

FAULT LINES

sermon notes

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These sermon notes are to be used in conjunction with *FaultLines: Challenges That Transform Your Soul* by Steve DeNeff (Indianapolis: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2014).

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ABOUT THESE NOTES

FaultLines by Steve DeNeff serves as the text for these sermon notes. Through this eight-week series, your congregation will learn to recognize life's FaultLines. With these notes, you will unpack the seven fundamental faults in life that we all experience, revealing in them a new vision of holiness from the most ancient biblical truth. Help your congregation answer the question: When life comes crashing in, will this break your faith . . . or make it?

1

KEEP ON GROWING

INTRODUCTION

If you gathered a large group of mature adults together, you would find they varied in age, height, education, social standing, economic status, interests, needs, jobs, and health conditions. However, they would have one thing in common: All of them would have reached their maximum vertical growth potential.

If you gathered a large group of Christian adults together, you would find they had at least two things in common: (1) faith in Jesus as Savior, and (2) the need to grow spiritually. Fortunately, spiritual growth is not only necessary, but also possible.

SERMON OUTLINE

I. Spiritual Growth Is Goal-Oriented

A. To Be Like Jesus

Although some believers might think God saved us to make us happy, healthy, and wealthy, he saved us so we might be “conformed to the image of his Son” (Rom. 8:29).

The apostle Paul deeply longed for the Christians of Galatia to become like Jesus (Gal. 4:19).

Just as a sculptor molds clay into the image he or she has in mind, so God molds his children into the image of Christ. We are clay in the Potter’s hands.

B. To Glorify God

When Jesus was troubled by thoughts of his imminent death, his desire was to glorify God (John 12:28). In our pursuit of spiritual growth, we need to follow Jesus’ example and desire to glorify God in every circumstance.

II. Spiritual Growth Is Gradual

We cannot take a pill or receive an injection that will instantly make us fully like Jesus. Our sanctification will not be complete until we see Jesus face-to-face (1 John 3:2).

A. The Holy Spirit Gradually Transforms Us into the Image of Christ

God does not expect us to achieve spiritual growth on our own. He has given us everything we need to lead a godly life (2 Pet. 1:3). He has made us participants in the divine nature (v. 4),

and we share in his holiness (Heb. 12:10). Further, he has given us his Spirit, who transforms us into the image of Christ (2 Cor. 3:18).

B. FaultLines Provide Opportunities to Grow Spiritually

FaultLines are those unexpected adverse circumstances that shake our lives. However, no matter how intense the FaultLines may be, God can use them for our good and his glory (Rom. 5:3–5; 8:28; James 1:2–4; 1 Pet. 6–7).

III. Spiritual Growth Is Assisted by Daily Practices

A. The Practice of Reading and Obeying God’s Word

Jesus emphasized the role of God’s Word in our spiritual growth (John 17:17); so did Peter (1 Pet. 2:2). Simply owning a Bible does not cause us to grow spiritually. We must read it and heed it (Ps. 119:9–11). By equipping ourselves with God’s Word, we successfully ward off the Devil’s attacks (Eph. 6:17).

B. The Practice of Prayer

In addition to equipping ourselves with God’s Word, we ought to “pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests” (Eph. 6:18).

A children’s chorus holds the key to spiritual growth. It counsels: “Read your Bible. Pray every day. And you’ll grow, grow, grow.”

CONCLUSION

Let us cooperate with the Holy Spirit in his ministry of assisting our spiritual growth. When FaultLines occur, let’s submit to the Holy Spirit, glorify God, seek God’s wisdom, rely on his Word, and pray!

2

THE CALL TO SERVE

INTRODUCTION

When a company launches a hiring program, it looks for experienced, successful candidates. But when God calls men and women to serve him, his “hiring practices” are completely different. He calls the least likely candidates, those who are in dire circumstances and feel unqualified for the task he assigns. For example, he chose timid Moses, a lowly shepherd, to lead the Hebrews from the hand of mighty Pharaoh of Egypt. Also, he chose a young shepherd boy to slay the giant Goliath and to become Judah’s king. One day, at the Sea of Galilee, our Lord called four distraught fishermen to become his disciples.

SERMON OUTLINE

I. The Lord May Call Us to Do What Seems Impossible (Luke 5:4–5)

A. What the Lord Commanded (Luke 5:4)

He commanded Simon to enter deep water and drop the nets for a catch of fish. The four fishermen may have considered it a waste of time to obey Jesus’ command. After all, Jesus wasn’t a fisherman; they were, and they had worked hard all night without catching any fish. They were at the end of themselves.

Often, when we are at the end of ourselves, we are at the beginning of a new opportunity to experience the Lord’s power. His adequacy can fill the void caused by our inadequacy. He delights to grant success when we have experienced failure.

B. How the Fishermen Responded (Luke 5:5)

They did what the Lord told them to do, perhaps reluctantly and without expecting results, but they obeyed.

When several unbelievers mocked a Christian because his lifestyle showed he obeyed the Lord, they said, “If the Lord told you to jump through that brick wall over there, you would do it, wouldn’t you?”

“Yes,” the Christian replied, “it would be my job to jump at the wall and the Lord’s job to get me through it.”

Our obedience is a crucial factor in the Lord’s call.

II. The Lord's Call Is His Enabling (Luke 5:6–7)

A. He Grants Success (Luke 5:6)

The fishermen had caught nothing all night. Their prior experience and expertise had failed them. The Lord, however, turned failure into success.

B. He Grants Abundant Success (Luke 5:7)

Not only did the nets begin to break, but also the fishermen's boats were so loaded with fish that they began to sink. If we respond in obedience to what the Lord calls us to do, we will be successful. Success may not conform to the world's definition of what success is, but it will conform to what God considers success. Further, the success will be eternal (1 Cor. 9:24–25; 1 John 2:17).

III. The Lord's Call Magnifies His Grace (Luke 5:8–11)

A. Peter Confessed His Sinfulness (Luke 5:8–9)

The super-abundant catch of fish showed Peter and the other men that Jesus was far more than just a man. The event also showed them how far below Jesus' perfection they had fallen. Therefore, Peter confessed his sinfulness and urged the Lord to depart from him.

B. The Lord Commissioned Peter and the Other Fishermen (Luke 5:10–11)

Jesus commanded the four fishermen to follow him, and he promised they would become fishers of men. The Lord calls only sinners to know him and to serve him.

The called and commissioned fishermen left the greatest business opportunity of their careers and followed Jesus. The Lord's call is more valuable than all the wealth or fame earth can offer us.

CONCLUSION

What started as a desperate situation for the fishing partners became an opportunity to experience the Lord's call. When we are at our lowest point, we may find the Lord beckoning us to a high calling. How will we respond?

3

WEATHERING A PERFECT STORM

INTRODUCTION

What do you picture when you hear the term *perfect storm*? A devastating hurricane? A destructive tornado? A raging forest fire? These are all appropriate associations, but another kind of perfect storm is a crisis that threatens not only your comfort, but also your faith. That kind of perfect storm struck the apostle Paul and everyone on a ship that was transporting him to Italy, where he was to be arraigned.

Let's observe a few similarities between that perfect storm and one you may experience or are already experiencing.

SERMON OUTLINE

I. The Perfect Storm Is Unexpected (Acts 27:13–15)

A. It Comes When Conditions Are Favorable (Acts 27:13)

Have you noticed that hurricanes often approach a coastline when many people are vacationing and beaches are crowded? If it were not for advance warning, the loss of life would be staggering. Similarly, when we are sailing along smoothly, a big crisis strikes us. However, because we have no advance warning, the crisis takes us by surprise and we are unprepared.

Conditions on the Adriatic Sea were favorable. A gentle south wind was blowing, so the sailors transporting Paul and other prisoners weighed anchor and sailed along the shore of Crete. What could possibly go wrong?

B. It Strikes with a Fury (Acts 27:14–15)

A vicious typhoon arose suddenly and buffeted the ship that was carrying Paul (v. 14). It swept the ship along its turbulent path in spite of the crew's efforts to avoid it (v. 15).

Have you felt the fury of a perfect storm? You felt helplessly locked in its grip as it swept you along. Most of us feel helpless in a perfect storm, don't we?

II. The Perfect Storm May Cause Despair (Acts 27:16–20)

A. Our Actions May Prove Useless (Acts 27:16–19)

The frantic sailors could hardly secure the lifeboat. They tied ropes around the ship to keep it from breaking apart. They dropped anchor. They tossed the cargo overboard. They jettisoned the ship's tackle. Nothing worked.

A perfect-storm crisis is too big, too difficult, for us to handle in our own strength and wisdom. We are helpless.

Have you felt helpless when you sent dozens of résumés, but you can't find a job? Have you felt helpless in the grip of a relentless illness when the doctors, medications, and treatments fail?

B. Our Hope May Vanish (Acts 27:20)

As the storm raged and the sailors' efforts to survive failed, they abandoned all hope of being saved. Like the sailors, we may despair when a crisis defies our efforts to survive it. We may lose hope. But God often puts his arms around us when we reach the end of our rope.

III. The Perfect Storm Tests Our Faith (Acts 27:21–44)

A. Strong Faith Weathers the Perfect Storm (Acts 27:21–26)

Paul told the sailors he had received a promise from God that no lives would be lost, and he said he believed God (vv. 21–25). After encouraging the men, he said they would run aground on an island (v. 26).

Faith meets a crisis head on. It may not end it, but it gives us the courage to see it through to the end.

B. Strong Faith Is Rewarded (Acts 27:27–44)

Although the storm blasted the ship apart, all 276 men on board escaped to dry land by floating on planks and other parts of the ship (vv. 27–44)

God honors the faith we place in his promises. If we look only at the storm, we will be distressed, but if we trust in God and his Word, we will be at rest. After the storm, he will reward our faith (1 Pet. 1:6–9; Rev. 2:10).

CONCLUSION

We cannot keep crises from our door, but we can trust God to sustain us in them and bring us victoriously through them. He never fails!

4

HOW TO HANDLE CONFLICT

INTRODUCTION

Most of us don't go looking for trouble, but somehow trouble finds us. We may encounter conflict or trouble at work, in our family relationships, in our relationship with our neighbors, in our business dealings, or somewhere else. We cannot travel through life without experiencing conflict.

The million-dollar question is: How should we handle conflict? Joseph, the favored son of Jacob, found himself in the center of conflict more than once, and he handled it well. Let's learn from his example!

SERMON OUTLINE

I. The Roots of Conflict

Conflict in Joseph's life arose from three sources.

A. Jealousy (Gen. 37:1–4)

Jacob did not hide the fact that he favored Joseph above his other sons. He gave Joseph a "richly ornamented robe" that clearly conveyed his favoritism. Consequently Joseph's brothers were jealous, and they hated Joseph. But Joseph may have added fuel to their jealousy by revealing dreams that predicted they would bow down to him (vv. 5–9).

Conflict among siblings can be intense. Parents need to guard against showing favoritism to one son or daughter at the risk of stirring up jealousy in the siblings.

B. Injustice (Gen. 37:12–39:20)

1. The brothers sold Joseph into slavery (Gen. 37:12–28).

When Jacob dispatched Joseph on a mission to check on his brothers' well-being, a sharp conflict struck him. His brothers plotted to kill him. However, one of the brothers convinced the others that it would be better to throw him into a dry cistern. Later, in the brother's thinking, he would rescue Joseph. However, a caravan of Ishmaelites came along, and another brother talked his siblings into selling Joseph into slavery.

What an injustice! Joseph had done nothing to deserve such treatment. He had gone from the status of favored son to that of a fettered slave!

2. Potiphar's wife falsely accused Joseph (Gen. 39:1–20).

Another injustice Joseph experienced occurred when the Ishmaelites sold him to Potiphar in Egypt. The wife of this high-ranking government official became enraged when Joseph rejected her sexual advances. In her fury, she told her husband Joseph had raped her. Consequently, Potiphar threw Joseph into prison.

How could such treatment befall the man God had chosen to be a ruler?

Have you suffered unjustly? Have you wondered why God would allow this injustice? You might have questioned the validity of Romans 8:28. But God had not concluded Joseph's life's story. Nor has he concluded yours. There is hope!

C. Insensitivity (Gen. 40)

1. Joseph's brothers were insensitive.

The brothers showed total disregard for Joseph's feelings and well-being. They were insensitive. All they cared about was how they could get rid of Joseph.

2. A cupbearer forgot Joseph.

Joseph was a model prisoner in Egypt and soon became a prison trustee. When two prisoners, former attendants to Pharaoh, had dreams they could not interpret, Joseph interpreted them. Within three days, the former baker would be executed, but the cupbearer would be restored to Pharaoh's service.

Joseph requested that the cupbearer remember him and show him kindness. However, when the cupbearer was restored to Pharaoh's service, he forgot all about Joseph. What insensitivity!

Two years passed before the cupbearer remembered Joseph and persuaded Pharaoh to summon Joseph from prison.

Does it seem like a boss or a family member is insensitive? You have been kind and loyal, but you and your kindness have been forgotten. Take heart! God has not forgotten you.

III. The Resolution of Conflict

A. Forbearance

Joseph endured prison for two full years before the cupbearer recommended him to Pharaoh and Pharaoh freed him from prison (Gen. 41:1–14). A conflict may continue for a long time, but it will end. In the meantime, we ought to be patient and stay focused on the Lord (Gal. 5:22; Heb. 12:1–3; James 5:7–8, 10–11).

B. Forgiveness

Have you asked how you can possibly forgive the person who brought so much conflict into your life? Consider Joseph's example of forgiveness! Eventually, Joseph was exalted to second in command over all Egypt, and eventually his brothers stood before him. They feared Joseph would retaliate for the grave injustice they had done to him years earlier, but their fears quickly subsided. Joseph forgave them. He told them they had intended to harm him but God intended it for good (Gen. 50:20).

Joseph's forgiveness prefigures the forgiveness we have received from Jesus—undeserved forgiveness. It also models the undeserved forgiveness we should show to others. Colossians 3:13 commands: "Forgive as the Lord forgave you."

CONCLUSION

We cannot avoid conflict. But we can choose to do the right thing in the midst of conflict. Instead of reacting to it with anger, resentment, impatience, and doubting, we can respond to it with submission to God's will, peace, patience, faith, and forgiveness. The choice is ours.

5

TEMPTATION IS A NO-COMPROMISE ZONE

INTRODUCTION

Temptation is all around us. It confronts us at work, at home, and everywhere else. We are tempted to lie, slack off, cheat, commit sexual sins, boast, defraud, commit prejudice, and countless other ways. Where does this temptation come from? Why are we vulnerable? How can we overcome temptation? The following observations may help us answer these significant questions.

SERMON OUTLINE

I. Observations about Temptation

A. Tempter

The Devil is the tempter. He tempted Eve in the garden of Eden, and she caved. He planted doubt in her mind. Then he twisted God's words and finally contradicted what God had said. Later, Eve persuade Adam to join her in sinning (Gen. 3:1–6).

Contrary to what some people think, God does not tempt anyone (James 1:13).

B. Exemption

Having the Holy Spirit does not exempt us from temptation. Jesus was filled with the Spirit, but he was tempted by the Devil (Luke 4:1–2). Although the Spirit used Paul in a mighty way, Paul confessed that he did what he did not want to do (Rom. 7:14–19).

The Spirit will convict us, but we can ignore the conviction and quench him (1 Thess. 5:19).

We will never live free of temptation (1 Cor. 10:12).

C. World

The Devil uses the evil world system to appeal to the lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life (1 John 2:15–16).

D. Escape

God provides a way of escape (1 Cor. 10:13). We can never say, "The Devil made me do it." A way of escape is available.

II. Observations about the Devil's Temptation of Jesus

A. Exhaustion

He tempted Jesus when He was physically exhausted and hungry. Jesus had eaten nothing for forty days when the Devil tempted him (Luke 4:2).

Often the Devil assaults us when we are weak, and he often assaults us at our weakest point. On page 110 of his book *FaultLines*, Steve DeNeff voices agreement with a Vatican report that the top three sins for men are sex (lust), substance abuse (gluttony), and shirking responsibility (sloth). For women, the top three sins are condescending or critical spirit (pride), jealousy (envy), and bitterness (anger). These sins may spring from the weakest parts of our nature.

B. Physical Desires

The Devil tried to get Jesus to give in to physical desire instead of trusting God to provide what he needed. He suggested Jesus turn a stone into bread (Luke 4:3). He tempted Jesus to receive the kingdom in exchange for worshiping him (vv. 5–7). This exchange would have involved the necessity of Jesus' bypassing the cross and, therefore, our redemption. Further he tempted Jesus to show off his divine power by leaping from the highest point of the temple and allowing angels to catch him (vv. 9–11).

III. Observations about Jesus' Victory over the Devil and Temptation

A. Jesus Overcame Temptation by Using God's Word

Jesus warded off each temptation by quoting and obeying Scripture (Luke 4:4, 8, 12). We, too, can overcome temptation and turn back the Devil's assaults by using the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God (Eph. 6:17).

The psalmist assured us that hiding the Word of God in our hearts protects us against sin (Ps. 119:11).

B. Jesus Was Refreshed Spiritually Following the Temptation (Matt. 4:11)

God must allow us to be tempted for our spiritual good. He draws near to us when we submit to him, resist the Devil, and draw near to God (James 7–8).

Meeting temptation and overcoming it prepares us for effective ministry (Luke 4:14–19).

CONCLUSION

Compromise may be a wise option in business, politics, or international relations, but it is totally unacceptable when we are dealing with the Devil. Temptation is always a no-compromise zone!

6

REBOUNDED FROM FAILURE

INTRODUCTION

No one wants to fail, but we have all failed at one time or another. Maybe you were sixteen and tried to pass a driving test. One eye was on the driver's license you hoped to get, but the other was on the curb you ran into. You failed! Perhaps you failed to get the coveted job you applied for. You may have failed to sink the free throw that your team needed to win that all-important basketball game. Worse still, you failed to maintain a good testimony at work or in the neighborhood. You said what you shouldn't have said or did what you shouldn't have done. As a result, an unbeliever remarked, "And you call yourself a Christian?"

Haven't we all been there—in the place of failure? Peter certainly was, but he didn't stay there. By God's grace, he rebounded; and so can we.

SERMON OUTLINE

I. Peter's Failures

A. Self-Confidence (Mark 14:29, 31; Luke 22:33)

Jesus predicted that all his disciples would fall away from him in his most critical hour (Mark 14:27), but Peter was too proud to accept this prediction. He boasted that even if the others deserted Jesus, he would not (vv. 29, 31). He claimed he was ready to follow Jesus to prison and even to death (Luke 22:33).

It is extremely risky to put our confidence in ourselves instead of in the Lord. Proverbs 16:18 warns, "Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall."

Sometimes a highly ranked sports team tastes defeat at the hands of a team that is the lowest ranked in the division. The defeat is usually attributed to the superior team's overconfidence. Similarly, if our confidence is in ourselves instead of in the Lord, we can expect to tumble badly in the Christian life. Paul counseled, "So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall" (1 Cor. 10:12).

B. Slothfulness

In the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus urged Peter, James, and John to stay at a certain point and “keep watch with me” (Matt. 26:38), but the disciples fell asleep (v. 40). Addressing Peter, he said, “Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation” (v. 41). Again, he went away to pray, but when he returned, he found the three disciples asleep (vv. 42–43).

It has been said the Devil is never too busy to rock the cradle of a slumbering saint. Peter’s slothfulness had given the Devil an opportunity to cause Peter’s downfall.

C. Disloyalty

Where was Peter when soldiers led Jesus away to be crucified? Didn’t Peter avow loyalty to Jesus? But Peter failed to follow Jesus when he was arrested. He deserted him and followed at a distance (Matt. 26:56, 58).

Situations arise when we should show true loyalty to Jesus, but the fear of man proves to be a snare (Prov. 29:25). We cave in to fear, as Peter did, and our failure to stand for Jesus is glaring.

D. Denial

Peter’s greatest failure occurred in the high priest’s courtyard. It was a chilly night, and likely a chill had filled Peter’s heart. While he warmed himself at a fire, he was asked three times whether he was one of Jesus’ followers. Each time, Peter denied that he was (John 18:15–18, 25–26).

Do we deny Jesus to avoid embarrassment or to avoid the possibility of a job promotion or the loss of “friends”? If we do, we fail badly, just as Peter did.

But we do not have to succumb to our failures.

II. Peter’s Restoration

A. Regret

When a rooster crowed, Peter remember Jesus’ prediction that Peter would deny him three times. Filled with conviction, Peter left the courtyard and wept.

If we regret a failure, we are likely to seek forgiveness and be determined not to repeat it.

B. Humility

Following Jesus’ resurrection, he met with his disciples at the Sea of Galilee. There, he found them fishing unsuccessfully. So he commanded them to cast their net on the right side of their boat. They obeyed and immediately caught more fish than they could handle (John 21:1–6). *Déjà vu!* That’s when Peter recognized Jesus and jumped into water. Soon, the disciples were gathered around a fire, where Jesus treated them to grilled fish and bread (vv. 9–14).

After breakfast Jesus asked Peter three times whether he loved him. Peter had previously denied the Lord three times at a fire in the courtyard of the high priest. Now, at a seaside fire, he confessed three times that he loved Jesus (vv. 15–17). His confession was both truthful and humble. There was no boasting on his part. Upon hearing Peter’s humble confession of love, Jesus commissioned him to feed his lambs and take care of his sheep.

Loving Jesus is an essential step in rebounding from failure. However, the test of love for Jesus consists of our obedience to him.

C. Obedience

Peter waited in Jerusalem for the Spirit in response to Jesus' command to do so (Acts 1:4–5; 12–14). If we want to serve the Lord joyfully and faithfully, we must obey him (John 13:17).

D. Empowerment

Restored to fellowship with the Lord and to a life of obedience to him, Peter received power from the Holy Spirit to proclaim the gospel boldly (Acts 2:14–41; 3:1–26). The Spirit also used Peter to write two inspired epistles, 1 and 2 Peter.

CONCLUSION

Often, when we fail in some way, we fall flat on our backs. It is then that we look up and depend upon the Lord to lift us up. We are never so far down that he cannot cause us to rebound completely.

7

DOLLARS AND SENSE

INTRODUCTION

Deep into the Great Depression of 1929, people needed a bright, uplifting song. It came in 1933. “We’re in the Money” became extremely popular. People were singing:

We’re in the money,
We’re in the money;
We’ve got a lot of what it takes to get along!
We’re in the money,
The sky is sunny;
Old Man Depression, you are through,
You done us wrong!

Unfortunately, only six years later the sky became dark when Adolph Hitler plunged Europe into World War II. Soon, America was in the thick of the fray. A rush of money may not always rush the beneficiaries into prolonged happiness or keep them from trouble.

If success hands us a windfall, our lives may change dramatically but not necessarily for the best unless we exercise good sense about our dollars.

SERMON OUTLINE

I. Wealth Is Fragile

A. Riches Are Uncertain (1 Tim. 6:17)

Paul commanded Timothy to warn the “rich in this present world” not to put their hope in wealth. He wrote that wealth is so uncertain.

The Bible does not teach that it is wrong to be wealthy, but those who are wealthy should not put their trust in riches. We all know a person can be “in the money” one day but out of money the next day. The stock market may drop like a rock. The value of the dollar may plunge to an all-time low. Unexpected medical expenses may exhaust one’s finances. Any number of factors may shrink or sink the wealth a rich person considers a security blanket.

B. Riches Do Not Accompany Us Beyond the Grave (Luke 12:16–21)

Jesus told a parable about a farmer who became rich due to a super-abundant harvest. He planned to tear down his old barns and build new ones to accommodate the bumper crops. Feeling that he was suddenly “in the money,” he told himself he had plenty of good things for a bright future. He would sit back, take life easy, eat, drink, and be merry. However that night God demanded the farmer’s life, and asked the farmer, “Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?” (v. 20).

Have you known people like the rich farmer? Gold is their god. Greed is their creed. When they die, they leave everything behind. No U-Haul can carry their wealth and possessions into eternity.

II. Stewardship Is Essential (1 Cor. 4:1–2)

A. God Has Entrusted Us with Material Assets

Whether we have a little or a lot, everything we possess is a gift from God. The psalmist wrote: “Praise the LORD, my soul, and forget not all his benefits” (Ps. 103:2). Every day should be Thanksgiving Day as we recognize God as the source of all we have and thank him humbly for all his benefits.

We may be tempted to think that 10 percent of our income belongs to God, but the remaining 90 percent is ours to use as we wish. That thinking is unfounded. One hundred percent of what God has given us is his. We are simply the stewards of what is his. Our houses, our cars, our money—even our lives—belong to him. We are not our own. We were bought at a great price (see 1 Cor. 6:19–20).

B. God Requires Us to Be Faithful Stewards

Can God trust us to invest what he has given us to serve his purposes? We are not free to waste what he has entrusted to us.

A faithful steward will support the gospel at home and abroad. The hymn, “O Zion, Haste,” challenges us:

Give of thy sons to bear the message glorious;
Give of thy wealth to speed them on their way;
Pour out thy soul for them in prayer victorious;
And all thy spending Jesus will repay.

When we place money in a bank, we expect the bank to guard it faithfully and to pay interest on the balance. We would certainly be disappointed, if not outraged, if we submitted a withdrawal slip and were told our balance was zero because the bank’s president used our money to help him pay for a Caribbean cruise. Similarly, we should faithfully guard and gain interest for God on what he has entrusted to us. Although it would be fine to take a cruise if that’s what God wants us to do, it would be shameful to squander what he has given us.

May he find us faithful!

CONCLUSION

Sudden success is a FaultLine, as Steve DeNeff points out in his book *FaultLines*. It can shake up our lives and be either a blessing or a curse. If we find ourselves “in the money,” let’s humbly accept our good fortune as a stewardship and faithfully use it for God’s glory.

8

LIFE'S FINAL APPOINTMENT

INTRODUCTION

Appointments are a part of life. Doctor appointments, dental appointments, lunch appointments, business appointments, travel appointments, and many more appointments fill our computer calendars, date books, smartphones, and other electronic devices. We like to know the time, place, and nature of each appointment, so we flag it carefully. However, there is no way to know when we will keep life's final appointment—our appointment with death. It could take place at any moment or years from now. Hebrews 9:27 simply but emphatically states that “people are destined to die once.”

How will we meet life's final appointment? Will we meet it with consternation or as a celebration?

SERMON OUTLINE

I. Consternation

Many unbelievers may show little or no concern about dying. They may take the fatalistic attitude that says, “When your number is up, it is up.” We may agree to a certain point, but we would add that the important thing is to know the One who puts the numbers up.

A. Eternal Suffering

God's wrath rests upon all who have not believed in Jesus as their Savior (John 3:36). Upon death they will enter hades, where they will suffer torment in its flames (Luke 16:22–24). Their suffering will never end (Matt. 25:46; 2 Thess. 1:8–9; Rev. 20:14–15).

B. Eternal Separation from God

The rich man who was suffering in hades experienced separation from God, and 2 Thessalonians 1:8–9 states that those who do not know God will be shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power. Undoubtedly, eternal separation from God is hell's most dreadful horror.

II. Celebration

A. Free from the Presence of Sin

Heaven is completely opposite from hell. It is blissful, beautiful, blessed, with bountiful pleasures. One of the greatest blessings associated with heaven is the absence of sin. Nothing that might defile heaven's pristine purity will enter heaven (Rev. 21:27). There, believers will finally be free not only from sin's power, but also from its presence (1 John 3:2). Our sanctification will be complete. Our holiness will be evident forever.

B. Forever in the Presence of Our Savior

Of course, heaven is a wonderful place, far exceeding the most beautiful and peaceful place on earth. But heaven's greatest attraction is our Savior. He is the central focus of adoration and worship in heaven. As his redeemed ones, we will see him and thank him in person for shedding his blood for our sins (Rev. 5:6–13).

CONCLUSION

An old preacher described the Christian life as good while we're living, better when we're dying, and best when we're gone. No one likes to welcome death, but when it arrives, we Christians can celebrate it as our graduation to a far better life.