

The Weekly Word

Dec 23-29, 2019

Oh my, the year is almost over. Christmas is only a few days away. Stay in the Word and happy reading...

Grace and Peace, Bill

To hear the Bible read click this link... <http://www.biblegateway.com/resources/audio/>.

Monday, December 23: 1Timothy 4- Training for godliness...

Many of us face the temptation to remain at the level of faith we presently have. We settle for mediocrity, choosing to stay the same rather than growing. I know I face this temptation. Maybe that is why Paul's words to Timothy struck a nerve with me this morning. Paul wrote: *Rather, train yourself to be godly. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come (7b-8).*

Training takes effort. And to train well most of us need someone to act as a trainer to help us train properly.

Training takes technique. People serious about athletic training have a trainer. Yes, this person pushes them to lift more and run faster. Just as important, and maybe more so, trainers make sure that their trainees are using proper technique in lifting, running, or for whatever athletic endeavor they are pursuing. Proper technique helps keep the athlete from injury. Poor technique often leads to muscle strain or worse. Proper technique also allows athletes to reach their highest potential because they are using their bodies to the best of their ability.

For those of us seeking to train ourselves to be godly, we need spiritual regularity. We must regularly pray, read and study God's Word, and bring the world into your life through obedience.

We need to put effort into our prayer, reading and study. We need to cultivate a life of obedience to God's world. All of this takes effort!

And we need to study, pray and read wisely. A mentor, like an athletic trainer, is helpful teaching us the habits and spiritual disciplines that truly work to train us in godliness.

Oh, God, I don't want to simply go through the motions; I want to grow in You. And this will take effort and training. Help me, Lord. Send Your Holy Spirit to be my trainer. Also, Lord, lead me to the right people who are further down the road of maturity than I am so that they can help me grow in godliness. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Tuesday, December 24: 1Timothy 5- Caring for people in need...

Love your neighbor as yourself, taught Jesus. Practically, how does a person do this? And how would the church live out Jesus' admonition to love in community?

One significant situation in the ancient world was widowhood. In the ancient world widows found themselves in a precarious situation. If a husband didn't specifically name their care in his will, a widow might only have her dowry or what remained in it to provide for her the rest of her life.

Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary on the New Testament gave this description: Widowhood could be a severe test in the Greco-Roman world, since women were usually not the direct heirs of their husband's wills. Rather, the widow had her dowry as well as any stipulation that the testator made for her care to his heirs (usually the male children of the

marriage). If the son or sons did not care for their mother (or often, their stepmother), the woman could be in a dire condition if her dowry was not substantial...

The church assumed the responsibility for caring for those in need, like needy widows and orphans. In verses 3-16, Paul gives Timothy practical direction on how the church cares for the widows in need. Caring for widows was a significant investment in love, which could involve many years.

My thoughts sparked with the church's desire to care for the needy within her banks, more so than the specific rules of engagement. In a world where poor people were left to fend for themselves, God said my people should do better. They should love, which means they will care for those in need. I remember that James addresses the care of widows and orphans, too (James 1:27). This tells me God had a different ethic for His people than the Roman world did.

Caring for those in need... is near to the heart of God. Yes, certain guidelines can be put in place to make sure people truly in need get the help they require. Still the guiding principle is care for people in need.

How we in the church as a collective and individuals treat people matters to the Lord.

So where does this touch my life? One place is generosity toward people in need. My heart can be calloused and jaded. I need the softening touch of the Holy Spirit to mold my heart to be closer to that of my Savior's heart. I also need to watch my 'categories.' I can forget that I live a privileged middle-class life and that not everyone has had the same privileges and advantages as I have had. Therefore their being in need is not a reflection of their character as much as it is a statement about the world in which I live. Like ancient widows, they may be in their situation out of no fault of their own. Again I need my heart softened by the work of the Holy Spirit.

Oh, Holy Spirit, develop within me a heart that beats in rhythm with Yours. Help me to grow in generosity and graciousness. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Wednesday, December 25: 1Timothy 6- Godliness with contentment is great gain ...

Paul offers an excellent one-liner: *But godliness with contentment is great gain* (6). Godliness... living a life that honors and reflects the manner and way of life God desires. Contentment... being comfortable with the life we have been granted, not striving for more and better but rather appreciating what we have.

Paul goes on to explain more fully what he means: *For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs* (7-10).

The life we live here and now is only the opening scene of a very long play. The life we live here and now is like the prelude to a great musical masterpiece. There are themes and hints in the prelude, but the masterpiece is so much fuller, richer and deeper. Our life here and now is an hors d'oeuvres, not the main course. *We brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it.* The life to come is a life unto its own; we can't take anything with us into the life to come.

Faith in Jesus is the entrance into the life to come, so anything that jeopardizes the future life is a foolish risk. Seeking money (and fame and power) is just the kind of seeking that can take our eyes off the prize of Jesus and run us in the wrong direction.

Contentment is an antidote to the ruining influence of the love of money. In my consumer driven world this gives me much to ponder...

Oh, God, grant me contentment and trust in You. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Thursday, December 26: 2Timothy 1 – Fan into flame...

Paul's words to Timothy struck a cord with me. *For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline. So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner...* (6-8a).

Fan into flame... make an effort to bring to life God's gifts in you. We have a fireplace at home and I love roaring wood fires. Sometimes I get distracted and stop tending the fire and the fire almost dies out for lack of care. In those moments if I place some fresh dry kindling on the embers and blow on them for a moment or two the fire will burst back into life again.

In essence I think that is what Paul is asking Timothy to do with the gifts of God in his life. We can all become distracted and God's gifts for ministry die back. So what do we need to do to bring God's gifts 'back to life'? We have to add kindling... we have to add fuel. For me that involves pressing into my Lord through prayer, the Word, worship and service. I need to do those things that bring me spiritual life and vitality. In addition to fuel I have to add oxygen by blowing on the fire. Spiritually speaking this could also be any of the above. But it also likely means activating my faith by stepping out and doing that which God has called and gifted me to do... be an agent for the Lord in the world.

And this means coming to grips with my fears, fears that are likely holding me back. Notice what Paul says next: *For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power...* Even Timothy needs to be reminded that fear or timidity can constrict us. BUT God gives us the power. The life of faith is never about ourselves. It is always about the Lord and His ability in and through us.

As I push back from the Word today I hear the Lord reminding me that I have effort to apply to my growth and to my service. Yes, God will come through and God will empower, but I am responsible for fanning the flame of the gifts God has given me.

Lord, give me dedication to fan, day in and day out, the gifts You have given me so that I might be an agent for You in my world. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Friday, December 27: 2Timothy 2 – Reflect on these things...

The opening paragraph invited me into meditation. I felt God's nudge to reflect on the things Paul invited Timothy to reflect upon. *You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others. Join with me in suffering, like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No one serving as a soldier gets entangled in civilian affairs, but rather tries to please his commanding officer. Similarly, anyone who competes as an athlete does not receive the victor's crown except by competing according to the rules. The hardworking farmer should be the first to receive a share of the crops. Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this* (1-7).

Paul uses three occupations to press home his point.

No one serving as a soldier gets entangled in civilian affairs... Soldiers soldier. They are agents of the government fighting the battles and keeping the peace for the country. When they

get off task everything suffers. Sentries are not on duty scanning the horizon for threats. Fighters are not trained and ready in case of need. Reflecting on this Paul seems to be saying we should be constantly mindful that we are ambassadors for the Lord making sure we will be ready when God needs us.

An athlete... With the athlete, if you don't follow the rules you are disqualified. What is Paul suggesting with this imagery? I think he is reminding Timothy and us that we have to live by God's rules. If we venture outside of God's rules for living then we will disqualify ourselves from God's service. I am not free to alter the faith to suit my preference. I am not free to live in ways that are contrary to God's will and way. To be God's child and servant I need to follow God's design for living.

Hardworking farmer... My first reflection is to notice the word hardworking. Neither soldier nor athlete had a qualifier. So Paul seems to intentionally be reminding us that when we work hard in God's fields then we can reap of God's produce. In other words God will care for us. But this isn't a 'cart blanch' comment that God will take care of me so I can sit back and put my feet up and do nothing. To use another phrase, 'we reap what we sow'... no sowing (no hard work), no reaping.

Stepping back God says, "Stay on task, My task for you! Play by My rules!" (live as a follower of Jesus should). Work hard and God will watch out for you.

So, Lord, strengthen my faith muscles so that I can work hard for You. Keep my nose in Your book so I know and live Your will and way. And keep me on task, put blinders on my eyes like jockeys do on thoroughbreds so I see my lane and am not distracted by things happening outside of my calling from You. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Saturday, December 28: 2Timothy 3 – Form and power...

Paul's comment in verse 5a, '*having a form of godliness but denying its power*' struck a nerve.

Having a form of godliness... thinking about faith a person can look the part but not truly have faith in the Lord. People can be outwardly moral and generally be a good person, but not have a deep seated faith in Jesus, in God the Father and the Holy Spirit. Thus, all that they have is a 'form' of faith, of godliness.

It is interesting where Paul goes... he does not go to the content of the faith, the place I went in the sentences above. Rather he goes to the power that accompanies true faith in the Lord. These people have the form but not the power of faith...

My initial picture of the 'power' was spiritual gifts like healings and miracles and all those amazing things Jesus, and then the disciples, did. But looking back on the text, verses 1-4, these people with the form but not the power of faith are engaged in sin-filled behaviors like love of money, are boastful, abusive, slanderous etc. I think Paul may be referring to 'power' that allows believers to live changed lives, to display the Fruit of the Spirit and character of Jesus, especially in difficult times. This is not to say that miracles and healings aren't displays of the power of God. But God's power is displayed in living a faithful life, too. To persevere under persecution, and to love neighbor as self, requires God's power, too!

Either way, one takes the idea of power, to have the form without the power means one is not an authentic follower of Jesus because God's Spirit within us provides both form and power.

Turning inward... does my life model a transformed Spirit-empowered life?

Oh, God, I pray so... in Jesus' name I pray.

Sunday, December 29, 2019 - Sunday Worship

If any of my thoughts or the Bible readings spark questions send an email reply and I will do my best to answer all questions from people on the list... I will answer personal questions privately; general questions will be answered in a subsequent email installment.

If you are reading along with me from the Living Hope website you can send questions or request being placed on the weekly email list by emailing Lisa at office@LivingHopeCT.org.

Click [here](#) for a link to my sermons on the web. Sermons are generally posted within 2 days.