

Friday: while being proactive in growth;

Read: 1 Peter 5:8-11 ⁸ Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. ⁹ Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. ¹⁰ And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.

<p>Reflect: For the second time Peter commands us to be “sober-minded” (cf. 4:7). The first (and only other) time this word was used, it was assumed we already were (cf. 1:13). This word doesn’t simply mean sober as in abstaining from intoxication by liquor. It also means being sober as in don’t be intoxicated by the things in/of the world.</p> <p>Some bad news in these verses is that Satan is out to get us. The good news is that we can resist him...and be successful! We are not at his mercy. Remember, Satan was defeated by the Christ event (i.e., the birth, life, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus). Yet just because Satan is defeated obviously does not mean he cannot wreak havoc on God’s creation (just look around).</p> <p>Note the contrast of “a little while” for our suffering with the “eternal glory” in store for those who remain faithful. Our reward for being faithful does not come in this life on earth (although we may get pieces of it), but things will one day be set right.</p>	<p>Respond: The word “watchful” implies focused attention. Are you aware of how the devil is trying to wreak havoc in your life?</p> <p>Read James 4:6-10. Apparently the command to resist Satan was a common one in the early church. Is it emphasized enough today?</p> <p>The end of verse 10 is superfluous; i.e., it abounds with words to make a point...God will set things right. How does this impact your life?</p>
<p>Pray: Thank God that we do not have to passively give in to the wiles of Satan. Pray for discernment to know and the strength in order to resist the devil. Praise God for His protection. Continue to pray for protection from sin and strength during times of testing.</p>	

Saturday: Remember, God reigns!!

Read: 1 Peter 5:11 ¹¹ To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

<p>Reflect: God reigns. It’s a message the world needs to hear. When we look at the world through eyes that are all too often fixed on the “reality” of this world...we can become disillusioned. When we look at this world it appears that Satan is winning...</p> <p>The reality is that Satan has already lost the war; unfortunately he is winning a lot of battles in the meantime. While we can certainly take comfort in the fact that God has won the war (if it be fair to call it one), the reality that Satan wins battles should deeply bother us...when he wins battles lives are lost, which means souls are damned for eternity.</p> <p>Tomorrow we will have some guest speakers representing the Shiloh Home of Hope (at least Lee and Carol Alderman will be present). Shiloh is one of the missions New Life supports. Therefore, it is one of the ways New Life desires to fight against Satan on the front lines, by supporting people who work directly with women to help them overcome specific areas of bondage to sin in their lives.</p>	<p>Respond: What are three examples you see of Satan winning “battles”?</p> <p>The word for “dominion” also means “strength” – God has the ultimate power/strength. How do you see this at work?</p> <p>Are you aware of the missions New Life supports? Do you pray for them?</p>
<p>Pray: Pray for those God is prompting to come to New Life tomorrow to be obedient and come. Pray that what we do tomorrow is pleasing to God and that lives will be positively impacted by the interactions we have, the singing, preaching, and teaching...pray for a God-honoring day. Thank God for His love.</p>	

Living in a Paradox

December 21 – 27

Paradox – **para•a•dox** \ˈper-ə-ˌdäks, ˈpɑ-rə

- 1 a tenet contrary to received opinion
- 2 having to do with contradiction
 - a. a statement that is seemingly contradictory or opposed to common sense and yet is perhaps true
 - b. a self-contradictory statement that at first seems true
 - c. an argument that apparently derives self-contradictory conclusions by valid deduction from acceptable premises
- 3 one (as a person, situation, or action) having seemingly contradictory qualities or phases

It has been said that the Christian life is a curious blend of trust in God and resolute action based upon it. In other words, as Christians we trust that God is Sovereign and that He will bring about His will. No opposing forces will prevent Him from accomplishing what He desires. However, the Bible also clearly states that we have a part to play in His will. E.g., it is through our actions that people are brought into the Kingdom (cf. Mt28:18-20). Yet we cannot earn our salvation – it is graciously given to us (Eph2:8-9). However (again), that grace demands we change...(I think you get the point that this can go back and forth all day)

Another way of looking at the issues in the above paragraph is by looking at extremes. On one end of the spectrum is what some call “quietism,” which equates to living passively because everything that happens is God’s will (He is sovereign isn’t He?) and there is nothing we can do about it. We simply need to trust in God more...or have more faith. On the other hand, and at the other end of the spectrum, some resort to “vigorous effort” because Christianity becomes a moral code of sorts that we must keep (we are to be like Jesus aren’t we?). In this view Christianity is basically like an illusion we will never attain (we sin regularly)...

Both of those views (quietism and vigorous effort) are false. As Christians we need to find a balance between the two. E.g., yes, God is sovereign – but also – yes, I have to put forth effort in my faith as well. However, there is an extent to which we can’t do anything about what happens to us; yet how we respond is important...

The life of Jesus helps us by showing a balance towards which we should work. He obviously lived in a way that showed He knew He had a part to play in His faith (e.g., Mt4:1-11), but He also resigned Himself to the fact that things would happen to Him that were beyond His control (e.g., Mt26:20-25).

The world is a dark place; we need hope. That hope came in the person of Jesus nearly 2,000 years ago; this week we celebrate His birth. His life is an example of how to balance God’s sovereignty with our free will. May our lives show the implications of His life this week and every week to follow...

Monday: Do what is required:

Read: 1 Peter 5:1-2a So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: ² shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight...

<p>Reflect: A number of things ought to jump out at us as we read these words. Firstly, the fact that Peter sends one letter to five provinces (cf. 1Pet1:1) demonstrates that having elders ‘govern’ churches was the standard practice for the early church. Secondly, Peter calls himself a “fellow elder”. Granted, we do not know all the historic details, but we know him as an Apostle...in that role he must have functioned as an elder (after all, being an elder is not a “title” but a way of life).</p> <p>Thirdly, take note of what Peter says he witnessed. It wasn’t the transfiguration, or resurrection, or confessing Jesus as the Messiah. He specifically mentions Jesus’ “sufferings”. You and I know (as did Peter and his audience) this recalls a time when Peter failed...miserably (Mt26:69-75).</p> <p>Fourthly, these verses contain three key words for Christians as they develop a theology of leadership. The noun for “elders” and the verbs for “shepherd” and “exercising oversight” are vital for those who want to have a biblically ‘governed’ church.</p>	<p>Respond: Do you think that since this passage starts with an exhortation to the elders that it excludes you (if you are not one)? Why/why not?</p> <p>Read John 21:15-17; notice the grace (also, “tend” in 21:16 is the same word as “shepherd” here in 1 Peter 5:2).</p> <p>Read Acts 20:17-38 for a somewhat similar passage.</p>
<p>Pray: Thank God for those who came to worship yesterday; pray the Holy Spirit continues the work that was either started, or continued, yesterday among those who were here. Thank God for the clarity of His Word. Continue to pray for workers in God’s Kingdom (Mt9:36-38).</p>	

Tuesday: be an example...

Read: 1 Peter 5:2-4 ² shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; ³ not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. ⁴ And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

<p>Reflect: It has been said that God is concerned about the motives, attitudes, and methods of those who lead His people. Bad results follow bad motives, attitudes, and methods when they are used in leadership. If those same ways of leading are brought into the church, bad results will ultimately be replaced with fatal results.</p> <p>If the elders of a congregation are serving because they feel they have to, are self-centered and greedy, or act in an authoritarian way (i.e., abusing perceived authority); how is the “flock” (people of the congregation) going to act? A key word here is “example”. You need to ask yourself two questions, “Who are Christian leaders I want my life to look like?” and “Do I have a desire for my life to be an example for others?”</p> <p>Peter says Jesus is our “Senior Minister” (i.e., chief Shepherd). Consequently, that is why I don’t like that label to be attached to me. I’m just a servant (i.e., slave) trying to be faithful; I don’t want a title. This isn’t the first time Jesus is mentioned with this theme. In 1 Peter 2:25 Jesus is mentioned with two other important nouns for leadership being used (i.e., “shepherd” and “overseer”).</p>	<p>Respond: Read 1 Peter 1:13-16; 2:11-12 and see how all Christians (not just elders) are to live.</p> <p>“Under compulsion” implies feeling forced into it (e.g., no one else will, etc.). Do you ever feel “forced” into service in God’s Kingdom? What might be the problem?</p> <p>So far we’ve seen five important words for developing a theology of leadership. How have you developed your view on church leadership?</p>
<p>Pray: Pray for Bob Griffin, Larry Hayes, and Roy Andrews; elders at New Life. Pray for the unity and purity of New Life. Continue to pray for God’s people to have boldness to speak for Him (Acts4:29).</p>	

Wednesday: so others will follow...

Read: 1 Peter 5:5 ⁵ Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”

<p>Reflect: Again, as on Monday, we see that it is implied/accepted that elders are the way by which the church is ‘governed’. If this were not the case, then why would “younger men” be <u>commanded</u> to “submit” to them (cf. 1Pet2:13,18)? I.e., Peter would not have command something that was unwarranted and unaccepted.</p> <p>While the “younger men” are singled out here, that doesn’t mean everyone else is exempt from the command. The thrust here is “if the younger men are commanded to submit, <u>how much more</u> should the rest of you submit...” A possible reason younger men are singled out is because some may have been unmarried and therefore prone to take unnecessary risks in a time when persecution was growing. Wisdom comes with age; better stated – it accompanies spiritual maturity.</p> <p>Pride is a (perhaps <u>the</u>) chief sin of mankind...it has a focus on oneself as more important and reflects a heart that is not humble toward God. Perhaps Peter has the deeds of Jesus in mind (e.g., Jn13:1-5) when he writes “clothe yourselves”. Again, we see our “Senior Minister” is our ultimate example.</p>	<p>Respond: What are examples of pride in your life?</p> <p>As 2008 draws to a close, are you more spiritually mature now (not just chronologically older in the faith) than you were at this point in 2007?</p> <p>Today is Christmas Eve day. What “example” from the life of Jesus comes to your mind most often? How has it impacted you?</p>
<p>Pray: Pray for the Christmas Eve service tonight. Pray for humility and confess to God areas in which you are prideful. Continue to pray for God’s Word to spread rapidly (2Thess3:1).</p>	

Thursday: and trust in God...

Read: 1 Peter 5:6-7 ⁶ Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, ⁷ casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.

<p>Reflect: Many in the ancient world viewed their religion as a way of bartering with the god they served. In other words, they sacrificed to and served a particular god in return for favors. This is not the Christian view of faith. We are to be faithful to God because of Who He is.</p> <p>Because of Who He is, God has acted on behalf of everyone by sending Jesus. Looking back to the Old Testament we can see Him acting specifically on behalf of His people, which consequently was to be for the benefit of everyone. We can read of the “mighty hand of God” intervening in history for the sake of His people (e.g., Exod13:9; Deut26:8). Yet it is also used in the context of correction (e.g., Ezra8:22).</p> <p>Since God sets Himself against the prideful (e.g., Prov3:34; cf. 1Pet5:5), then how do we humble ourselves? A key is in verse seven (which should not form a new sentence as the NIV has) – we throw our anxieties on Him. In other places the word for “anxieties” is translated the “cares of the world” (Mt13:22; Lk21:34). When we are not so wrapped up in the things that concern us, we are freer to serve.</p>	<p>Respond: Do you see any connections between our “instant society” and the ancient view of religion as bartering? Do we serve God for something in return?</p> <p>How has God intervened in your life in the past (e.g., through people, events, etc.)?</p> <p>What are some “anxieties” you need to cast on God?</p>
<p>Pray: Confess to God the last time you violated something in these verses. Thank God for the birth of Jesus. Pray for Brent McCrory; preaching minister at New Life. Continue to pray for open doors to share God’s Word (Col4:2-6) and the boldness to do so.</p>	