

Friday: Godly Results

Read: Acts 6:7⁷ And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.

Reflect:

This verse closes out this pericope (section) of Scripture just as it began – with a statement about the growth of God’s Kingdom. When His people face life in godly ways, godly results follow.

Growth occurred because a godly solution was reached regarding an internal problem. The lessons to be learned from this portion of Scripture are very important...

We must take care of widows (and those who are less fortunate), there is no place for prejudice in a church, leaders need to be able to seek out solutions to problems, leaders must be Spirit-filled, all believers have a service to fulfill, and conflict resolution is possible, and necessary, in the body.

Respond:

Are you aware of any unrest, tension, or disagreements (or however you want to describe them) in the body of New Life? Will you let a leader know?

The word for “serving” (cf. Acts6:2) seems to imply a proper use of Spiritual Gifts (cf. Mt20:28; 25:44; Jn12:26; 1Pet4:10-11). Are you utilizing yours? How?

How have you seen conflict dealt with in a godly manner at New Life? What about in an ungodly manner?

Pray: Pray for New Life to be a “light” for Emporia and the surrounding communities. Pray for a growing desire to utilize your spiritual gifts. Pray for those who are preparing to teach, preach, lead worship, serve as greeters, etc this coming Sunday.

Saturday: Proactive

Read: Jude 17-23¹⁷ But you must remember, beloved, the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ.¹⁸ They said to you, “In the last time there will be scoffers, following their own ungodly passions.”¹⁹ It is these who cause divisions, worldly people, devoid of the Spirit.²⁰ But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit,²¹ keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life.²² And have mercy on those who doubt;²³ save others by snatching them out of the fire; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh.

Reflect:

There seems to be a lot to remember as followers of Jesus. I suppose a lot of it could be summed up that, “Whatever the popular culture tells you to do – DON’T DO IT!!!”

Now obviously that is an overstatement. There are a lot of good things that “pop” culture encourages us to do (e.g., conserve energy, recycle, give to charity). However, we must always remember that those good things have their basis in God.

These verses toward the end of James makes it very clear that we are not passive in our faith. It also makes it clear that others need us. Both of those parts can be addressed (in part) by being in a Discipleship Group. Tomorrow we will take a bit of a closer look at “Holistic Small Groups” during the sermon. This quality characteristic was a high one for us – will we keep it there and improve it?

Respond:

What is the biggest pull of the world on your life?

Are you a part of a Discipleship Group at New Life? Why or why not?

Are you more mature in your faith now than you were a year ago at this time? What about three years – or five? How do you know?

Pray: Pray for God’s guidance for New Life. 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.

Whatever It Takes...

August 10 – August 16

“No pain no gain” – at least that’s what they say (whoever “they” are). Well actually, “they” was Jane Fonda who (at least according to one source) started using the phrase back in 1982 while producing a series of aerobic workout videos. The emphasis (along with “feel the burn”) was to put forth the concept of working out past the point of experiencing muscle aches. (Hmm...since it was in aerobics workouts shouldn’t it have been “No pain, no loss”?)

David B. Morris wrote in The Scientist (a monthly journal) in 2005, “‘No pain, no gain’ is an American modern mini-narrative: it compresses the story of a protagonist (hero) who understands that the road to achievement runs only through hardship.”

Certainly we all know from experience that life isn’t easy. In fact it is quite often hard – sometimes it seems almost unbearable. A difficulty arises, followed by another, and another...

Yet we persist don’t we? Some persist better than others. Others get by. Some give up. Others overcome and move on, having bettered themselves.

This week, as we look at “Empowering Leadership,” we focus on Acts chapter six. Much can be learned from this passage. In a sense we see the Apostles take a “whatever it takes” mentality to the difficulty the early church was facing. Well, “whatever it takes...so long as it is god honoring” is a better way of putting it.

The phrase “whatever it takes” could also be said as, “No pain, no gain”. Difficulties don’t have to be painful (even though they may physically be at times). It seems to be a matter of perspective. Will we look at this difficulty as a burden – a problem; or as an opportunity for growth – for improving ourselves?

This perspective comes into play in an individual’s life, as well as in a group of people (like the church). Furthermore, when it comes to work in the kingdom there is too much at stake to look at “it” (whatever it is) as a burden or problem. Instead we should try and focus on, “How can I/we grow through this?” How will we be better as a result?

It seems like hard work, and in fact it often can be. However, the results are very rewarding. In fact, the results have ramifications in eternity – both the results of pushing through with a “whatever it takes” mentality and the results of giving up...

Monday: Grumbings...

Read: Acts 6:1¹ Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution.

<p>Reflect: No one likes a church fight. Well, at least no one should. A disagreement within the body can lead to hurt feelings, resentment, and worse of all...stagnation in Kingdom growth.</p> <p>Some fights in a church are for “good” reasons (e.g., defending proper doctrine). However, far too many fights are simply a result of fallen human nature. As people we want our own way, generally speaking, because we think it’s best.</p> <p>Notice that the brewing fight in verse one isn’t theological (i.e., doctrinal) – but practical. It is likely that this “daily distribution” can be traced back to the sharing of the early Christians (e.g., Acts2:44-45). It is also likely that it wasn’t merely food, but money with which food could be bought. No matter what is ‘likely’ – the conflict it was creating was real.</p>	<p>Respond: Have you ever been a part (or witnessed) a church fight? What was your reaction to it?</p> <p>The word “complaint” is something we are told not to do (cf. Phil2:14). Are you quick to complain, or seek a godly solution?</p> <p>Are you aware of any needs in New Life’s body that are being neglected? Will you let a leader know?</p>
<p>Pray: Continue to pray for workers in God’s Kingdom (Mt9:36-38). Pray that we are aware of the needs that exist in the body of New Life. Pray for purity and unity for the people who make up the body of New Life.</p>	

Tuesday: Godly Wisdom

Read: Acts 6:2-3² And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, “It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables.³ Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty.

<p>Reflect: The 12 were the Apostles – those handpicked by Jesus (with Matthias having replaced Judas) to carry on His teaching. Notice how they did not ignore this brewing conflict. It likely would have been “easy” to do – no doubt the Hellenistic Jews were a minority in Jerusalem at this time (although growing in number) – and the majority could have said “be quiet”.</p> <p>To “give up” preaching the word conveys a concept of leaving something behind like an orphan (Lk20:31), or a prisoner (Acts24:27). Obviously that is not a way to handle God’s word.</p> <p>The solution was to empower others to serve and therefore fulfill this need. However, they didn’t use the “mirror test” (i.e., hold up a mirror and if it fogs over – because of breathing – then ‘you’re it’). Those selected were to be known for having good things said about them, guided by the Spirit, and wise. When needs arise they should be met. Yet we must keep in mind that godly people will meet needs in godly ways.</p>	<p>Respond: Is this simply a case of “the squeaky wheel gets the grease”? No. Consider how devastating an ethnic split would have been for the body of Christ so early in Her existence.</p> <p>Do you have a desire to serve at New Life? Why, or why not? How are you? How would you like to?</p> <p>Do you think the leaders of New Life can be described like those in verse three?</p>
<p>Pray: Continue to pray for God’s people to have boldness to speak for Him (Acts4:29). Pray for a growing desire to serve in God’s Kingdom; ask Him where if you’re not sure. Pray that you (and others) don’t neglect an area of service that can be offered to God’s Kingdom.</p>	

Wednesday: Service

Read: Acts 6:2-4² And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, “It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables.³ Therefore...⁴ But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.”

<p>Reflect: Is one task more important than another? The service of providing for the widows (daily “distribution”) in verse one uses the same word as the service (“ministry”) of the word here in verse four.</p> <p>Therefore it doesn’t appear the apostles were establishing a hierarchy of their commission, but describing two different ministries that were needed <u>and</u> honorable to God. For a church to be good stewards of God’s blessings, people need paired up with the areas in which they can serve most effectively in the kingdom.</p> <p>What would have been some possible results if the widows had not received care? Having no one to provide for them they would have had to either beg or turn to prostitution. Neither was a good scenario, and neither are choices from which someone made in God’s Image should have to choose.</p>	<p>Respond: Read some instances where the word for “service” is also found (e.g., Acts11:29; 12:25; Rom12:7; Eph4:12; Rev2:19).</p> <p>Do you think levels of priority are being given here in Acts, or priority based on individual giftedness?</p> <p>Are you aware of a widow, or single mom (or other person) in need of assistance? What will you do about it? Can New Life help?</p>
<p>Pray: Continue to pray for God’s Word to spread rapidly (2Thess3:1) as His workers speak boldly. Tell God of your desire for Him to work through your life for His glory. Pray for those who received groceries from someone(s) in the body of New Life.</p>	

Thursday: A Godly Decision

Read: Acts 6:5-6⁵ And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch.⁶ These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them.

<p>Reflect: Seven men were chosen because according to other Jewish writings, seven men were chosen in a village to help care for widows and orphans. Certainly if it was common practice in a village, “the church” shouldn’t neglect it.</p> <p>The names of these seven men are Greek names. More than likely this indicates they were of the “Hellenist” group – the group with the complaint. Fortunately they were “full of faith and the Holy Spirit” – so there didn’t need to be a concern about spite making inroads into their actions.</p> <p>The people choose the seven men and the apostles approved them. Everyone had ownership in the process. The people were able to select those they were willing to trust, and the Apostles were able to OK the selections and thus safeguard against possible difficulties.</p>	<p>Respond: What is a common practice in the city of Emporia (or Lebo, Americus, et al) that New Life should not ignore?</p> <p>How risky do you think it was to entrust the “grumbling party” with working on the solution?</p> <p>The praying and laying on of hands signified a blessing (e.g., Numb27:18). How often do you pray for the leaders of New Life?</p>
<p>Pray: Continue to pray for open doors to share God’s Word (Col4:2-6). Pray for the elders and preaching minister as they will be meeting this Sunday (they meet every 1st & 3rd Sunday). Pray for effective ways for New Life to become known for doing God’s will in the surrounding communities.</p>	