

The Knife is Sharp
January 4, 2015

(Recite 2 Peter 1:5-7 - "*Make every effort...*")

On TV, there was a commercial on many years ago. I don't know what they were advertising. But there were mentally handicapped young adults being trained for life in the real world. It looked like a group home or a training center. One of these young men was in the kitchen, getting ready to cut up some vegetables for a meal. And he was saying to himself, out loud, "The knife is sharp. I must be careful. The knife is sharp." As he picked up the knife and started using it, he repeated, "The knife is sharp."

How many of us have picked up a knife, knowing it was sharp, and got careless while using it and cut ourselves? I've used a knife in a hurry and gotten cut on more than one occasion. I've learned that... You get careless in a hurry when you hurry. When you pick up a knife you should slow down and, like this young man, repeat to yourself, "The knife is sharp," over and over until you have finished with the knife.

When you are working with something dangerous, you can't let your guard down. You have to be methodical and constantly aware of the danger.

This was a lesson my dad taught me. I lost my dad this past year. I have spent time thinking back on good memories of my dad, and bad memories. The bad memories are not of my dad being bad, but of me being bad... or just careless.

One day my dad and I were working on my car. We were adjusting the drive belt on the engine. My dad told me to go put the car in neutral. And for whatever reason I thought I was also supposed to turn it on. I didn't ask him if he also meant for me to turn it on. I just put it in neutral and turned the key in the ignition.

Dad had his thumb near the belt when I turned the engine on and it grabbed his finger and sent it under the belt, over the pulley. I know it hurt a lot. He told me so, almost with tears in his eyes. Nothing was broken, but it must have created a blood blister under the skin and was bruised pretty bad. To my dad's loving credit, he never said another word about it after that day, but I know his finger must have been sore for weeks afterwards. I wasn't being as careful as I should have been, and my dad suffered for it.

From my dad's cautions, and experiences like that one, I learned to be more aware of danger. My dad taught me how to use a saw and a hammer safely, as well as an ax, a hatchet, a knife and a BB gun. He was concerned about my safety and the safety of others. He let us build a tree house in the backyard. But he made sure we did it safely and made it strong enough to climb on..

I liked to climb trees when I was a kid. My dad had two rules about climbing trees. Rule number one, is that you couldn't use anything to help you get up the tree. If there were no branches hanging low enough to pull yourself up, you had to shinny up just using your arms and legs. Dad said, if you needed help getting in the tree, you did not belong in the tree. Rule number two was to never grab a branch, or step on one, that was smaller than your wrist.

I always followed those two rules. I was always careful when 20, 40, or 60 feet up a tree. I never went fast. I always looked at what I was grabbing or stepping on. I did so because of the danger. Climbing trees is dangerous.

As a church leader I'm always thinking about safety. Many rules are meant to keep us safe. So I try to keep safety and rules in mind. People who ignore safety and rules aren't always happy with those of us who think about safety and rules.

I believe we should always be aware of our surroundings and behave accordingly. This is true for ourselves, but even more important when we have responsibility for the safety of others, especially of children and teens. Children are never thinking about what is safe. And some teenagers are still like that. The knife is sharp.

So there are activities where we always need to be aware of the danger. Operating a car is easy. But being on the roads is dangerous. We have lots of rules to help make it safer, rules like no speeding, no crossing the solid lines, no texting, no dialing, no horseplay, watch out for the other guy, watch out for children and balls and bicycles and pedestrians. Don't let yourself get distracted. Driving is always dangerous, to you and to anyone around you. Some activities are inherently dangerous. The knife is sharp.

Age contributes to danger. Because my old skin is thinner than it used to be, I have to remember to slow down when I am in the kitchen or workroom, opening any drawer or door. I get cut and bruised more easily than I used to. The knife is sharp, and so is the corner of every drawer.

The bad guys are a danger. Because of identity theft, I need to be careful what I type into my computer, what I put on social media, and what sites I visit online. I need different passwords for everything. I need to guard those passwords carefully, and make them difficult for others to figure out. The knife is sharp.

Some places are dangerous, especially at certain times of the day. There was an article in the newspaper last week about a man who was shot outside of a bar in Odenton, at 1:30 a.m. Now anyone who has been around here for a few years, and read the local paper, would know that being outside that bar any time after dark, but especially after midnight, is putting self in a dangerous place. Time and again someone is stabbed, shot, or robbed in that area, late at night. You don't want to be anywhere near there after dark if you can help it. The knife is sharp.

I'm sure you could give many examples yourself of areas of life that you have learned that caution is needed or an accident can occur. You've learned of places or activities or people to avoid or be careful around.

This morning I want to talk about a particular awareness that we need to have. As we move into a new year and are doing some self-examination, we need to be reminded of important things. We need to make goals for the new year with the last year in mind. As last year started, we were thinking how we wanted 2014 to be better. We wanted to make great progress as followers of Jesus. We wanted to root out sin and grow more obedient to Jesus. We wanted to grow much in the character of Jesus.

Well now that we look back on the year, we can evaluate our progress. We can see which activities and priorities helped us and which hurt our progress. May be there are some ways to help us make more progress and have less setbacks than in the last year.

We're going to look a little further in the book of 2 Peter than our recent series. We pick up in the second chapter. Note what God did and can still do.

2 Peter 2:4-10 (NIV) For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them into gloomy dungeons to be held for judgment; if he did not spare the ancient world when he brought the flood on its ungodly people, but protected Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and seven others; if he condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by burning them to ashes, and made them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly; and if he rescued Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the filthy lives of lawless men (for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard)-- if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment.

God has the power and the knowledge and the plan to protect the righteous and to punish the unrighteous. He is aware of both all the time. He sometimes brings judgment upon the earth to remind us that we answer to Him. His power is greater than any hurricane, any tornado, any mudslide, any tsunami, any lightning strike, any earthquake, any bomb. God has more than all the power of the universe at His disposal to harm or protect.

This is the God of which Peter is reminding us. This is the power of God of which we must be aware. God is no one to take lightly, take for granted, or ignore.

There is a day coming, Peter reminds his readers, when God will bring judgment upon the whole earth.

2 Peter 3:10-14 (NIV) 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.

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.

Because the end of the world is coming, I must live carefully, thoughtfully. He says again in this passage to "make every effort". Let me encourage you to make a particular effort this year to live more carefully than you did this past year.

Peter's point in writing this letter is to serve as a reminder of the circumstances and because of them, to live a certain way.

2 Peter 3:1-2 (NIV) Dear friends, this is now my second letter to you. I have written both of them as reminders to stimulate you to wholesome thinking.

That is what we need as we move into a new year. We need a reminder to be always aware of the situation in which we are living. We need pure thinking, careful thinking, strategic thinking, tactical thinking. How do you want this year to be different than last year? What do you need to do every day to make that happen?

I encourage you to adopt a phrase for this new year, something like "the knife is sharp." Use that every day, not just when you are using a knife, but when you are driving, when you are angry, when you are depressed. Make it part of your everyday, to remind yourself of the circumstances in which you are living.

You might use, "the knife is sharp." Or you might use of these that also speaks of facts: "The end is near." "The things of earth will be destroyed." That last one might be good for when you go shopping, for things you don't need but want. Another one would be, "you can't take it with you."

Or instead of reminding yourself of a fact, you might remind yourself of an action you want to take consistently this year. For that, you might use a phrase like, "make every effort", or "do whatever it takes", or if you have picked one particular virtue to work on you might say, "add to my faith, goodness" or whatever it might be.

My phrase, to help me remember to live in preparation for Jesus' return is

The Day of the Lord is coming. It could be this year. It could be this month. It could begin this week, even today. If it doesn't happen today, don't let that lull you into thinking that it won't happen tomorrow. Don't let it lull you into thinking that you can be careless.

The knife is sharp. The Lord is all-powerful. The Lord is coming back. He will judge the earth and all of its inhabitants. None will escape His notice.

Because these things are true, you must live with caution and determination. You must live with wholesome thinking. You must live and act and speak in order to please the Lord.

How will you live this year? Live with more determination. Live in the awareness of God's plans for the world. Live, reminding yourself daily of the situation in which you are living.

Jesus is coming. Because of that, how will you live this year?