. However, if we suffer because of our connection to Jesus, we are blessed.

Hard times are only temporary! God does indeed have something far better planned for us who trust in Jesus — both here and in eternity. That gives us hope in our suffering and enables us to keep on doing good and living for Him in the here and now, no matter what we are facing.

Saturday, March 20

Servant-Hearted Leadership

1 Peter 5:1-4 — “To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ’s sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.”

When Peter first encountered Jesus, he was a brash, burly, impetuous fisherman. He spoke his mind. He minced no words. He was outspoken and a man of extremes. Jesus called him to leave his life of fishing for fish behind to follow Him and become a fisher of men. Peter diligently followed Jesus and learned from Him. There were times Jesus had to reprimand him. There were times Jesus had to correct him. Little by little, Peter learned. Peter’s biggest blunder, however, came when Jesus had been arrested and was being unfairly tried. It was during that very difficult period that Peter vehemently denied 3 times that he even knew Jesus. After Jesus’ death and resurrection, Jesus met up with the disciples on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, and it was there that Jesus reached out to restore Peter.

Three times, Jesus had asked Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” Jesus loved Peter deeply and His desire was to not only help Peter face what he had done but to restore him so that he could serve Jesus. But each time the question was asked, the words stung. They stung with guilt and shame and remorse. With each response, Peter cowered a little more. But each time, Jesus gave him an assignment: “Feed my lambs.” “Take care of my sheep.” “Feed my sheep.” Now these are not the commands a fisherman would expect to hear. Not at all. No, these are words one would expect to be addressed to a shepherd. Jesus had a new task for Peter. He wanted Peter to follow His example as the Good Shepherd and be a shepherd or pastor who would take care of His sheep and His lambs.

With that in mind, Peter, in this passage from 1 Peter 5, addressed the leaders or pastors or shepherds of his day who were serving the Lord and the church. He appealed to them as a fellow elder and a fellow pastor, and challenged them to faithfully, humbly, and willingly serve those who had been entrusted to their care. He urged them to guard their hearts and their motives. He encouraged them to serve willingly, not out of compulsion. He urged them not to be greedy for money, but instead to be eager to serve. He challenged them not to lord it over those entrusted to them but to set an example that they could follow. He also reminded them that they were serving under the leadership and lordship of the Chief Shepherd who would one day return to reward those who had been faithful. The reward they would receive would be a crown of glory that would never fade away. What a challenge! Did you notice the one main theme? Serve! Those who fill the position of pastor or shepherd need to have servant hearts — hearts that are filled with love and compassion for those they serve.

May God help all those who serve Him to do so humbly with servant hearts — and may God help all of us to pray for those who serve in such roles!

Sunday, March 21

At Attitude of Humility

1 Peter 5:5-6 — “Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.’ Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.”

Several months ago, I discovered that a local grocery store I frequent had hired some young men to serve as cashiers. I was pleasantly surprised the first time one young man in particular waited on me. As I approached the checkout area, he beckoned me to the register he was manning and greeted me by saying, “I am so glad you chose to shop with us today.” Then he added, “How may I serve you today?” My initial response was shock. Actually, I was speechless, unsure how to respond. I had never before been greeted that way in a grocery store. When the transaction was completed, he again thanked me for shopping there and for allowing him the privilege of serving me. I left the store with a lilt in my step and with joy in my heart. What a pleasant experience and what a joyous surprise it had been to be greeted by an individual with such a kind, gentle, and humble demeanor!

As Peter addressed the young men among those he was writing to, he urged them to be submissive to those who are older and to clothe themselves with humility toward one another. One word sums up this kind of attitude — respect. Respect towards elders is both taught and caught. It is taught as a way of life, but it needs to be lived out as an example as well. That respect will be evidenced in how one treats those who are older or who are in leadership positions. That respect will be demonstrated by being submissive to others.

Along with that respect, there needs to be a mark of humility. Now a lot of times, young men can carry an air of pride and arrogance. Peter instructed the young men of his day in regard to God’s attitude toward the proud and arrogant. He made it very clear that God opposes the proud (Proverbs 3:34). Think about that for a moment. God hates pride. Why? Because pride focuses on self. It is both the reliance on self and the exalting of self. With pride in one’s heart, there is no room for God or for others. The writer of Proverbs warned: **Proverbs 16:18** — “Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.” History has proven that truth over and over again. Pride and arrogance often lead to a fall.

However, God does give grace to the humble. He does give grace and help to those who have not only learned to respect others, but who put Him first and seek to live for Him and honor and glorify Him.

Let me ask you today: What marks your life — pride and arrogance or humility? Have you learned to respect others and be submissive to them? You may not be a young man as were those to whom Peter wrote these words, but any individual who seeks to honor and glorify God will truly seek to live a life of humility, dependence on Him, and respect for others. Those who do so will certainly be recipients of His grace.

Monday, March 22

Getting Rid of Anxiety

1 Peter 5:5-7 — “Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.”

Years ago, I came across the story of a traveler who was walking along a dusty, country road carrying a large, heavy load on his back. A man came along with a horse and cart and offered the traveler a ride. The traveler, relieved for the ride and the opportunity to get off his tired, aching feet, gratefully accepted and climbed up beside the man. However, as he sat there, he did so still bearing the heavy load on his back. The man turned to him and suggested he put his bag in the back of the cart. The traveler looked at him, and, with a heavy sigh, remarked that it was kind enough for the man to offer him a ride, he didn't need to carry his burden as well.

We chuckle at the irony of this story, don't we? It would have been no burden or problem for the driver if the traveler had placed his load in the cart. It would have made life a lot easier for the traveler, but no, he continued to struggle under the weight of that heavy load.

Now aren't we a bit like that traveler at times? We struggle under the weight of a load of burdens, cares, and anxiety while all the time God is urging us to let go and give it to Him. But, like the traveler, we insist on carrying that load ourselves.

In 1 Peter 5:7, Peter urged his readers, “Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.” The picture here is one of casting or throwing our burdens and problems — and even ourselves — on the Lord. Why? Because He cares for us! What a wonderful reminder this is! God cares very deeply for each one of us. He knows us. He knows our struggles. He knows our weaknesses. He not only knows, but He also loves us and cares for us.

The Psalmist David added another dimension to this in **Psalm 55:22** — “Cast your cares on the LORD and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous fall.” The Lord not only cares about us and our struggles, but we are also given the assurance that when we cast our cares on Him, He will sustain us. Now that word “sustain” is not one we use often, but it gives us a beautiful picture of the way the Lord provides for His people. It's a picture of support, of nourishment, of encouragement, and of meeting needs. What a wonderful picture we have here! When we cast or throw our problems on the Lord, we can do so knowing that He cares for us and will sustain us and will keep us from falling.

Let me ask you today, what load or care or burden are you carrying that you need to give over to God? He urges you to let go of it and give it to Him. He can handle it! Nothing is too big for God! He promises that He will take care of the problem and you.

Tuesday, March 23

Be Alert

1 Peter 5:8-9 — “Be self-controlled and alert. 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 your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.”

As a child growing up, my family always owned cats. Now those cats were avid hunters. I still remember the day that one of the cats had chased a chipmunk into the stonewall fence across the road from our house. The cat lay very quietly near the stonewall out of sight of the chipmunk. It lay there motionless and silent, waiting and watching intently for the chipmunk to sneak back out. Now chipmunks are curious critters, and soon it snuck back out, only to be pounced on by the waiting cat.

Peter described our spiritual enemy, the devil, as a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Now, as a cat or a lion lies in wait quietly, motionless, and still, watching for its unsuspecting prey to come even closer, so the devil lies in wait looking for some unsuspecting individual to pounce on and devour. The goal of both is to catch the prey completely unaware, oblivious to the approach of the predator.

Peter warned his readers that the best way to be prepared for an attack of the enemy is to, “Be self-controlled and alert.” First, we need to learn the value of exercising self-control. We live in a world where we are faced with all kinds of temptations that seek to lure us in and lead us down a path away from God and the things of God. We live in a world that focuses on instant gratification. We are faced daily with the invitation, “If it feels good, do it.” In the face of such temptations, we need to learn to exercise self-control. Self-control is not easily learned, but for the Christian, it is one of the characteristics or fruit that the Holy Spirit works to develop in us.

Peter also challenged his readers to “Be alert.” They were to keep their eyes and their ears open and be aware of the enemy and his deceptive, scheming tactics. It may seem obvious, but it’s so easy to forget that those who are not alert and watching, or those who have even grown complacent, become easy prey for the enemy.

Paul, in 1 Corinthians 10:12 added another dimension to that warning when he wrote the following words: “So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall!” When we become overly confident and think that we will never fall into temptation, we place ourselves in a very dangerous position. Such pride or self-confidence can easily lead to our downfall.

Peter then gave some advice on how to stand strong against the enemy’s schemes. “Resist him!” Resist the devil in the power of the name of Jesus. Stand strong against him by standing firm in the faith. Remember you are not alone in your struggles. Others have been through the same temptations and the same struggles. Others are even now going through the same thing. Just remember that God is faithful! Yes, He is! Remember also that the devil has already been defeated. Yes, he has. Remember also that you will win as you stand strong in your faith, in your commitment to Jesus Christ, and in the power of His strong and matchless name.

Wednesday, March 24

The Armor of God

Ephesians 6:10-13— “Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.”

In yesterday’s devotional, we learned that we have an enemy who prowls around like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. In today’s Scripture reading, which was written by the Apostle Paul, we discover that God knows we have an enemy who seeks to take us down by his deceptive and ruthless tactics and schemes, but we also learn that God has provided everything — absolutely EVERYTHING — that we need to stand strong and victorious. The first admonition here is to “be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.” The verb tense translated here as “be strong” is actually passive, so a better translation is “be strengthened.” Not only is that a better translation linguistically, but it is also better theologically. Paul isn’t suggesting that we go to a spiritual fitness center to gain spiritual muscle-mass to enable us to whip the devil. Instead, we are to invite the Lord to strengthen us. The difference is huge. When we say, “Be strong,” the emphasis is on what we can do—a humanistic effort doomed to failure. When we say, “Be strengthened,” the emphasis is on what the Lord can do. That points to the heart of our faith. What is the source of our strength? The Lord! What is the source of our power to stand against the enemy? The Lord! Who provides what we need to stand strong in battle? The Lord!

Paul reminded his readers that their battle was a spiritual one, against spiritual forces, and needed to be fought with spiritual weapons or armor that was provided for them by God. However, that armor would be useless in the day of battle, or when the day of evil came, if they didn’t put it on.

What did that armor consist of? That armor consisted of the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the shoes of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit (the Word of God). Notice how every vital organ would be protected. The belt of truth would guard the innermost parts. The breastplate of righteousness — God’s righteousness would guard the heart. The shoes of peace would prepare the way to share the Gospel message with others. The shield of faith would protect from the enemy’s darts. The helmet of salvation would protect the mind. The sword of the Spirit — the Word of God — would provide offense against the enemy. Adding to all of these, Paul added the weapon of prayer.

Like the believers of old, we likewise face a formidable spiritual foe, but we do not face that enemy alone. God Himself is on our side and has provided everything we need to stand strong, firm, and steadfast — if we will avail ourselves of the armor He has provided for us. Have you put on the full armor of God? Will you? That is the only way you will stand in the evil day.

Thursday, March 25

Waging War on Our Knees

Ephesians 6:18 — “And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.”

Of all the lessons I’ve learned in regard to prayer, the most powerful and valuable was not taught to me by pastors or Bible teachers or Bible scholars, but by my mom. To look at my mom, she was a very unassuming, humble woman, but she loved the Lord, and she lived out her faith in everyday life in very practical ways. Probably the most important lesson she taught me in regard to prayer was this: when the Lord wakes you up in the middle of the night with a burden on your heart for somebody, pray for the person — even if you have to pray all night long. On numerous occasions, she shared with me that the Lord awakened her in the middle of the night to pray for her brother-in-law, George. She would pray and pray . . . and pray some more as long as the burden lay on her heart. On every one of those occasions, she would awake in the morning to receive a phone call from her sister letting her know that George had been taken back to the hospital in the middle of the night with serious breathing issues. She always marveled that God would awaken her to pray for him at his exact hour of need.

I had a similar experience years ago when the Lord awakened me in the middle of the night to pray for a young lady I knew. In my heart, I sensed a very strong, intense battle being waged for this young lady’s soul. It seemed like Satan wanted to bring her down and destroy her, but God, in His great love for her, was not about to let that happen. I wrestled in prayer all night for that young lady. Sometime later, I learned that that very night she had attempted suicide. Her life was miraculously saved, and she went on to live a very productive life. When her life hung in the balance, God had reached out looking for a prayer warrior to intercede on her behalf.

In the same breath — or stroke of the pen — in which Paul described the armor of God, he went on to emphasize the importance or value of prayer. Although, prayer may not be considered one of the pieces of the armor of God, one thing is obvious: some battles can only be waged and won on our knees. In order for that to happen, we need to wield and utilize the weapon of prayer. Prayer keeps us in contact with our commanding officer — the God of the universe. Prayer keeps us connected to the One who can defeat the spiritual forces of evil. Prayer helps us to wage war and win against the unseen enemy. That prayer is not just prayers lifted up for ourselves but intense, intercessory prayers in which we wrestle for the souls of others.

What about you? Are you utilizing the weapon of prayer in the war against the unseen enemy? Remember, some battles can only be waged and won on our knees. So, pray, pray, pray — and keep on praying on all occasions, with all kinds of prayers, for all the saints.

Friday, March 26

Empowered to Live a Godly Life

2 Peter 1:3 — “His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.”

I don't know how many times people have said to me throughout my years in ministry: “I just can't live the Christian life.” Their struggles and complaints echo those of the Apostle Paul from Romans 7:14-24. Paul had expressed the longing and desire to do good. He even affirmed that he knew what he should do, but he just did not have the power or the ability to carry it out. He recognized that there was a war being waged within him between the forces of good and the forces of evil. He acknowledged that no matter how hard he tried, evil always seemed to win. He concluded in Romans 7:24-25 — “What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!” After much struggle, Paul realized that what he could not do, God could and would accomplish in him through His Son Jesus Christ.

Peter, in his second epistle, echoed that same thought. He joyously proclaimed that God's power had given all believers — not just Peter and the other Apostles, but all believers — everything they needed to live a godly life in an ungodly world through their knowledge of Jesus Christ. Believers in Christ have been given *His power* to overcome sin and the evil one, but they have also been given His power to live a life that is honoring and glorifying to God! Now that's good news, isn't it? God Himself will give us everything we need to live godly lives in a world that does not live by His standards.

Now that looks good on paper, and that sounds wonderful preached from the pulpit, but how does this look and work in everyday life? Here's a few practical ways God's power can help us in our daily lives. God's power can help us think thoughts that are pleasing to Him. God's power can help us refrain from using our words and our tongues to hurt others. God's power can help us overcome addictive habits. How is this possible? After all, I have struggled to do it before, but nothing worked. It is, however, wondrously possible as we learn to trust God and rely on Him for His help in areas in which we struggle. He will indeed provide the help and the grace and the strength we need to be overcomers and to live for Him.

Saturday, March 27

Empowered by the Holy Spirit

John 20:22 — “And with that he breathed on them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’”

Acts 1:8 — “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Although Peter did not mention the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the passage we considered in yesterday’s devotional, one thing becomes obvious when we look at the life of Peter before Pentecost and his life after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. He was still Peter, but His life had been powerfully changed when he received the mighty filling of the Holy Spirit of God.

Before Pentecost, Peter had been one of Jesus’ closest companions, but he struggled in many ways. He was impetuous and blundered ahead without weighing the consequences of his words or actions. On a number of occasions, he had declared that he would stand beside Jesus all the way, but when push came to shove, he would flounder in his commitment to Jesus. On one occasion he had even vehemently declared 3 times that he didn’t even know Jesus, and that he certainly was not one of His disciples. Jesus had been patient with him, teaching him, rebuking him, and showing him the way a disciple ought to live and act. After His resurrection, He even lovingly and graciously brought Peter to the point of restoration.

After His death and resurrection, Jesus had appeared to His disciples on one occasion when they were gathered together behind locked doors. He had showed them his hands and side, and they were overjoyed to see Him. He wished them peace and then breathed on them, and told them to receive the Holy Spirit. At another time when He appeared to them, He gave them the command to not leave Jerusalem until they had received the gift the Father had promised them. (Acts 1:4) Then again, when He met with them, He promised them that they would receive power when the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they would be His witnesses. (Acts 1:8)

In Acts 2, we find the disciples gathered together on the day of Pentecost — a Jewish feast day. They were united together, waiting in the presence of the Lord, and praying. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what appeared to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. Those gathered in Jerusalem could not understand what was happening. The Holy Spirit enabled Peter to preach a powerful message explaining what had happened resulting in God-ordained conviction coming on the crowds. Many believed and were baptized, and over 3000 people were added to their numbers that day.

What Peter could not do in his own strength and ability, God did in and through him through the mighty work of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

God has also promised His Holy Spirit to all who believe and will receive Him. The Holy Spirit will do in us — and through us — what we cannot do. He will transform our hearts and minds. He will help us live godly lives. He will empower us to witness for Him. He will help us obey God. Have you received the power of the Holy Spirit for yourself? You can today!

Sunday, March 28

Promises to Live By

2 Peter 1:4 — “Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.”

In 1980-81, I had the privilege of attending Houghton College. One of the highlights of that year was sitting under the teaching of Dr. Daniel Chamberlain and Dr. Paine in a Sunday School class where we did an in-depth study of the book of Ephesians. One beautiful word picture from that study has remained with me to this day. When they were describing the list of blessings from Ephesians 1 that are ours because of Jesus Christ, they described those blessings as a “smorgasbord” — a wide and varied abundance of God’s blessings granted to His children.

Now the study of Ephesians 1 and that list of blessings bestowed on God’s children is a study for another time, but when I think of God’s promises, and when I think of His Word, it is easy to picture what God has provided for us in His Word (the Bible) as a smorgasbord — a feast — with something for every situation and every need. Think with me for a moment about the treasures found in God’s Word. God’s Word contains laws or instructions on how to live a life that is honoring to God. It contains historical records of times past. It includes poetry that encourages and uplifts and meets us at our point of need. It also includes prophecy of things yet to come. The New Testament records the Gospel accounts and events from the life, teaching, and ministry of Jesus. The New Testament also provides us with a record of the beginning of the early church and letters of instruction and encouragement to those newly established churches.

Just think, in His Word, God has given us His promises to sustain us, lessons to teach us, admonitions to discipline us, and prophecy to remind us that He is still in control and still in charge even when the future ahead of us seems so uncertain. Yes, we have been given power by God and His indwelling Holy Spirit to live godly lives, but we also have been given His Word and His promises to cling to and to help us no matter what we face in our daily lives. Along with His Word and His promises, He also gives us the assurance that He is faithful to keep His promises and to care for us, provide for us, and meet our every need.

The key, though, isn’t just in owning a Bible — or even in owning lots of different Bible translations. The key is in getting into His Word — reading it and studying it — and letting His Word get into us. God’s Word is powerful and life-changing, but only as we take it off the shelf and get into it for ourselves. It is only then that His Word is able to mold us and shape our thinking and our wills so that we become more like Jesus Christ. Only then, will we be able to live lives pleasing to Him — lives that are in line with our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Monday, March 29

Keep on Growing

2 Peter 1:5-9 — “For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins.”

Over the years, I have had the privilege and opportunity to serve the Lord in various senior living homes. One thing that has intrigued me is to see how these senior adults react to new learning opportunities. Some gladly accept a new challenge and joyfully tackle the opportunity to gain new skills. Others have a mental block when asked to attempt something new. They refuse to even try. The greatest truth learned from watching these senior adults is that the willingness and desire to learn new skills helps to keep both the mind and body healthy and active.

As we continue in 2 Peter 1, we discover that Peter challenged his readers to keep on growing spiritually — in faith, in goodness, in knowledge, in self-control, in perseverance, in godliness, in mutual affection, and in love. When we keep learning and growing, and when these characteristics are manifest in us in increasing measure, we will become more like Jesus. We will be able to effectively and productively live the kind of life that Christ has called us to. There will be evidence of growth and fruit in our lives. We will be able to overcome sin in our personal lives. We will be enabled to live godly lives even in a culture and a society that is ungodly and that does not honor the Lord. As a result, our lives will be a radiant testimony to those around us of His love and His grace.

On the other hand, think with me for a moment about what happens if we do not keep learning and growing. A plant that ceases to grow, dies. It's that simple. As people, when we stop learning and growing, we may not immediately die, but the decline begins. In a spiritual sense, we lose our focus and perspective. In fact, Peter admonished his readers that they would become near-sighted and blind and forget all that Christ had done for them (v. 9). Now I have struggled with near-sightedness all of my life. As a teen, I was told I would eventually lose my sight and go blind. That was not something I looked forward to. As a result, I have taken as many preventative measures as I could to keep that from happening. Now, wasn't that what Peter was admonishing his readers — to take preventative measures so they would not get to that point?

Again, can you imagine getting to the point where you forget all that Christ has done for you? I hope I never get there. It was for this reason that Peter gave them this warning. Continuing to learn and grow would constantly remind them of God's love and grace and would keep them alert and focused.

The challenge is for us as well. Keep learning and growing! Stay close to Christ! Don't ever forget all He has done for you!

Tuesday, March 30

Know Your Calling

2 Peter 1:10-11 — “Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall, and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”

When I was attending United Wesleyan College, I was deeply challenged by a statement made by one of my professors. Dr. Edward Bean reminded us on a number of occasions that those of us who had heard the call of God to go into full-time ministry would at times face such difficult and intense times in ministry that the only thing we could hold onto was the assurance of God’s call on our hearts and lives. He was absolutely correct. There have indeed been times when the challenges of ministry or even of life have been so overwhelming that the only thing left to hold on to was God’s call on my life.

Peter, in writing these words of encouragement to those early churches had likewise warned his readers that they would face difficult times, fiery trials, and severe tests. Over and over, he had encouraged them and advised them on how to face life’s difficulties. These two verses are often used by those pushing the doctrines of election and predestination, however, this does not appear to be Peter’s intent.

After Peter had reminded his readers that God had provided everything they needed for life and godliness, and after Peter had reminded them of God’s great and wonderful promises, and after he had challenged them to continue to grow, he urged them to be all the more eager to make their calling and election sure. In other words, he was challenging them to know who had called them and chosen them and to stand in that assurance. Their salvation and the assurance of their salvation rested in God alone.

He also assured them that if they did so, they would never fall. Jude, in Jude 24, assured his readers: “To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy.” The courage to face life’s trials and difficulties would come from the assurance of their salvation as well as their confidence in Him.

The same is true for us. Our salvation rests on Christ’s death on the cross and His blood shed on that cross for our sins. We cannot save ourselves. God, who chose us and called us, is the only One who has saved us by His wonderful love and grace. We are His.

May I remind you today to be sure of your calling and who you belong to. You are God’s. He called you! He chose you! You belong to Him! Not only that, but God is strong and faithful and will watch over you every moment of every day. With His help, you can stand strong and confident in the face of life’s difficulties.

Wednesday, March 31

Recognizing the Fake

2 Peter 2:1 — “But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them—bringing swift destruction on themselves. Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute. In their greed these teachers will exploit you with stories they have made up. Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping.”

Criminals have gotten so good at producing counterfeits that look like the real thing that it's hard to tell them apart. Consider for a moment, if you had two \$20 bills placed in front of you, one real and one counterfeit, how would you determine which was which? Would you know how to tell the real from the fake? How would you be able to tell them apart?

Several years ago, I read an interesting article in regard to training people how to distinguish counterfeit money. Those being trained were not taught what to look for regarding counterfeit bills. Instead, they were taught to know and recognize all the characteristics of the real thing. The better they were acquainted with the real thing, the better they would be able to recognize the fake.

Now, this was Peter's objective in challenging his readers as he had in the first chapter. He had reminded them that God had provided everything they needed for godly living. He had reminded them of the value of God's Word and His promises. He had challenged them to keep learning and growing in their spiritual lives. He had likewise admonished them to be all the more eager to make their calling and election sure — to stand steadfast in their calling. All of this would equip them to stand strong and firm and steadfast against the attacks of false teachers and prophets. By staying close to the Lord, by being filled with the indwelling Holy Spirit, by keeping in God's Word, and by being sure of their calling in Christ, they would be able to recognize the false and fake when it reared its ugly head. They would be able to recognize it and overcome it, because they knew that which was true and genuine.

Allow me to ask, are their false teachers and false prophets at work today? Yes, there are. How can we recognize them? As with counterfeit money, the best way to recognize the false, the fake, and the counterfeit is to study the real thing. Stay close to the Savior. Stay in God's Word. Read it. Study it. Hold all teachings up to the light and standard of God's Word. There are those who may try to secretly introduce false teachings, but you do not have to be overcome by them. *You can overcome* but only by standing firm in your relationship with the Lord and in the truth of God's Word.

Thursday, April 1

The Lord's Patience

2 Peter 3:7-10 — “By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men. But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. “

It's interesting to note that when life gets difficult on a national or world-wide scale, our thoughts start turning toward the last days and eternity. Since the pandemic began last year, and since our nation has been struggling with political unrest, have you noticed that conversations have often turned toward the last days and the end times? If nothing else, it's made us focus on God's overall scheme of things.

Peter warned his readers that according to the words of Jesus Himself, the persecution and difficulties that were taking place in their time and in their culture had been foretold by Jesus Himself. He also reminded them that scoffers would come, scoffing and making light of the prophecy or promise regarding Christ's return. There would be those who mocked by questioning, “Where is He? When is His coming? Why had He not come back as He promised?”

Peter warned that Judgment Day and the destruction of ungodly men would indeed come and that Christ would indeed come back. He reminded them that just because it had not yet happened, did not mean that God would not keep His promise. In fact, the delay was actually showing the character of God and His patience toward those who had not yet repented of their sin and turned toward God.

I love the words of Peter in verse 9 — “The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.” This verse clearly shows the heart of God. We need to remember that when we think that God is being too slow, He is actually demonstrating patience. You see, God, in His great and wonderful love, really does not want to see anybody going off into eternity without having repented of their sins. In His heart of hearts, His desire, His longing, and His hope is not to see people perish or die without having accepted Jesus as their Savior and Lord. He does not delight in that. No, He keeps offering more time and extending more opportunities to those who have not yet repented. Now that's love and patience, isn't it?

One day, however, the Lord will come back. That will be an awful day for those who have not accepted Jesus as Savior and Lord. It will come quickly — unexpectedly — like a thief in the night. The heavens will disappear with a roar. The earth will be destroyed by fire. Believers will be taken home to their heavenly reward. Allow me to ask you today: Are you ready? Have you repented of your sin? Have you accepted Jesus as your Savior and Lord? If not, will you do so today before it's too late?

Friday, April 2

Living in View of Eternity

2 Peter 3:11-14 — “Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness. So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him.”

As our thoughts and our hearts turn toward the last days and the end times, how should we live? Now that’s a good question, isn’t it? Should we live in fear and trepidation as we face the uncertainty of those times? Should we be overwhelmed by anxiety and dread? Or should we start living like the dickens, resorting to violence or rioting or other ungodly behavior? Should we eat, drink, and be merry as we chase after those things that will satisfy our earthly, human desires? Indeed, how should we live knowing that one day Jesus will return to take His children home to be with Him? How should we live knowing that everything will one day be destroyed by fire?

In verse 11, Peter answered that question for his readers. “*You ought to live holy and godly lives* as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming.” Peter both challenged his readers regarding how to live and what to look to forward to.

As God’s children, we are to live holy and godly lives — lives that measure up to God’s holy standards. We are not to live haphazardly or carelessly, nor are we to live in an ungodly manner. We are not to live according to the pattern of this world or like those around us. In 1 Peter 1:2, Peter had reminded his readers that they had “been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood.” They had been chosen by God and sanctified by the Holy Spirit for the purpose of obeying Jesus Christ and living according to His teachings.

Peter also reminded his readers that in keeping with His promise, we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth — that new home being the home of righteousness. Since we are looking forward to this, we need to make every effort even now to live in such a way that we will be found spotless, blameless, and at peace with Him when He returns.

What a challenge this is for us! Yes, we need to live our lives in the here and now, but we also need to live in such a way that we keep our focus on eternity. May God help us!

Saturday, April 3

One Final Word

2 Peter 3:18 — “But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.”

I hope and pray that you have been as blessed as I have been as we have made our way through this Lenten season, and as we have studied the teachings from 1 and 2 Peter on how to live godly lives in a world that is not friendly to God or His people. This has certainly been an intriguing and amazing study.

As we wrap up this Lenten Devotional, I want to leave you with one final word. It just happens to be the final exhortation in the second epistle attributed to the Apostle Peter. Actually, Peter had begun this second letter with a challenge to grow — and he concludes this little epistle with a challenge to continue to grow.

We all know that whatever is alive will show signs of life and growth. We also understand that what is not growing is either stagnant, dying, or already dead. There are certain things that contribute to growth for all living things — proper nutrition, water, sunlight, and air. My father and my grandmother had the ability to grow plants that thrived. They seemed to know the right combination of what was needed to help plants do their best. Not me. My first year pastoring in West Chazy, I planted some perennials right in front of the church where they were in bright sunlight all day long. I thought Impatiens plants would look beautiful there, but I had no idea that those plants thrived best in shade — not in the bright sunlight. They did not fare well at all. Sometimes, you can provide everything you think is needed to help plants grow, but it may be too much or even too little. It was a lesson I learned the hard way.

Like the flowers I planted in the hot sun that really needed a lot of shade, we also need to make sure we are in a place where we can learn and grow and mature. We must realize that not every relationship, not every workplace, and not every environment is conducive to growth. As Christians who have received Jesus as Savior and Lord, the best place to grow is in a close relationship with our Savior.

Peter emphasized throughout this letter that we must do everything we can to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. It's not enough to only grow in knowledge; we must also grow in GRACE — God's grace. What does this mean? This means we must seek to grow in our relationship with our Lord as well as our relationships with others. In order to grow in grace, our hearts and spirits must be open and sensitive to the Lord. We must have teachable and willing spirits. The best way to grow is by reading God's Word, by spending quality time in prayer and fellowship with our Lord, by actively participating in worship, by enjoying Christian fellowship, and by serving the Lord and others. It's a lifelong process.

What are you doing to enable yourself to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ? What changes will you make to help ensure continued growth?

