

GODLY PASTORS BLOGS - 1

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(India Outreach, Spiritual Warfare, Family Ministries, Counseling, World View)

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I am writing a weekly blog just for pastors and church leaders in India. I want to help train, encourage and support you in your work. Please pass this blog on to others who may benefit. If anyone wants to receive this each week write me at jerry@schmoyer.net and I'll put you on my email list.

BLOG 1: STUDY GOD'S WORD

Being a pastor or church leader is both a great privilege and responsibility. It is not easy being a godly pastor. I want to help you be the leader God created you to be and needs you to be. I would like to send you a blog each week to help you during these hard times of COVID-19.

Paul offers good advice to Timothy in his life and ministry. ***2 Timothy 2:15 Paul writes, "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth."***

Paul warns Timothy to correctly preach and apply the Bible (1 Timothy 2:15). This requires spending time studying the Bible and learning what it says. Develop sermons that accurately teach and apply God's Word. This takes time and lots of effort, but it is the only way we will feed ourselves and our people the Word of God (John 21:15-17). This is our greatest responsibility. During times when churches are closed, you can use the extra time to pray, study the Bible and prepare sermons.

The best way to do this is to start each day reading the Bible and praying. Study a small portion of Scripture each day. Don't wait until the end of the week to work on your sermon. It is better to start a sermon or Bible study a few weeks before you will present it. That will give you time to think about it and add to it before you preach. I have written a book on Bible study and another on sermon preparation. They are on my web site in English and Telugu (<https://www.christiantrainingonline.org/our-ministries/india/books/>) or email me and I'll send a PDF copy by email.

Are you doing your very best to learn God's Word and teach it to your people? Are you working hard to better understand the Bible? Paul says if we do this, God will approve of our ministry, but if we don't, we will be ashamed (2 Timothy 2:15). I don't want to be ashamed when I stand before Him. God gave everything for me. I want to give everything for Him as well. It is a joy to lead God's sheep, but it comes with hard work. I want to encourage you to faithfully study and teach God's Word. Apply it to your life and to the lives of your people. Make sure God approves of your life and ministry.

If you have any questions or if there is anything I can pray about for you, please write me and let me know. Jerry@Schmoyer.net I would love to hear about your family and ministry. Send a picture if you can. (June 24, 2020 Doylestown, PA)

BLOG 2: FEAR OF THE FUTURE

Covid-19 can cause fear in us today. We fear illness, death or loss of money. I have some health issues that make me higher risk of Covid -19. But instead of fear, I see this as an opportunity to trust God.

A bigger danger than the virus is the fear it can create in us. Fear is one of Satan's strongest weapons. Demons are often behind fear (Romans 8:15). It can also be called insecurity, anxiety, worry, or stress, but it is still fear. Anything not of faith is sin (Romans 14:23). God does not give us fear (2 Timothy 1:7; Romans 8:15). If you experience fear know it is not from God but from Satan.

Scripture teaches us that fear crowds out faith and leaves little room for trusting in the great power of God to care for us and provide in every situation, even a breakout of a virus (Isaiah 41:10). Fear causes us to miss the "peace that surpasses understanding" (Philippians 4:6-9). Fear robs us of living as "lights in the world" (Philippians 2:15). We must replace fear with faith (John 14:27).

Fear takes root when we choose to focus on circumstances instead of God. Peter walking on water is a good example (Matthew 14:22-33). When his eyes were on Jesus his faith was strong, but when he looked at the waves, fear grew in his mind to be and he started sinking. He looked back to Jesus and was rescued.

Trust is the cure for fear. Victory over fear comes from remembering and meditating on God's power and control. Trust God's promises. Memorize and then quote Scripture such as Deuteronomy 31:6; Proverbs 3:25; Psalm 23:4; 34:4; 56:3-4; 118:6; Joshua 1:9; 10:8; Exodus 14:13; 1 Samuel 17:45-47; Isaiah 41:10; Matthew 10:28; Philippians 4:6-7, 13; 2 Timothy 1:7; 1 John 4:18.

If you allow fearful thoughts in your mind you will lose the peace and joy God promises us. You will be a poor testimony to others. Be an example of faith and trust in your family, neighborhood and church. Reach out to other pastors and Christians who are in fear and remind them of God's promises to care for us. Help pastors and other leaders who may be struggling with fear. God is in control of all that is happening. We have nothing to fear but fear itself. (August 3, 2020 Doylestown, PA)

Philippians 4:6-7 Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

2 Timothy 1:7 For God has not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, and of love and of a sound mind.

Ask God to show you any fear in your life. Confess it as sin and quote Scripture against it. Arm yourself with favorite Scriptures about fear.

BLOG 3: SOME THINGS SHOULDN'T CHANGE

The recent pandemic has drastically changed the way we function as a church. Many churches have not met for several months. Still, the church must continue to function. A church is more than a group of people gathering to meet. The church I still the church, even if we don't gather. What is important in a healthy church? What does God look for in our churches? The church in Antioch is a model example

The Antioch church, composed of many small house churches, was strong and active. New believers started it after Pentecost (Acts 2). Stephen's martyrdom and the onslaught of persecution

caused many new Christians to move from Jerusalem to Antioch (Acts 11:19-21). They demonstrate important lessons in growing a healthy church.

First, we see a **focus on grace** (Acts 11:22-24). God's grace was evident to all the Christians in Antioch. The church loved and accepted everyone, no matter their culture or background. They generously gave to those in need (Acts 11:27-30). Christians from both Jewish and gentile backgrounds worshipped together. Rich and poor, young and old sat side by side. Believers were first called "Christians" in this church (Acts 11:26). They acted like Jesus so their unbelieving neighbors labeled them in mockery. They responded to insults with grace and love.

A second mark of a healthy church is a **focus on God's Word** (Acts 11:25-26). The leaders emphasized teaching God's Word and evaluated all they believed and did through the lens of the Word. Paul was one of their teachers communicating God's truth. A deep understanding and respect for God's Word is essential for a healthy church.

Next, they saw the importance of **training people** in how to apply the Word in daily life (Acts 11:25-26). Barnabas actively trained others, including Paul. The people were called "disciples" because they were committed followers of Jesus.

Healthy churches **pray, worship, fast and listen obediently to the Spirit's voice**. In Acts 13:2-3 the Christians "were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.' So, after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off." This was an important part of the early church (Acts 2:42). Healthy churches pray and listen obediently to the Spirit's voice.

Finally, this church had a **desire to reach others** (Acts 13:2-3). They sent their two best men, Paul and Barnabas, on the First Missionary Journey. The church heard reports of their travels (Acts 14:26-28) and sent them out again on the Second and Third Missionary Journeys. A desire to share God's truth and grace characterizes a Godly church.

The world needs healthy churches today more than ever. Even if we don't gather, a pastor can still lead his people to be a church God desires. (August 10, 2020 Doylestown, PA)

Matthew 28:18-20 Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Does your church: 1) focus on grace, 2) communicate God's Word, 3) train believers, 4) pray 5) reach out with the gospel?

Do you do encourage and participate in these areas?

BLOG 4: GREAT IS GOD'S FAITHFULNESS

As church leaders, we often preach and teach on the faithfulness of God. We worship and praise God for His faithfulness. But sometimes we still need to remind ourselves just how faithful! Covid is a hard time for everyone, especially pastors. Churches aren't meeting and it is hard to talk to our people and help them grow. Our people need a lot of help and encouragement today, sometimes more than we have to give. Many pastors do not have money and that makes life hard for their families. We know God is faithful, but it's good to be reminded. I want to remind you He is faithful no matter your need or situation.

God is always faithful, even when we don't recognize it or thank Him. When we are ungrateful for the blessings He gives us, He is still faithful. When we forget Him and put other things first, He remains faithful. When we are too busy to pray or read the Bible His faithfulness continues. When we doubt His love or goodness, He is still faithful. Even when we are in sin, He remains faithful to us.

The Bible talks about God's faithfulness to keep His promises to Israel (Deuteronomy 7:9). God promised Noah he would keep him safe (Genesis 6:17-18; 9:9-17). He kept His promise to return the Jews to their land (Zechariah 8:7-8). God was faithful in sending His Son to die for our sins (Hebrews 5:5-10). He kept His promise to bring Jesus back to life (Matthew 16:21; 27:62-64).

God is faithful. He cannot lie neither can He break a promise. (Hebrews 6:18; Numbers 23:19). God is always faithful (1 John 1:9; 1 Corinthians 10:13).

Life changes. Life doesn't go in the direction we want it to go. The future can seem unsure. Our world is going through a very hard time, and it may not get better for a while. But God is faithful. He promises to provide our needs not all our wants. (Matthew 6:25-34). He promises to give us His peace as we trust Him (Philippians 4:4-7). He promises to be with us. There is nothing to fear (Isaiah 41:10-13). Yes, God is faithful. (August 17, 2020 Doylestown, PA)

Sing with me: *"Great is Your faithfulness, O God my father. There is no shadow of turning in thee. Thou changest not, Thy compassions they fail not. Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me."* Let that great hymn play in your mind and heart throughout this day. (August 17, 2020 Doylestown, PA)

1 Corinthians 1:9 "God, who has called you into fellowship with His son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful."

2 Thessalonians 3:3 "The Lord is faithful, and He will strengthen and protect you from the evil one."

If you need reassurance about God's faithfulness, then read the references in the blog. Pick out some that speak to you. Write them down and read them over and over until you memorize them.

BLOG 5: WHAT GOD EXPECTS OF PASTORS

It is a great privilege and a special honor to be a pastor or church leader (1 Timothy 3:1). God says we are blessed, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" (Romans 10:15; Isaiah 52:7). Helping people know Jesus and grow spiritually is a wonderful experience. We are commanded to "shepherd" God's sheep (John 21:15-17).

If we do, one day we will hear Him say, "Well done, good and faithful servant!" (Matthew 25:23). These are words I desire to hear when my life on earth is over and I stand before the Lord. Along with Paul, I want to be able to say, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith." (2 Timothy 4:7-8).

Some people have wrong expectations of what a pastor should do. Often, we have wrong ideas too. We look at other pastors and feel we should be doing what they are doing. What are the Biblical duties of a pastor? What does God expect of us?

When someone is hired to work, he is told exactly what is expected of him. He knows what he should be doing and not doing. In order to please his boss, the workman does what is expected. The same is true of pastors and leaders. God tells us in the Bible what He expects so we know exactly what we should be doing and not doing. Yet many pastors do not know what the Bible says.

God does not expect us to be perfect, or to have a large church or make a lot of money. He does not expect us to be liked by everyone or do everything by our self. But He does expect us to use

the special spiritual gifts and talents He has given us as individuals. He doesn't expect us to copy someone else or try to be like another church.

He expects us to continue to grow spiritually. Sometimes we spend so much time doing other things that we neglect our own daily, personal Bible study and prayer. As a result, we don't grow. Spending time alone with God is so important. We should not neglect it.

God also expects us to lead His sheep. Sheep need a shepherd to take care of them and the same is true of God's sheep. A shepherd leads by protecting his sheep from false teachings, sin and Satan's deceptions.

God expects pastor/leaders to feed the sheep by teaching them the Bible. Pastor/leaders are commanded to learn His Word so we can know more about Him and feed on His Word. Then we teach the Bible to the people your church.

God doesn't expect us to do everything ourselves, but to train others to use their gifts to minister. We must be discipling and training others to serve God. Train people in your church to do what you do so they can help. Take someone along when you minister so they can see how you pastor

We serve God by serving the sheep. Sheep don't serve the shepherd. The shepherd serves the sheep. We are to serve our sheep by doing what is best for their growth and maturity. We can't try to do everything they want us to do but must do what helps them grow.

The most important people for us to serve is our wife and children. They come before serving the church. Being a good husband and father is more important than being a good pastor.

This is what God expects us to do if we desire to hear "Well done." God is the one we serve and please. (August 24, 2020 Doylestown, PA)

1 Corinthians 4:2 "Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful."

1 Peter 5:2 Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve;

How are you doing with what God expects? Are there any things you need to start or stop doing? Write them down and make plans so you will be doing just what God expects.

PRAY: "Dear Jesus, we thank you for the great honor and privilege of serving you by taking care of some of Your sheep. We want to minister as You would have us, but we need Your help in order to do that. I pray you would instruct each of us to understand, practice and apply what the Bible says You expect from us. Use us for your glory and the growth of Your kingdom. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen"

BLOG 6: FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

The Bible says God wants to be close friends with us (John 15:15; James 2:23). Friends spend time together. They trust each other with the secrets of their heart. They are available to help a friend in need. They are quick to forgive. They mutually share, and listen to each other. God does that for us, but are we a good friend to Him? Do we forget Him, take advantage of Him, and come to Him just when we have a need? Are we too busy to spend time with Him?

I like Paul's words in Philippians 3:7-14. He wants to "know Jesus". He doesn't want to just know facts about Him; he wants to be close friends with Jesus. He wants to have a close familiarity that comes from spending time talking and listening. We need to have that kind of relationship with our wife and children, and we need to have it with God as well.

Sometimes we don't know how to share our lives. We've never done it with anyone, or, if we have, they may have hurt us and we don't want to risk being hurt again. Other times we are too busy even with ministry-related activities and neglect talking to God in prayer and listening to God in Bible study and meditation.

As pastors and church leaders we risk being so wrapped up in doing good things for God, we neglect time alone with Him. This is our time to feel His love and let Him know we love Him. God doesn't just want our work. He doesn't need that; He is God and can accomplish what He wants without our help. He does need our love and closeness. That's why He came to earth and went to the cross – so we can have a close personal friendship with Him.

How can we make it a top priority? We can't wait until our other work is done. There will always be more. As we recognize our total dependence on Him and humbly spend time with Him it becomes our OWN need and joy and not a chore to cross off our feel guilty list

Jesus is the best friend I have. He wants me to spend time thanking and loving Him through prayer and reading His Word. What are you doing that is more important than that? Spend time with Him as soon as you are done reading this blog. (August 31, 2020 Doylestown, PA)

Philippians 3:10 I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

Deuteronomy 6:4-5 Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

On a scale of 1 to 10, where would you say you are in your friendship with your mate?

On a scale of 1 to 10, where would you say you are in your friendship with God?

Honestly ask yourself what keeps your closeness with God from growing? What roadblocks are in the way? What can you do about them?

BLOG 7: GOD IS FAITHFUL EVEN IN HARD TIMES

We know God is faithful. During good times we praise Him for His faithfulness. When things get difficult, we turn to Him and His faithfulness. But when life is hard for a long time it can be difficult to keep trusting in God's faithfulness. Still, God is faithful, even when you can't see it. He may not be removing the problem but He is still with us and helping us through it. Here are some ways He remains faithful:

He provides for our needs (Philippians 4:19; Psalm 145:13-15). We may not have what we want, but we have enough to keep on living. Trusting God during hard times develops a stronger faith in us and helps us grow. Pastors and leaders need to keep growing in faith, so God gives these times to learn to trust Him all the more. Trusting Him instead of worrying shows we recognize God is in sovereign control of everything. Hard times give us opportunities to trust God when it matters the most. Are you trusting Him to provide your needs?

God will give us grace to get through (2 Corinthians 12:9). His grace is sufficient for whatever we are going through. His strength is seen when we are weak. We think we must be strong and in control. As pastors and leaders, we want to be in charge. It is humbling to rely on God and others for help. His grace, His love, His Spirit within us will help us through whatever we face.

God comforts and encourages us (Matthew 5:4). He promises to be with us always (Deuteronomy 31:6). He assures us we can do all things with His help (Philippians 4:13). He never says He will remove our problems and make life easy, but has a purpose for all that happens to us

(Jeremiah 29:11). He will use it for good in our lives (Romans 8:28). God's promises can be trusted (Numbers 23:19). Allow God to comfort and encourage you. Go to His promises to give us strength and courage. Use scripture to encourage and comfort the people around you (Hebrews 10:25).

Even in these hard times trust God's promises to provide, encourage, comfort and strengthen us. Then pass this truth on to others. Read your Bible. Remember God's promises. Trust Him even when it seems things are not getting better. God is faithful, and He will be with us. (September 7, 2020 Doylestown, PA))

Here are some of God's promises for you to read and remember.

ALL OUR NEEDS MET

For the Lord God is a sun and shield; the LORD bestows favor and honor; no good thing does he withhold from those whose walk is blameless. Psalm 84:11

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Psalm 23:1-3

And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:19
I will never leave you or forsake you. Hebrews 13:5

ANSWERED PRAYER

Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. Matthew 7:7

This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us - whatever we ask - we know that we have what we asked of him. John 5:14:15

BLESSING THROUGH TRIALS

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. Romans 8:28

No temptation/testing has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted/tested beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted/tested, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it. 1 Cor. 10:13

FEAR

The Lord is with me; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me? Ps. 118:6

Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go. Joshua 1:9

GUIDANCE

Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight. Proverbs 3:5-6

PEACE

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:7

REWARD FOR PATIENCE, FAITHFULNESS

But those who hope (wait upon) the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary; they will walk and not be faint. Isaiah 40:31

STRENGTH FOR WHATEVER COMES

I can do everything through him who gives me strength. Philippians 4:13

My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. 2 Corinthians 12:9

BLOG 8: HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE

Suppose an important letter was delivered to your house. It said great riches were yours if you followed the directions enclosed. What would you do with that letter? Would you trash it? Would you just let it sit around your house gathering dust? Or would you carefully read it to discover how you could enjoy this wonderful inheritance? You certainly would study it thoroughly to learn exactly what it said so you could get the promised riches. You would be very foolish not to do so!

The Bible is a special letter from the King of Kings, your heavenly Father, which gives access to His unlimited resources and blessings for this life and eternity. It is God's Word, given to us so we may know His blessings and benefits to us as Christians.

1 Peter 2:2-3 says, "Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good." Many Christians do not read or study their Bible. Perhaps they don't know how or think it is too hard to understand. Maybe they don't see the need to know God's Word so they neglect it.

Learning to study the Bible takes work and practice, that's why Paul commands "do your best" (2 Timothy 2:15)." It takes time to study the Bible. You only get out what you put in. Those searching for gold or diamonds do not find them lying on the ground surface, but must spend time digging down deep to find the gems.

There are three main steps in Bible study:

- 1-**OBSERVATION** - Carefully look and notice everything the Bible has to say in the context.
- 2 -**INTERPRETATION** – Reveals what it means.
- 3 - **APPLICATION** -Makes it relevant to daily life.

Verses have only **one** meaning – That is what the writer was saying to the people to whom he wrote it. However, it can be **applied** in **many** ways to our lives.

Learning any new skill takes time and practice. A child learning to walk will fall many times, but he gets up and keeps going. Learning to drive a car or use a computer can be difficult at first, but if requires perseverance before it becomes easier. You can't learn to drive a car or use a computer by simply reading about how to do it. You must practice. The same is true of Bible study. (September 24, 2020 Doylestown, PA)

2 Timothy 2:15 says, "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth."

How much time a week do you spend in focused, in-depth Bible study? Reading or listening to others teach is good, but there is nothing better than chewing your own spiritual food. We are privileged to have a written revelation from God. Make sure you spend time reading it regularly.

BLOG 9: MARRIAGE & MINISTRY

Before sin even entered the world, God created marriage between a man and a woman. His perfect plan was to form a marriage based on love and respect. The marriage relationship shows God's love relationship with us (Ephesians 5:25-33). Satan hates Christian marriages and does all he can to attack and destroy it. If he can destroy a marriage then it affects the children, the church and the whole nation. He especially attacks pastors and church leaders' marriages to weaken their ministries and defeat their children.

We need to understand God's plan for marriage so we can live out the Biblical picture of Christ's unconditional, loving relationship to His church through the example of our marriage relationship. A pastor/leader can best minister if the marriage and family are following Biblical principles (1 Timothy 3:4-5; 1 Peter 3:7).

A **husband** is to relate to his wife as Jesus relates to His people. He is to show sacrificial love by His actions, putting His wife and her needs before his own. That is what Jesus did when He left heaven to come to earth and go to the cross to pay for our sins. His love for us is unconditional, no matter what we do or don't do. He focuses on giving, not getting, and as husbands we do the same. Because Jesus showed unconditional, sacrificial love for us, we respond in trust and submission to Him.

A **wife** is to respond to her husband's sacrificial, unconditional love by trusting and submitting to him. We don't take advantage of Jesus' love and forgiveness. A wife should never take advantage of her husband's love and forgiveness, either. She gives herself 100%, as Christians are to give themselves to Christ. She exemplifies loyalty and faithfulness to her husband, as she to Jesus. Responding this way, Jesus gives meaning, purpose, direction, guidance, peace and joy to our lives. The same is true of a godly wife who trusts her godly husband.

Our marriages and families must be a picture of Jesus' love and care for us. We can only have that kind of marriage as we depend on God's mercy and grace to work in us. Psalm 127:1 says, "Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labor in vain." In Ecclesiastes 4:12 God states, "Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken." We need God and each other to have a peaceful, holy, fulfilling, harmonious marriage and family. (September 21, 2020 Doylestown, PA)

Proverbs 18:22 He who finds a wife finds what is good and receives favor from the Lord.

Psalms 127:1 Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labor in vain.

How is your relationship with your spouse and children? Does it reflect Jesus to the world around you?

If you don't have a mate or children, think of those who do and pray for them.

PRAY: "Dear Jesus, I thank you for creating marriage, even before sin entered the world. Your plan of one man and one woman loving and serving each other is a beautiful picture of Your love for us and our trust in You. Please help us be the husbands and wives, the fathers and mothers You want us to be. Fill us with Your love for each other. Help us to show unconditional love and sacrificial service as You do to us. Teach us to forgive as You forgive us. Help us to serve by putting others before ourselves, as we follow Your example. We ask you to use our families so You are glorified in them. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen"

PRAY: "Father, we thank You for Your book, the Holy Bible. What a privilege it is to have Your very words and thoughts written down to study and learn! We thank you for Your Spirit that lives inside us and helps us understand what we read. I pray you would help each one to better understand and apply Your Word to our lives. Give us a desire to know You better by learning what You say to us in the Bible. We thank you in Jesus' name." Amen

BLOG 10: PATIENCE & PERSEVERANCE

Perseverance or patience. Which is more important? Actually, they are much the same. We need them both. It's hard to be patient and persevere when things are going well, but when it seems life will never be 'normal' again, we need patience all the more. The older I get the more I value this character trait.

This fruit of the Spirit doesn't grow easily in our lives (Galatians 5:22-23). No one is born with patience. Babies want everything right away. They demand their needs be met immediately. Sometimes we are the same way with God. We expect Him to give us what we want when we want it. Maturity is a process of learning to be wait and stay faithful no matter the circumstances (Romans 5:3). God uses difficult circumstances in our lives to make us more like Jesus (Romans 8:28-29).

During these unsettling times keep your trust in God. Continue in faithful service to Him and others. Read your Bible daily. Spend time in prayer and worship. Talk about your concerns with mature Christians who will pray for you. Remember His promises and trust Him.

These days will bring us closer to God or drive us further from God. Which is happening in your life? (September 28, 2020 Doylestown, PA)

Here are some good promises to remember:

And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus. Phil. 4:19

I will never leave you or forsake you. Hebrews 13:5

But those who hope (wait upon) the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary; they will walk and not be faint. Isa. 40:31

I waited patiently for the LORD; he turned to me and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand. He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God. Ps. 40:1-3

I can do everything through him who gives me strength. Phil. 4:13

My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. 2 Cor. 12:9

Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go. Joshua 1:9

BLOG 11: GOD DOESN'T NEED ME BUT I NEED HIM

When I started in ministry, I was excited about the opportunity to use my gifts and talents for God. There was so much I wanted to accomplish. I was "expecting great things from God and doing great things for God." I knew I needed His help to carry out these desires. I had no doubt that with God's assistance, great things would happen.

With maturity I realized I can't do anything for Him on my own. It's not even teamwork. Everything I accomplish in ministry and life is all by His grace and mercy. I feel like a little boy thinking he can hit a baseball a mile when it is really his father standing behind him, wrapping his arms around his son and holding the bat around him making contact with the ball. Without my heavenly Father's arms wrapped around me, I'd miss it by a mile every time. When I insist on doing things my way, God lets me see how badly I fail without His help.

It's not about me, it's all about Him! As I mature spiritually I find God keeps getting bigger and bigger. I, by comparison, keep getting smaller and smaller. That's the way it should be! There's something freeing about "letting go and letting God." While I've been busy trying to do as much as I can in ministry, God is more interested in me doing only what He wants but doing it well.

There's a real peace that comes with letting God be God. I recognize He doesn't need me to run His Kingdom down here. I need to humbly come to the conclusion I can't do ANYthing without Him. "Apart from Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). But "I can do all things through Him who gives me strength" (Philippians 4:13).

When I embrace and internalize that reality then I am more motivated to listen to Him. I spend less time asking Him to help me with what I am doing and more asking Him what He wants me to do. I see some of my biggest plans lying in ruins by the wayside, but I find He has used me to touch lives at times and in ways I didn't expect. People are important than the program. I'm to serve my people. They aren't here to serve my program. I've got more peace and more patience because I know if I am in His will, then He will bring whatever results He wants whenever He wants. God doesn't measure success by numbers (people, dollars, possessions, etc.) but by faithfulness. So, I spend more time making sure I am doing what He wants and less trying to get Him to make my plans work.

I'm sure you already learned this and can add to what I've said. Keep it foremost in your mind. God doesn't need any of us but each one of us totally needs Him! What a privilege it is that He chooses to use us for His kingdom and glory! (October 5, 2020 Doylestown, PA)

Galatians 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Romans 12:1-2 Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God — this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is — his good, pleasing and perfect will.

If God withheld His grace and help from your life, what would it be like? What could you accomplish for Him on your own, without His help? How often do you try to do this?

How natural is it for you to give credit to God for EVERYthing that happens?

BLOG 12: SATAN ATTACKS PASTORS

One day a young man was out for a walk. As he walked, he saw a sign inviting him to sign up to see the world for free. Food, lodging, everything would be provided. In fact, he would be paid a salary, too. It sounded wonderful, so he signed his name. He joined the army! He was handed military weapons to fight. Now he realized there was an army of soldiers that were his enemies and swore to destroy him. He was not expecting that!

When Christians accept Jesus as Savior, they are surprised to find they have an enemy. Perhaps they expected life to be perfect and easy, with no more problems. Salvation doesn't end the battle; it is just the start! When you accept Jesus as your Savior, you also accept Satan as your enemy! You deserted Satan's army to join God's army. Satan opposes God and us who are His people. Now you are in the middle of a war you don't want, don't like, can't understand and seem unable to win. This is especially true for pastors and church leaders.

The position of a pastor or leader is a great privilege, but we have an enemy, Satan, who opposes us. Satan tries to oppose all God does. He wants us to think he is as great as God but He

isn't. Before God created the world, He created angels to serve Him, but one of the angels didn't want to serve. He wanted to be worshipped. He wasn't able to defeat God so God cast him out of heaven. One third of the angels followed him. We call them demons and the one who leads them we call Satan. Their whole purpose is to control the world and be worshipped. He isn't as powerful as God, but He is more powerful than us. The only people he doesn't control are Christians who are living for Jesus. We are the only ones who can bring light into his darkness. For him to succeed he must stop the church. In order to stop the church, which Christians do you think they try to stop first? Pastors and leaders. Pastors and leaders are the ones they would like to destroy. God is greater, but we must know how to have victory in Him.

Many Christians don't know there is victory over Satan and his demons through Jesus. They believe Satan's lies that he cannot be defeated and is someone to be feared. These beliefs of helplessness lead to defeat. God has provided for us to win this spiritual war. Jesus' victory on the cross has destroyed Satan's power (Hebrews 2:14-15) but he is still free to attack those who serve God. God has given us power and authority to command demons, in Jesus' name, to stop their work (Luke 9:1-2). It is God's power which works through us, not our own power (Luke 10:17-20). In the future Satan and all demons will be bound in hell forever (Revelation 12:7-11; 20:7-15; Matthew 25:41). Until then we must not fear them, but stand against them in Jesus' name. We must learn how to have victory over them (2 Corinthians 2:5-11). (October 12, 2020 Doylestown, PA)

BLOG 13: HOPE IN THE LORD

Sometimes we think "hope" means a wish or desire. But in the Bible "hope" means "confident assurance." As Christians, we have confident assurance God will keep His promises. Our assurance is that He is in control of all that happens with a plan and purpose for our growth and His glory. We are assured of His continual presence with us on earth and our eternal presence with Him in heaven.

Hope is looking ahead, beyond the present hard times. Circumstances can distort His love and sovereignty but trust in the character of God and His Word that never changes rather than changing circumstances

Jesus is our example. He faced the cross because of the assurance of what He would experience after it was over. *"Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12:1-2).*

Whatever we are facing in life, we must keep remembering God loves us and will use everything that happens for His purpose in our life and in those around us. Keep reading your Bible. It will remind you of God's faithfulness to those in the past, and His promises to you today. Remember His faithfulness to you in the past. Spend time praising and worshipping Him for Who and what He is, even when going through suffering. When you struggle, ask others to pray for you Be assured that God is in control of the present and the future, and that He loves us and has wonderful things in store for us. (October 19, 2020 Doylestown, PA)

Hebrews 10:23 Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.

Isaiah 40:31 but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary; they will walk and not be faint.

Jeremiah 29:11 11 For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

BLOG 14: PREACHING & TEACHING THE BIBLE

I read a story about a man that gave his pet dog medicine. Every morning he would hold the dog tightly, pry open his mouth and try to force the medicine down his throat. The dog would kick, shake and try to get away. It was extremely difficult for the owner to make the dog to swallow the medicine. Then one day, before he could hold the dog down, the man spilled the medicine on the floor. Immediately the dog ran over and licked up every drop of it. The man realized the dog liked the medicine! The dog didn't like the way he gave it to him!

As Christians we are commanded to teach God's Word to others. Three times Jesus commands His followers to ***"Feed My sheep" (John 21:15-17)***. If you preach or teach the Bible, lead a Bible study or Sunday school class, have devotions with your mate or teach the Bible to your children you are feeding God's sheep.

What a shame if people didn't desire God's Word because of the way we present it to them. His Word is life giving and nourishing for our souls. There is no problem with God's Word, but there can be a problem with how we feed it to others.

Our bodies are designed to need physical food to grow and remain physically strong and healthy. Our souls are designed to need spiritual food to grow and remain strong and healthy spiritually as well. We need to present God's Word in a way that is interesting, holds attention and is easy to apply to daily life. Good teaching or preaching means we communicate God's Word in a way people understand, remember and apply it to their lives. It can only be done with God's help and dedicated work (2 Corinthians 3:5). We are to feed His sheep with the nourishment He provides in His Word, and do it to the very best because it has an eternal impact (Romans 10:9-15).

It is wonderful if God has put a burden or desire in your heart to share His Word with others. Paul says in ***1 Corinthians 9:16, "I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!"*** Preaching or teaching God's Word is a great privilege. If your church isn't meeting you can still teach, encourage, counsel and help those you meet or talk to. Let's make sure we communicate God's Word in a way that attracts people to God and helps them understand and love Him better. (October 26, 2020 Doylestown, PA)

Hebrews 4:12 For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

2 Timothy 4:2 Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage – with great patience and careful instruction.

Thank God for the privilege you have of studying and learning God's Word. Ask Him to help you be faithful with the opportunities you have to pass it on to others. Spend some time reading your Bible today.

BLOG 15: GET OUT OF THE BOAT

The story of Peter walking on water is a familiar story. It's a simple story of faith and trust, but let's look a little deeper. Think about the context of Peter walking on water. Why would a grown man ask Jesus to invite him to walk on water? Why get out of a safe boat and risk the danger? We might overlook the fact that a treacherous storm was raging and the disciples feared the boat would sink. Maybe it was a choice between a sinking boat and walking on the water with Jesus? Now the water walk seems like the safest alternative! Maybe without the storm Peter would never have walked on the water.

What storms are you facing in your life? Have you considered that God allows them to rage around us so we'll take that step of faith and move towards Him? Maybe God is trying to get you out of your comfort zone and draw closer to Him. Jesus didn't stop the storm, but He was there for Peter. He may not be stopping your storm but He is certainly there for you, too. Take a risk and get out of the boat!

When Peter looked on Jesus, he walked on water. He was amazed! Surely he knew he couldn't do it on his own! It took faith and obedience! Peter didn't get very far until he started to look at the raging waters- his circumstances and started to sink.

When we get our focus off Jesus and focus on our circumstances it is easy to be fearful and sink! We have two options: Keep your mind on the purposes, praise and potential in Jesus and rise above the fear or succumb to the destructive emotion of our fears and sink under them. Which are you doing? When you start sinking reach out to Jesus like Peter did. The best part is that Jesus reached out to Peter first! He didn't turn His back on Peter because Peter failed. He didn't leave him to struggle alone. He immediately forgave Peter and helped him back up. He'll do the same with you and me as well!

Why is it that Jesus expects us to do the impossible? He calls us to do what we can't do in our own strength – like telling Peter to walk on water! Why didn't He just stop the storm? Or come over to the boat Himself? Either would have been easy for Him. Walking on the water was impossible for Peter! Jesus calls us to do the impossible – because He knows if we can do it by ourselves, we will. It's only when we need His help that we turn to Him. To the extent we can do something ourselves, we will!

When Peter got out of the boat and walked towards Jesus, Peter was leaving his place of security to take a risk into the unknown. The boat was going down, but as a fisherman it was familiar place. Even though it wasn't safe at the moment, it still was hard to crawl out. That is what Jesus wanted him to do. Before Peter could reach Jesus' side, he had to leave his place of safety. The same is true of us. We have to leave the walls of comfort and security we build around ourselves and step out in faith to come closer to Him. Jesus didn't come to Peter in the boat. He challenged Peter to leave and come to Him. The challenge for us is the same. Even though our hope and security in material things and people may not be working it still can be unsettling to leave it for the unknown. Our only true sanctuary is in Jesus. (November 2, 2020 Doylestown, PA)

Leave your poor substitute. It's sinking anyway! Get out of the boat and reach out to Jesus.

2 Corinthians 5:7 We walk by faith, not by sight.

Proverbs 3:5-6 Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will make your paths straight.

BLOG 16: WE ARE NOT ALONE (JOSHUA 1)

Some times when I would travel and speak in India I felt very much alone. I was in a different culture with a language I didn't know. It was at these times, though, that God Himself felt more present than ever. The same was true of Joshua.

He was totally overwhelmed with the seemingly impossible task of defeating impregnable Jericho in order to enter the Promised Land. Nothing in his military experience had prepared him for such a challenge, yet God had led them to enter the land right where Jericho stood. So, Joshua went outside the camp by himself to think and pray. Being alone was appropriate for he felt alone with the load of his responsibility resting only on him. No one else could share the burden; no one could really understand just how he was feeling and what he was going through.

I can identify with those feelings and I'm sure you can as well. Even when surrounded by many people, we can feel very alone in the challenge we are facing. You, too, face situations in your family or with friends, at work, in health or financial matters that are yours alone. No one who isn't in your situation can really understand, and even then each situation is different. No 2 are totally alike. So, we feel alone. That's how Joshua felt.

What happened, though, was that God Himself appeared to Joshua to reassure him that he wasn't alone (Joshua 5:13). God had promised he would not be alone (Joshua 1:5). He has repeated that exact same promise to us as well (Hebrews 13:5; Deuteronomy 31:6-8, I Kings 8:57). When I share this truth with the pastors God applies it to my heart as well. We are not alone. I am not alone. You are not alone. Yet our enemy would do all he can to convince us we are alone and that God is not with us.

Remembering that we are not alone is absolutely crucial to moving ahead in faith. If not we will become discouraged and defeated. The truth of the matter is that we are not alone. Never. God is always with us. He is with us every moment. He is with you wherever you are every moment. We never need to feel alone. Never! (November 9, 2020 Doylestown, PA)

Jeremiah 29:13 You will seek Me and you will find Me when you seek Me with all your heart.

Joshua 1:5 No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you.

Hebrews 13:5 God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."

When do you tend to feel most alone? Memorize one of the above verses today. Meditate n it all day. Remember it all day long. Share this truth with others.

BLOG 17: WE ARE NOT IN CHARGE (JOSHUA 2)

When Joshua faced the first great hurdle as the leader of the Jews he felt alone, but God appeared to him to reassure him he was not alone (see the last blog). He had a second truth to teach him.

When Joshua went out alone before attacking Jericho, God appeared to him to reassure him he was not alone. When Joshua asked who He was, He said He was the commander of God's army (Joshua 5:14). He reassured Joshua He wasn't in the Jews army or Jericho's army. He was in God's army. In fact, He was the head of the army because He was God Himself. You see, Joshua thought he was the commander of the army, but really God is showing Joshua that He outranks Joshua. So, Joshua is not the highest-ranking officer. God Himself outranks Him and is taking command from Joshua. Joshua only thought it was his battle when in reality it is God's battle.

As I write this, I am reminded that I am not in charge of my life or ministry. I must remember God is in control, even over what I say and do. He puts the words into my mind and I speak them with my mouth.

Your ministry is God's ministry, your church is His church. He is the Great Shepherd (Hebrews 13:20), the sheep belong to Him, not you. He promises that He will build His church (Matthew 16:18). It is His work, not ours. That is great reassurance for all of us. I am not in charge. He is. I need not worry, get upset or try to force things. I am not alone, and I am not in charge. Neither are you. (November 16, 2020 Doylestown, PA)

Joshua 5:13-15 Now when Joshua was near Jericho, he looked up and saw a man standing in front of him with a drawn sword in his hand. Joshua went up to him and asked, "Are you for

us or for our enemies?" 14 "Neither," he replied, "but as commander of the army of the Lord I have now come." Then Joshua fell facedown to the ground in reverence, and asked him, "What message does my Lord have for his servant?" 15 The commander of the Lord's army replied, "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy." And Joshua did so.

Are you a person who wants/needs to be in control? If so, confess your lack of faith in God because it is a sin. Give God control of your life, especially what you fear and worry about. Don't think it is up to you. You are not in charge. Thank God for that fact!

BLOG 18: EACH MINISTRY IS SPECIAL (JOSHUA 3)

I've been sharing lessons with you from the life of Joshua, lessons which God spoke to my heart as I shared them with the pastors I was teaching. First, God showed Joshua that he was not alone, then reminded him that he was not in charge. God had another lesson for Joshua before giving instructions as to how to have victory over Jericho. He told Joshua to take off his sandals because the place he was standing was holy (Joshua 5:15).

God wanted Joshua to be sure he understood that the assignment he was being given was a sacred trust. It was sacred because it was assigned by God. Every ministry assignment God gives is special and sacred. We sometimes judge the importance of what we are given by God to do by comparing it to what others do. Then we start thinking someone else has an assignment that is more important than ours. We feel they are better than us. And those who don't seem to be doing much for God we may look down on as not being as good as us. God was teaching Joshua that his assignment was sacred because it was from God and for no other reason.

If God has entrusted you with an assignment it is sacred. The duties of a wife and mother are no less special than those of a large church pastor. All are sacred because all come from God and are individually assigned. If I feel my contribution to the kingdom is less because I pastor a small church, then I am denying the sacredness of what God has anointed for me to do. If you are a wife, a mother, an employee, a teenager or wherever you find yourself in life and God has given you opportunities to minister to others in any way in His name, that is a sacred ministry.

The implications of this truth are astounding. Whatever God has given you to do for Him is important and special. There are no 'little' assignments. What you do for Him is as precious in His sight as what I do, and what I do is as special as the pastor of the largest church in the USA. So don't feel your work isn't important, or noticed, or appreciated by God. Don't judge or compare one Christian with another. And especially don't underestimate the value of the unique contribution God has given YOU in His Kingdom. (November 23, 2020 Doylestown, PA)

1 Corinthians 12:12-26 The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. 13 For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body — whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free — and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. 14 Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. 15 If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. 16 And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? 18 But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. 19 If they were all one part, where would the body be? 20 As it is, there are many parts, but one body. 21 The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" 22 On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, 23 and the

parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, 24 while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, 25 so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. 26 If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.

What is the unique contribution you make in the name of Jesus? Whose lives do you touch? What service do you do for Jesus' sake? Thank Him for these sacred opportunities. If you have not seen it as very important, ask God to forgive you for devaluing what He says is special. Recommit yourself to doing the best you can in each responsibility He has given you in life.

BLOG 19: WE HAVE ALREADY WON THE BATTLE (JOSHUA 4)

God has been teaching Joshua as he begins his service to God as the leader of the Jews (Joshua 5:13-15). As Joshua faced the impossible task of defeating impregnable Jericho, God appeared to him and assured him that he wasn't alone, he wasn't in charge, and the assignment the Lord gave him was sacred. There is one more truth God taught him – the battle has already been won (Jericho 6:1-2).

Joshua 6:1-2 says: "Now Jericho was tightly shut up because of the Israelites. No one went out and no one came in. Then the Lord said to Joshua, 'See, I have delivered Jericho into your hands, along with its king and its fighting men.'" Not only is the battle God's, but it has already been won! All Joshua had to do was listen to God's word and obey His orders, and God would do the rest. They were strange orders, walking around the city, making noise and all the walls falling down and the soldiers dying with no casualties to the Jews. That's not the way you'd think a battle would be fought!

But God has strange directions for us to win our battles today: forgive our enemies, show love to those who hurt us, be kind to those who are unkind to us, in order to be first, we must be last, etc. Yet God's directions are always right.

The battle belongs to God and He is already the victor, but that doesn't mean we don't have to fight. Joshua couldn't stay in his tent; he had to battle the enemy. All our battles will ultimately end in victory. Some may come quickly; others will take a lifetime. Jesus promises that He will build His church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it (Matthew 16:18).

Our sheep are not ours, but Jesus' sheep. He will fight for them. Ultimately, He will have victory, and the church will prevail. The battle can be long and hard, but we must keep fighting because we know there will be victory for us and for the church. So don't be discouraged, don't give up, and don't fear defeat. The enemy cannot defeat us if we keep following Jesus. Only we can defeat ourselves. I must keep pressing ahead during good days and bad, when victorious or struggling. So must you. The battle has already been won. And we are the victors! (Hyderabad, January 27, 2014) (November 30, 2020 Doylestown, PA)

Deuteronomy 20:3-4 He shall say: "Hear, O Israel, today you are going into battle against your enemies. Do not be fainthearted or afraid; do not be terrified or give way to panic before them. For the Lord your God is the one who goes with you to fight for you against your enemies to give you victory."

This was a verse God gave me the first time I came to India and it still means a lot to me. Think about what battles you are fighting now. Write them down so you can clearly see them as battles. What difference does it make that God has already promised victory, even if it might not come for a while? How should that affect you in how you face these things today?

BLOG 20: HOW TO FEED GOD'S SHEEP

As pastors and church leaders God expects us to know His Bible. It teaches us how to know Him better and grow spiritually. It shows us how He wants us to lead our people. It is very important for us to nourish our spirit.

The Bible is our tool. Men who work have tools. Farmers have tools, doctors have tools, carpenters have tools. The better a man can use his tools the better he can do his work. The better we know God's Word, the better we can pastor. We learn the Bible to feed our spirit and we use it to feed our people

One of the most important things a shepherd does is to make sure the sheep have good food and water. If they don't have these what happens to the sheep? They need to be fed to produce wool and more sheep. Making sure they are fed is a very important part of a shepherd's job.

Are your people growing and reproducing other sheep? Are they spiritually healthy? God expects us to feed his sheep.

Jesus told Peter something 3 times while they talked after His resurrection; what did He tell Peter? "Feed my sheep." Three times He said this because it was that important. If we want to hear God say "Well done good and faithful servant" we must feed His sheep.

Feeding the sheep means to teach them God's Word. Some pastors are so busy during the week they don't take time to prepare a sermon. They get up on Sunday and read a few Bible verses, then they close their Bible and talk to the people. They tell the people the same thing they have already told them before. The people only hear their words, not words from the Bible. Is that feeding the sheep?

Do you have a wife who is a good cook? Does she make food you like to eat? What if you came home hungry and wanted to eat, but she didn't make any food? What if she tells you she has been busy and didn't have time to make food? But here is some old food from yesterday, you can eat it. Then the next meal she does the same thing, and the meal after that. Would you like that? Why not? That's not a good way to feed you, is it?

Is that the way you feed your people? You give them the same old thing without preparing something new? They won't like that anymore than you do, and they won't grow. You need to feed them like you want your wife to feed you.

Your wife plans ahead what she is going to make for you. She puts in a lot of work so it is fresh and nourishing. She makes it so it tastes good and gives you good health. That's what you need to do when you feed your people.

When Paul preached, he would take a passage of scripture and explain it to the people. Then he would apply it to their needs. Ezra did the same thing.

You need to start early in the week to prepare your sermon. Pick a book you would like to teach the people and start studying it. Read the first verse and think about it. Pray and ask God to help you understand what it means. You can look up references in your Bible or use a commentary. Write down what He is teaching you. Then pray and ask God to show you how this applies to your life. Write that down as well. When you are done with one verse go on to the next verse and do the same thing

Then when Sunday comes you use your notes to teach the people what the first verse means. You tell them how it applies to them. You can use stories or examples from the Bible or life to explain it. Then you do the same with the next verse. Don't do too many verses in a sermon. It is better to

do a few verses well than try to do too many. The next Sunday you do the same thing with the next verses. In this way they will be learning God's Word. You will be teaching God's words, not just your words. The people will learn new things, not just the same thing over and over. It will give them something to think about and practice during the week. They will grow spiritually. When you do this you will be feeding your people. They will grow and become more like Jesus. (December 7, 2020 Doylestown, PA)

1 Peter 2:2-3 Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.

John 21:17 Jesus said Jesus said, "Feed my sheep."

Are the people you lead growing in their knowledge of the Bible? Are you feeding their spiritual needs? Are you a good steward of God's Word or do you neglect it and not spend as much time learning it as you should?

BLOG 21: RUNNING ON AN EMPTY TANK

Sometimes when I get busy running errands, I forget to put gas in my car. I have too much to do to stop so I'll just do it 'later.' You know what can happen then. It's like being too busy to eat, so you just skip meal after meal. That'll catch up with you as well. The same is true spiritually as well. It's easy to be so busy that we neglect regular time alone with the Lord. We deal with spiritual things all day. We plan Bible studies, pray with people and give Biblical counsel. But unless we have a daily intake of God's Word and a time of close personal connection with God, we will soon be running on empty. We can be so focused on what we DO that we start to neglect who we ARE. Then we start to become discouraged, drained, impatient and frustrated. It's because we are trying to operate without the proper fuel. Let God fill you with His presence. But that takes time, quality time – as does any worthwhile relationship. It takes time talking and listening. We don't want to become like the religious rulers in Jesus' day – so busy doing godly acts that they missed out on their personal connection with God. Remember, it's all about relationship, and that means our own relationship with God.

How old were you when you started studying the Bible? When did you first learn how to study the Bible for yourself? Paul tells us that Timothy knew the Scriptures from the time he was an infant (2 Timothy 3:15). He affirms that the Word is profitable for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness. These four uses of Scripture form a good outline for personal Bible study. If your own method of learning the Bible is getting a bit stale, why not try something fresh for a bit of a change. Follow Paul's outline to Timothy and perhaps you will discover some brand-new insight into God's Word. (December 14, 2020 Doylestown, PA)

TEACHING: Ask yourself what the passage you are studying says about God. What do I learn about His character, purpose or power? What does it say about others and the temptations or trials they face? What does it say about ME? Is there any insight into my own sins or struggles?

REBUKING: As you think about the truths you have read, is there any place where you are falling short? If so, where? Why is this happening? Is this sin a root problem, or a symptom of a deeper problem? For example, you may find yourself critical of others. Is criticalness the root problem, or could it be that someone has unfairly criticized you and you are having a hard time forgiving.

CORRECTING: If you see a sin in the passage you are studying, what should be done to correct it? In other words, what is the opposite of the sin? What action or plan will you be taking to correct the problem?

TRAINING IN RIGHTEOUSNESS: Now that you have seen where you fall short and what you need to do to correct that, what do you need to do to stay on track? How can you make this change a part of your life?

While not all passages will fall into this pattern (promises, for example will not work here), this can be a good way to study Proverbs, Paul's epistles or even the statements made by Jesus. Howard Hendricks says the only wrong method is the one you use all the time. So, if you're looking for a fresh slant to your Bible study, why not try the Timothy method.

2 Timothy 3:16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,

Psalms 19:7-8 The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes.

John 5:39 You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me,

Think of some times when you had a great time of Bible study – what made those times so meaningful?

What are some of the strengths of your current personal Bible study method?

What are some of the weaknesses of your present way of studying the Bible? What can you do about them?

If you've discovered something that helps make your Bible time more meaningful please let us know. We'd love to share some of these in future blogs.

BLOG 22: HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE

A good detective, a scientist, a doctor and a Bible scholar all share one trait in common – they know how to ask the right questions. If the correct questions aren't asked, it's impossible to come up with the right answers. That's especially true in Bible study. The most important step in Bible study, and the one we are often weakest on, is observing a passage. Our application is only as good as our interpretation, and our interpretation is dependent on our observation. The best way to observe is to ask questions. If the author of the passage you are studying were sitting next to you, what questions would you ask him about what he wrote? If you were one of the original recipients of the letter or Bible book, what would you need to know to accurately understand what was written?

To begin a good Bible study, get a pencil and paper (or computer) and write down as many questions as you can about the passage. Some may seem very simple and taken for granted, but write them down anyway. Other questions will never be answered, but still write them down. Just write down every question you can think of. You don't try to answer the questions. That comes when you do your interpretation of the passage. Now you list questions. What does a word or phrase mean? (What exactly was the life of a shepherd like, Psalm 23:1) Look for cause and effect, the reason something happened. (Why did Jesus come to earth, Luke 19:10)? Or the question could be about the process in which something happened. (How do we know about God's power, Ephesians 1:19-20)?

Then, too, you can ask questions about an attribute, person, place or idea. (For example, what was John the Baptist really like?) Questions about how things compare are also insightful. Asking about the differences or similarities between people, objects, events or aspects of the verse are helpful. (In John 1:17 you could ask, what is the difference between law and grace?) Finally, you

can ask questions which classify ideas, events, attributes, etc. (You might ask what different kinds of people followed Jesus if you are studying a passage that speaks about His followers.) Be creative and imaginative. No question is a 'bad' question. Ask any and all that you can. Your product will only be as good as your process, and this is the key to having a good start to your process.

When it comes time to interpret the passage you do so by answering the questions you've asked. Don't flippantly and quickly just jot down what you already know – you aren't learning anything new then, are you? Instead, search for a more complete and detailed answer than you already have. Pray for wisdom first. Then use footnotes and commentaries or any resources you have on hand. But remember, you can't rush the time you spend observing if you want to have a meaningful study. And asking questions is the key to good observation. (December 21, 2020 Doylestown, PA)

Jeremiah 5:21 Hear this, you foolish and senseless people, who have eyes but do not see, who have ears but do not hear:

Ezra 7:10 For Ezra had devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the Lord, and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel.

2 Timothy 2:15 Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.

Open your Bible to a verse you have recently studied and start writing down some questions. Start with simple who, what, when, why, where and how questions, then go deeper.

If the author was with you, what questions would you ask Him? If Jesus Himself were here, what questions would you like to have answered to better understand the passage?

Try doing this with a mate or friend. It's an enjoyable way to do Bible study together. Creativity feeds creativity.

BLOG 23: GOD REWARDS FAITHFUL SERVICE

Trying to live for God can be difficult. Ask Isaiah or Jeremiah or even John the Baptist. They were persecuted, some even killed. Sometimes it seems our words and witness aren't making any impact. Results can be slim. But often seeds are planted and the results don't show until much later. Stay faithful anyway. Discouragement, that often-used weapon of Satan, can become a constant companion. God in His mercy does allow us to see glimpses of changes in lives we touch, and that's great.

Often it seems that no one really understands and appreciates what we do except our mates, and they often have their own struggles to deal with. It's important to remember that God knows what we strive to do, even if it doesn't always seem to succeed.

We know in our minds that God just wants us to be faithful in what we do and leave the results to Him. It is His job to change hearts and lives, not ours. We are to faithfully serve, to minister for Him. That's what He looks at – our faithfulness.

God doesn't compare us with each other (thankfully!), He just compares us with ourselves. If we are doing our best to faithfully serve Him then He is thrilled with us. God doesn't evaluate us by the results we produce, but by the faithfulness of our service. After all, the servant with 2 talents received the same "Well done" from the master as the servant with ten! (Matthew 25:21-23)

Anyone can serve God when things seem to be going great, but to faithfully serve when we don't see the results brings greater pleasure to God and reward to us. Write that on a piece of paper

and put it over your desk: "God rewards my faithful service, no matter if there are good results or no results." (December 28, 2020 Doylestown, PA)

Matthew 25:19-23 *"After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. 20The man who had received the five talents brought the other five. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with five talents. See, I have gained five more.' 'His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!' 'The man with the two talents also came. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with two talents; see, I have gained two more.' 'His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'"*

Are you evaluating your effectiveness by the fruit of your ministry?

Are you discouraged with what external outcomes you can observe?

Thank God for not appraising your effectiveness by visible results but by your faithfulness.

Remember those in your own past whose faithful service influenced you (perhaps a thank-you to them would be greatly appreciated by them).

Recommit yourself to faithfully serve Him even when there are no visible results.

BLOG 24: LET GOD'S WORD STUDY YOU

When I was a young boy, I remember loving baby food. Peaches were my personal favorite. I didn't think anything could ever beat their taste. Then when my own children were eating baby food I thought I'd treat myself to a taste of their peaches. Needless to say, I was very disappointed. What had once seemed like such a wonderful food item turned out to be bland and almost tasteless. What caused this alteration? The food didn't change, but my taste did.

I hope by now you know where I'm going spiritually with this. The more we mature in the faith the more we need spiritual meat. Processed and simplified Bible truths are OK, but we need something deeper and stronger to feed our growing souls. Unfortunately, many Christians stick to the simple stuff. They read devotionals and use lesson plans that are about the Bible, but don't get into it themselves. They let others chew their food for them instead of chewing it themselves.

Sure, we are busy, but there is no quick way to take in the truths of God's Word. It takes time to read and observe a passage of Scripture, looking for things you haven't noticed before. There's no fast way to unearth the gems of the Bible which only come to those who do careful and thorough interpretation. And only precise and insightful application can cause the truths we have been studying to become part of our daily lives.

When we rush, we try to do application before we carefully observe and thoroughly interpret, we miss the real meaning of the passage. That's like walking into a doctor's office and after a quick look at you having the doctor write a prescription and send you on your way. A good doctor observes the patient, then interprets what he discovers. Only then is diagnosis accurate and helpful. We want a doctor to take his time and do a good job when checking us, and God wants us to do the same when handling His Holy Word.

When we interpret a passage, we study God's Word, but when we apply it to our lives, we let God's Word study us! Very little that we do in a day will be taken with us to heaven – but what we learn in the Bible and its application in our lives will be ours eternally. Don't spend all your time on

daily activities, invest some in eternity. Spend some quality time in the Bible today. (January 4, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

1 Corinthians 3:1-3 Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly — mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men?

2 Timothy 2:15 Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.

Have you ever tried journaling your Bible study, writing down the personal applications you come up with? Try it today. It'll help you have better results and will be worth the time.

When is the last time you studied a passage just for your own edification, not for use in a lesson or message?

Which step of Bible study – observation, interpretation or application, are you weakest on? What can you do to improve in that area?

Do you find yourself too busy to have quality devotional time with God each day?

Do you find yourself spiritually empty without anything new to share with others?

What's your plan? When do you try to schedule regular time with God?

What gives you the most difficulty in spending time with God each day? Is it business, laziness, unconfessed sin, poor priorities.... ?

Who is your accountability partner? Who will ask you the tough questions about your relationship with God? If you don't have someone (and your mate doesn't count) then get someone now.

BLOG 25: DON'T FEAR THE STORMP

There are many problems facing us today. The corona virus has brought illness and death to many. Often there is not enough money for food. Persecution is increasing. In addition, we often face problems in our lives and families.

When we focus on these things, we can become anxious and fearful. Even Christians can get discouraged, especially when they expect God to make it all go away and He doesn't. Yet Jesus allows these things to happen in our lives so we can learn to trust Him. The same thing happened to the disciples in Jesus' day.

Many people followed Him for healing and free food. Jesus challenged them to become disciples and serve Him, not expect Him to serve them. He told them there was a cost of following Him (Matthew 8:18-22). Then He gave them a test to strengthen their faith.

Jesus got in a boat with His disciples and immediately fell into a deep sleep (Matthew 8:23-27). Jesus was a human being just like us (Hebrews 4:15-16). He knows what we go through because He experienced it Himself. He was so tired even a terrible storm didn't wake Him up. The storm was so bad the waves swept over the boat. The disciples became afraid and thought they would die.

Jesus was testing their faith. They were in a hopeless situation and couldn't do anything to help themselves. They turned to Jesus for help, but did so out of fear, not faith. "You of little faith, why are you afraid?" Jesus said to them (Matthew 8:26). When we have little faith, we have big fear. If we have big faith, then our fear will be little. We can't have both fear and faith, just one or the other.

Sometimes it seems like Jesus is asleep and not answering our prayers. He wants us to learn to trust Him when storms come in life. The disciples had promises of God's presence and protection, so they had no reason to be afraid (Psalm 118:6; Joshua 1:9; Isaiah 40:31). We, too, have God's promised provision and personal involvement in our lives (Philippians 4:19, 13; Hebrews 13:5; Romans 8:28; 2 Corinthians 12:9).

Jesus spoke to the storm – imagine doing such a thing! The storm obeyed and immediately disappeared. Here we see the God side of Jesus as well. He is both man and God. As man, He knows what we go through, and as God, He is in control of all that happens.

That doesn't mean He will always do whatever we want to make our life easy and smooth. No good parent does that for their children. He could have prevented the storm from every happening, but He knew the disciples needed the opportunity to stretch their faith. He allows storms in our lives for the same reason. We need to see them as opportunities to trust and respond in faith, believing His promises in His Word. (January 11, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

My God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:19

I will never leave you or forsake you. Hebrews 13:5

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. Romans 8:28

I can do everything through him who gives me strength. Philippians 4:13

My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. 2 Corinthians 12:9

How do you respond to the storms in your life right now? Which rules in your heart: faith or fear? Read the verses above. Write some of them down to memorize and say whenever trials come. They will help you keep your faith strong and your fear weak.

BLOG 26: MINISTRY IS TEAMWORK

Paul accomplished many things for God, but he didn't do it alone. God provided people like Luke, Barnabas and Timothy to help him. Every Christian needs a Luke, a Barnabas and a Timothy in their lives.

As a young pastor, Timothy was trained by Paul. A 'Paul' is someone more mature and experienced to give us wisdom and guidance. Each servant of God needs to know someone more mature in the faith and learn from them. Paul himself had Luke as a mature mentor to travel with him and give guidance when needed.

Paul had Barnabas as a friend and companion. A 'Barnabas' is a peer to share common experiences with as we journey through life together. Do you have a friend to share your struggles and victories, someone you can go to for help or prayer?

Finally, Paul taught younger pastors, like Timothy and Titus, to build his life into. A 'Timothy' is someone younger in the faith to advise and help grow as a person. We need to look for those with potential to minister and help them in any way we can.

We need all three of these in our lives. We need younger people whom we can train, friends our age we can depend on and someone older and more experienced than us to help guide us.

I have some men who are experienced in life whom I can go to for guidance and advice when needed. I have some friends that are in my same stage of life to share my problems and successes. And I have younger men in ministry that I can encourage and help teach.

We all need a Paul to hold us accountable, to ask the tough questions, to offer insight, to give us encouragement and direction. Remember, the lone sheep gets picked off by the lion, so we need to connect closely to those who have had experience fighting the lion. (I Peter 5:8) Components of life such as business, pride, fear of disclosure, or moving around a lot, make it hard to find and keep a 'Paul' relationship going, but it is well worth the trouble. It will take a bit of sacrifice and vulnerability. It requires time and honesty. But it is essential for you to be all God created you to be as a person and servant. Mentoring is important and effective. Even Paul needed a 'Paul' in his life! (January 18, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

2 Timothy 1:3 I thank God, whom I serve, as my forefathers did, with a clear conscience, as night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers. 4Recalling your tears, I long to see you, so that I may be filled with joy. 5I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also. 6For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. 7For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.

Exodus 18:13-14 The next day Moses took his seat to serve as judge for the people, and they stood around him from morning till evening. 14 When his father-in-law saw all that Moses was doing for the people, he said, "What is this you are doing for the people? Why do you alone sit as judge, while all these people stand around you from morning till evening?"

Who is your 'Timothy'? Who are you taking the time to really disciple in the faith?

Who is your 'Barnabas'? Who is your closest ministry friend (not mate) with whom you can share your victories as well as your defeats?

Who is your 'Luke'? What mature believer have you developed a mentoring relationship with so you can regularly connect with them to learn from their wisdom and experience?

If you lack any of these make that a regular prayer request.

What can you do to deepen your 'Paul' relationship and get the most out of it?

BLOG 27: USE YOUR SPIRITUAL GIFT

So you're gifted – at least that's what they tell you. Maybe you understand spiritual gifts, but don't know which gifts you have. How can you better understand and make the most of the gifts He has given you?

You must practice using your gifts by serving God in the ways that are best and easiest for you. That means functioning in the role God has assigned to you, doing what you are burdened to do and ministering as best you can in ways that are available to you. Even the most accomplished swimmer wasn't world-class the first time he got into a pool. Just do what you can and you'll discover what is easiest for you and where you are most successful and where you are not.

When I was a young pastor, I tried being an evangelist, but it was very hard for me to talk to people I didn't know about their faith. I wasn't good at it and struggled. My wife is much better at that than I am. I loved to teach the Bible and people wanted to come and learn from me. They also came to me for adv their problems. God didn't give me the gift of evangelism, but He did gift me to teach and counsel. No one has all the gifts. Find and use the gifts God has given you. Don't compare yourself with others. A spiritual gift is something you enjoy doing (have a desire/burden to do) and something you are able to do – maybe not as well as you'd like but certainly better than the average Christian.

Don't limit what God is doing in you. God gives us a variety of spiritual gifts, a special 'mix' that is unique to each of us. There are 3 basic colors (red, yellow and blue) but thousands of combinations can be made from them. That's how it is with spiritual gifts. We each have a unique combination of gifts that blend with our personality and spiritual development. That makes each of us unique. Still, it can be good to try and find someone who has at least some of the gift mix you see in yourself and have that person mentor you. If it is a local person you can spend time with them. If it is someone in the Bible, church history or on the national scene today you can still study their life to see what you can learn to apply to your own growth.

Remember that God will gift you, but He will also stretch you. As I said, my primary spiritual gift is teaching, but I've always been shy and uncomfortable speaking to groups of people. I must still speak to people about their faith when God leads me to do so, but I spend most of my time studying and teaching.

The best advice I can give you as to how to develop your gift is to use it. Focus on it in your ministry. Be alert to opportunities to use it for God's glory. Remember it is His gift for His glory. We use it for Him, not for ourselves. (January 25, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

1 Peter 4:10 Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.

Ephesians 4:11-13 It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

1 Corinthians 12 Now about spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant. ... There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit.. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.

If you were describing your gift mix, what spiritual gifts would you say you have? What is the balance between them (which is the main gift, which supplement other gifts, etc.)?

What would your mate or close friends say about the list you have written?

What can you do to further develop the gifts god has given you?

Is there any way you are holding back in using your gifts, any way you are resisting the way God is stretching you through using your gift? Apologize to God now and make yourself totally available to Him.

BLOG 28: THE SPIRITUAL GIFT OF PASTOR

One of my favorite titles for a pastor is 'shepherd.' The term speaks of tender, loving care, of responsibility and oversight for those

who would not prosper without it. A shepherd's is someone with a caregiver's heart, someone who has others they oversee and build into spiritually. It could be a pastor, youth worker, children's helper, mother or father.

Are you concerned about the spiritual needs of the people around you? Do you long to see them grow in the Lord? Do you have a burden and desire to help them, encourage them, rejoice with them, love them and assist them in any way possible? Do you give of yourself because of a concern

for the ones you are ministering to? A shepherd must love his sheep in order to lay down his life for his sheep, and pastors lay down their lives for their teenage sheep every day.

The gift of pastor or shepherd is the special ability that God gives to certain members of the body of Christ to assume a long-term personal responsibility for the spiritual welfare of a group of believers. So yes, youth pastors and children's' pastors are definitely pastors.

The Greek word translated 'pastor' refers to the caring, protecting feeding and leading of sheep. Jesus calls Himself the "Good Shepherd." Since He is not physically on earth, He calls some of us to be assistant shepherds to help care for His sheep. This is a great privilege and a wonderful calling. There is none higher.

But it also entails responsibility and accountability. After all, they are HIS sheep, not ours. He owns them, not us. He brings growth, we are just the channel He sometimes uses. When our sheep rejoice, we rejoice. But when they stray or are in pain, we hurt with them and for them. In that way we represent Christ and show in a very real way just what Jesus is like. Those we shepherd should see a glimpse of the Great Shepherd in us. What a wonderful privilege and great challenge that is! (February 1, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

Ephesians 4:11 It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers,

1 Peter 5:2-3 Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers — not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.

1 Timothy 4:12-15 Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity. 13 Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching. Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through a prophetic message when the body of elders laid their hands on you. Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress.

Take some time to identify the gift of pastor (shepherd) in your life. Write down your thoughts and burdens for those around you.

What can you do to be a better shepherd, to be more like the Lord Jesus Christ in how you care for your sheep.

Every sheep needs a shepherd. Who is your shepherd? Who do you look to and go to? If you're trying to function without a shepherd of your own you like a sheep trying to make it on his own. That just doesn't work for long.

Spend some time thanking God for the wonderful privilege He has given you of being a shepherd of some of His sheep!

BLOG 29: WHY DOES GOD ALLOW SUFFERING?

One of Satan's best arguments to turn people against God is the issue of suffering. If God is good, how could He allow suffering? If there is a God at all, how could He allow so much pain in the world?

The question as to why some have so much pain has no clear answer. Why does God allow people to suffer and struggle? How can a God of love allow so much evil to continue? God doesn't

defend Himself or explain what He allows. He gives mankind a free will choice. Sin and the resulting evil are the natural consequences or turning from Him. Still, innocent people suffer.

Some think that either God isn't in control of everything or He isn't good. Both of these are lies. We can't try to evaluate God's person and character by suffering in the world for He has proven His character and love by leaving heaven, becoming a man, living on earth, then going to cross to take on the punishment for every sin we would ever commit. That proves His love for us beyond a shadow of a doubt. He definitely is good. If it weren't for the cross, we would all deserve eternity in hell from this moment on. So, anything less than hell shows us His grace and mercy. Why He seems to show more to some than others is not up to us to judge. God isn't accountable to us. We cannot stand in judgment of Him until we know all the facts as He knows them and see everything as well or better than He sees it. So, we trust in His character as revealed by His works in our life. We focus on the known, not the unknown.

Many things seem unfair to little children but they must trust their parents. Getting an injection from a doctor or having a pretty shiny knife taken away may seem to a child that a parent doesn't love them but a child doesn't have the perspective to truly view what is happening. We don't have God's perspective on life either. We depend on the fact that He is in sovereign control of everything and that that all He does is out of love for us. More than that we cannot know. (February 8, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

Romans 8:35-39 Who can keep us away from the love of Christ? Can trouble or problems? Can suffering wrong from others or having no food? Can it be because of no clothes or because of danger or war? 36 The Holy Writings say, "Because of belonging to Jesus, we are in danger of being killed all day long. We are thought of as sheep that are ready to be killed." 37 But we have power over all these things through Jesus Who loves us so much. 38 For I know that nothing can keep us from the love of God. Death cannot! Life cannot! Angels cannot! Leaders cannot! Any other power cannot! Hard things now or in the future cannot! 39 The world above or the world below cannot! Any other living thing cannot keep us away from the love of God which is ours through Christ Jesus our Lord.

What do you say when people ask how a loving God can allow innocent people to suffer? When are you most apt to doubt God's love and goodness? What have you learned from this blog that can help you better trust Him when you don't understand?

BLOG 30: DEMONS ATTACK THE FAMILY

Parents have a great effect on their children. This happens in two ways. One is by example and influence. Children learn sins from their parent's example and that gives opening to demonizing. The second way is when demons who have access to a parent claim access to the child, too. When a demon has access to a person, he also claims right to all that person has, including their children. The Bible says God "punishes the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation" (Exodus 20:4-5; Deuteronomy 5:8-9; Exodus 34:6-7). The Bible says that children are affected by their parent's sins (Ezekiel 18:2) and this is one of the ways. In fact, this is one of the most common reasons people are demonized.

This is especially true of first-born males, for Satan seeks to claim them just as God does (Exodus 34:20). If you notice some of the same problems in your life as in your siblings, parents, aunts, uncles, or grandparents, it could very well be ancestral demonizing. The same demons have access to those in the family and do the same work in various members (not all members, that would be too obvious). They claim the blood line and use that as access.

Generational bondage is often discerned by the sin patterns that repeat from generation to generation. It is not uncommon to observe generations of abuse, addiction, hatred, superstition and fear, pride, control and manipulation, rejection, sexual sins and perversions, unbiblical religious beliefs, witchcraft, and rebellion etc. If you see some patterns in the symptoms or characteristics of demonizing in others in your family that could show ancestral access. That is why so often a boy who hates his father for beating his mother grows up to beat his own wife, or a child of an alcoholic becomes an alcoholic also.

Generational bondage can be broken by personally repenting of and confessing the sins of past generations. Claim the blood of Christ as stronger than your blood line and put that access under the blood of Jesus (Romans 5:15). Claim that you are a "new creation, old things have passed away, all things have become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17). Ask God to turn curses into blessing (Deuteronomy 23:5). Read the Bible. Following is a sample prayer. There is nothing

"Dear Jesus, please set me free from all evil influences coming from my parents and ancestors in the name of Jesus. I know I am a new creation in Christ. Old things have gone and all things have become new. I reject and disown all the sins of my ancestors. I reject any and every way in which Satan may claim access to my family or me. In Jesus' name I now command every demon that is working against me to flee my presence and my family and never to return. I now ask You, heavenly Father, to fill me with Your Holy Spirit. I submit my body as an instrument of righteousness, a living sacrifice, that I may glorify You in my life. All this I do in the name & authority of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen." (February 15, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

Deuteronomy 5:9 I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God. I punish the children, the grandchildren and the great-grandchildren for the sins of their fathers who hate Me.

Do you struggle with sin patterns or issue which your parents or grandparents also struggled with? Do you see patterns in your children that could come from you or your mate? If any of these are true, use the prayer above.

BLOG 31: BACK TO THE BASICS

Sometimes we go through periods in our lives when we struggle against a certain sin or problem. No matter what we do we don't seem to have victory over it. It could be something demonic attacking us, or it could be a sin or weakness in our flesh that allows it to continue. What can we do when that happens? What advice can we give others who are struggling but not having victory?

Whenever a sports team is struggling, they go back to the basics. When a business is foundering, they need to make sure they are following good basic using good basic business principles. The same is true in living the Christian life. When we are struggling and don't seem to be having victory, we need to go back to the basics the basics. These are some of the basics:

1. Spend time with Jesus every day, preferably in the morning when you first wake up. Read your Bible. Read through a whole Bible book, don't just jump around reading a few verses here and there every day. Ask God to teach you about Himself as you read. Then spend some time in prayer. Confess any sin you are aware of in your life which you haven't confessed before. Confession means agreeing with God that it is sin. Spend some time praising Him for Who and what He is and thanking Him for all He has done for you. Then pray for the needs of others and finally for your own needs.

2. Make sure there is no sin in your life. We all sin and continue to sin, that's why we confess it (1 John 1:9). But after confessing it, we must have victory over it. Sin breaks our fellowship with God

and opens us to attack by the enemy. Ask God to give you the strength to overcome these things (1 Corinthians 10:13). They may be hard at first for they can be long-time habits and the enemy doesn't want you to stop them, but they are important to stop. When you fail, confess it and start over again. This includes thoughts, attitudes, things you should be doing but aren't, good you do out of self-centered motives, unforgiveness, anger, jealousy and others.

3. Make sure you have close Christian fellowship with other believers. We all need worship, Bible study, fellowship and being with other Christians. Make sure you do this as often as you can. This is a great way of growing and gaining strength from others.

Start working on these 3 each day and you'll build a solid foundation with God. Consistent faithfulness weakens the work of the flesh and demons so you can begin to have victory again. It's important to grow spiritually and get stronger so that as these things fade you stay close to Him. (February 22, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

1 Thessalonians 4:1-3 Christian brothers, we ask you, because of the Lord Jesus, to keep on living in a way that will please God. I have already told you how to grow in the Christian life. The Lord Jesus gave us the right and the power to tell you what to do. God wants you to be holy. You must keep away from sin.

No matter how long you have been a Christian, it's always beneficial to keep going back to the basics. That's where the 'game' is won or lost. It's easy to slip in one or more areas. How are you doing in the things mentioned above? What improvements can you make?

BLOG 32: HUMILITY DOESN'T COME EASILY

One of the biggest battles I've had in my life has been my battle with pride. Pride can be a very subtle thing, but it is extremely dangerous! When I think I have it licked in one area of life it pops up in another. Not only that, but it's very hard for me to recognize it in my own life! I can see pride in others quite easily but am almost totally blinded to it in my own life.

It's important to have confidence in myself and enjoy who I am and what I've accomplished, but I can't become proud. Some people put themselves down all the time and that is still pride. It's an over-emphasis of self, self-centeredness and self-focus. There really isn't any difference between saying I'm better than others and saying I'm worse than others. The focus is still on me. And that is pride. Pride takes our eyes off Jesus and puts it on ourselves. Satan doesn't care if we think we are better than others or worse than others. Either way we are thinking about ourselves and not God.

The best I can do is to keep asking God to show me MY pride and to keep me from it. I truly don't want to be acting in pride. But I also am often unaware of it in its early stages. Daily I must ask God to keep me from it, to show it to me and to help me keep from it. Pride is something every pastor has to be careful of. A proud pastor is not a good testimony for Jesus because he is more concerned about himself than the people. Others can see his pride, even if he can't.

My wife has been my biggest help in pointing out pride to me before I recognize it. Wanting to always be right, reacting against constructive criticism, little critical things I say about others, attitudes to other ministries who compete with or do things differently than mine, these and others are subtle ways she can see pride before I see it. I need to confess it and ask God to change my heart.

Pride is at the root of all sin. Self-centeredness is the opposite of God-centeredness and other-centeredness. It's such a large part of our 'flesh' that we will have to deal with it as long as we live in these bodies. Thank God for His patience and mercy with us! (March 1, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

Prov 11:1 When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom.

Dan 4:37 Those who walk in pride he is able to humble.

Prov 16:18 Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.

Where or when is your biggest problem with pride? What can you do about it?

How do you respond to criticism? How critical are you of others who challenge you?

Ask your mate or best friend to honestly tell you where they see pride in your life. Ask them to tell you every time they see you reacting in pride.

Write down a detailed list of where pride manifests itself in your life. Pray about this every day for the next week.

BLOG 33: PERSEVERE LIKE MOSES

God always has a plan. His plan for the Jews was for them to come out of Egypt and into the Promised Land (Exodus 3:7-8; 23:31). God had a plan for Moses as well - to lead them from Egypt to the Promised Land (Acts 7:35-35). Moses passed God's plan on to the people, who wanted it to happen as well (Exodus 6:6-8). Moses didn't come up with his own plan for the people, nor did he try to make them like other nations. His goal was to follow God's plan for them.

God has a plan for each one of us as well (Jeremiah 29:11-14). It's of primary importance that we know it and follow it. Some leaders come up with their own plan and ask God to bless it and make it work. That seldom works. Instead, we must listen to His voice speaking inside us, revealing to us His plan for us and our life and ministry. Sometimes God puts a desire or burden in our hearts as a way of showing us what He wants us to do. It could be something major that will require our whole focus, or something smaller and simpler that doesn't take much time to accomplish. Other times He sends us opportunities like open doors to step through.

Following God's plan for our lives and ministry is not always easy. In fact, often it is very hard. There will be times when every leader wants to quit. Moses wanted to quit several times (Numbers 11:14-15). The burdens of ministry get heavy, opposition makes progress difficult and our energy gets low. I've had times when I wanted to quit and wished God would let me quit, but I always knew inside that isn't what He wanted and I didn't want to disobey Him, so I kept on. Each leader needs to learn that for himself or herself. Discouragement is a strong tool of Satan and we need to recognize it and not give in to it.

Moses lost his family when his wife and children left him and went back home (Exodus 4:24-26). The Jews were constantly complaining and criticizing what he was doing, even though he was obeying God's directions. Moses struggled with sin as we all do, and often was defeated by lack of control over his anger. He never did accomplish what God wanted – leading the Jews into the Promised Land. They just wandered for 40 years without growing or maturing. Those are the kinds of difficulties we face as church leaders today as well.

A lesson I learned from Moses was the importance of keeping my eyes on Jesus, not on circumstances around me or on the results of what I was trying to accomplish. God expects us to be faithful to Him (1 Corinthians 4:2). He doesn't look for great results from us, just faithfulness to what He assigns us. Jeremiah ministered for 50 years without one convert. Isaiah's ministry was much the same. So faithfully persevere. (March 8, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

When God looks at you, does he see someone who faithfully perseveres no matter what is happening? Are you quick to quit? Maybe you don't quit completely, but do you slow down and not serve as faithfully as you should? What things make it hardest for you to persevere? What can you do to keep faithfully serving despite these things?

BLOG 34: A GOOD WIFE IS WORTH MORE THAN RUBIES

God has blessed me with a wonderful wife or I wouldn't be where I am today. The longer I am married to her the more I appreciate the fine person she is and the more I thank God for such a special gift. Her behind-the-scenes work and faithfulness in my life and ministry is invaluable. Her faithful, deep prayer life accomplishes much for the Kingdom. She is my greatest prayer supporter.

Through her I have learned about God's unconditional love for me, because I've seen it demonstrated through her. I understand God can and will forgive me for she has done that time and time again. I can trust His faithfulness better because I see it lived out in her life.

Sometimes we think we could accomplish more in life if it weren't for the needs of our mates and families. We can resent the time they take. Perhaps I could have done more in quantity without my wife and family, but that wouldn't have lasted. The quality would have been far less, and even so I'm sure I would not have been able to minister for so many years without her.

Learning to meet her needs first doesn't take away from my ministry, in enriches it by maturing me. Whatever I put into her I get back many times over. Learning to put someone before myself hasn't been easy but has been essential in marriage and ministry.

The main lessons I've learned in life and the greatest spiritual and emotional growth I've experienced in life have come through my marriage. Things haven't always been easy or perfect. God uses our imperfections and our conflicts to teach me about humility, service, apologizing, forgiving and accepting forgiveness. These things can't be learned from a book, only from life.

Any time you take two people who are opposites and put them together there will be struggles. Male and female, introvert and extrovert, first born and baby of the family – we are as opposite as we can be. Then add a fully active sin nature in each of us and you have a sure formula for conflict. The major lessons of life, love and growth which I've learned have come through my marriage and family, not my ministry. By comparison ministry is easier. Others are easier to impress, they don't need as much from me and I can keep them at a safe distance. None of that is true of my wife and family.

The older I get and the further I go in life and ministry the more I realize that a good wife IS worth far more than rubies. And so is a good husband for you women reading this! (March 15, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

Ecclesiastes 31:10-12 A wife of noble character who can find? She is worth far more than rubies. Her husband has full confidence in her and lacks nothing of value. She brings him good, not harm, all the days of her life.

Ecclesiastes 31:30-31 Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised. Give her the reward she has earned, and let her works bring her praise at the city gate.

1 Peter 3:7 Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.

How much do you truly value your mate? How much do you resent the demands they put on you?

What do you truly sacrifice to meet your mate's needs? What more should you be doing?

When is the last time you told them how much they mean to you? Do so now (sometime today).

Spend some time in prayer thanking God for them and praying for their needs.

BLOG 35: GOD KEEPS HIS PROMISES

In recent blogs we've looked at many promises of God, but there are hundreds of others in the Bible. Tune your attention to notice them when you read or listen to the Bible. Make a list of ones that speak to you. Write them down for future use. They are good ammunition to have when you need them!

It's also good to keep a record of promises God has kept in your life. It'll encourage you and you'll praise Him for all He has done. He is faithful to keep His promises, you know. He cannot lie or break a promise (Hebrews 6:18). He kept them in the past. He promised Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and their descendants that He would return them to the land He promised and He did (Zechariah 8:7-8). They are there now.

God promised Noah He would save His family (Genesis 6:17-18; 9:9-17). He told Ishmael he would bless his descendants (Genesis 17:18-20). Moses was assured God would spare the Israelites if they obeyed Him (Exodus 19:5). All these promises were kept.

There are many Old Testament prophecies promising a coming Messiah or Savior. God's faithful promise was fulfilled in the New Testament when He sent Jesus to atone for our sins. God promised to send His Son (Matthew 1:21-22) to die for our sins (1 Thessalonians 5:9-10) and give us eternal life (John 3:18). Here are some other promises God has made to us. (March 22, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

I can do everything through Him who gives me strength. Philippians 4:13

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Phil. 4:7

My God will meet all your needs according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:19

My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness. 2 Corinthians 12:9

I will never leave you or forsake you. Hebrews 13:5

Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know. Jeremiah 33:3

This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. 1 John 5:14

God has been faithful to His people as well (1 Corinthians 1:9; 2 Thessalonians 3:3). He's been faithful to me. Has He kept His promises to you as well?

"God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it?" Numbers 23:19

"Forever, O Lord, your word is firmly fixed in the heavens. Your faithfulness endures to all generations; you have established the earth, and it stands fast." Psalm 119:89-90

"Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness." Lamentations 3:22-23

"Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful." Hebrews 10:23

Take a few minutes to think of God's faithfulness in your life. What fulfilled promises stand out in your mind?

BLOG 36: LEADERSHIP LESSONS FROM WOMEN

A GODLY LEADER GIVES WILLINGLY TO OTHERS In Genesis 24 we read about Abraham's servant seeking a bride for Isaac. He selected **Rebekah** because she was willing to give him a drink and water his camels as well. Leaders give when asked. In giving to others, we are really giving to Jesus, what we do for them we do for Him (Matthew 25:34-40). Godly leaders serve by putting the needs of others before their own. It was long, hard work for her to draw enough water out of a well for many thirsty camels, yet she did it willingly. It wasn't convenient or easy, and she didn't even know the person she was helping. Like Rebekah, a godly leader gives willingly to others.

Are you quick to willingly give to others in need? Will you go out of your way and sacrifice to help someone you don't know, someone who can't pay you back? Will you help someone even when no one knows the good deed you have done? This starts in your family, so do you sacrifice to willingly serve others in your family?

GODLY LEADER ENCOURAGES THEIR FOLLOWERS **Deborah** is the only female judge in Israel's history. She was one of the best judges. There weren't men willing to serve, so God used her. She worked with a male general who led their armies against their enemies. Deborah didn't fight in the battle, but she did encourage those who fought and urge them on by assuring them that victory was theirs (Judges 4). Godly leaders are cheerleaders for others. By their words and actions they encourage, motivate and inspire others to follow Jesus.

Do you go out of your way to encourage others? Do you say things to help them face what is going on in their lives? Do you criticize or condemn those struggling under heavy burdens, or do you do what you can to help them?

A GODLY LEADER HAS COURAGE In the book of Esther, **Esther**, an Israelite, became one of the king's wives. Haman opposed all Jews and tried to have them annihilated. He would have succeeded had it not been for Esther's courage to bring this to the attention of the king. Approaching the king without an invitation could result in certain death, but Esther risked it and God was with her. She was willing to do the right thing for her people. Since no one knew she was a Jew, she would have been spared, but she didn't take the easy way out. Leaders must have the courage to face anyone at any time. We may feel fear, but can't let it keep us from doing the right thing. (March 29, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

Do you have courage to do what is right for others, even if it puts you in great danger? Do you struggle with fear of what others may think of you or do to you? How can you have victory over your fear?

BLOG 37: MY FAMILY IS MY FIRST MINISTRY

As I look back on my life I have a perspective that many of you who are younger don't have. My children are grown, married and on their own. My impact on their life has largely been made. I thank God that He convicted me at the start of ministry of the importance of making my family my number one congregation. Others have come and gone but my family is still my family. There is no one I have had more influence on or ever will have more influence on than my children and my wife.

Jesus' top priority while on earth was His 'family' of disciples, not the crowds and not new programs and projects. He put them and their needs first, often withdrawing from the crowds or sending others away to spend time with the disciples. His pattern is ours to follow today. There is no one you will reproduce yourself in more completely than your children or grandchildren. And you WILL reproduce yourself in them, for good or for bad. Children are like soft clay which you are

forming and molding into whatever image you choose. Even if you are too busy to be with them much, that forms an image of rejection and unimportance in them. You are forming them and will form them more than anyone else.

It's it a shame that pastors' children often have a reputation for rebellion and disobedience. Whose fault is that? God Himself says that if we can't manage our families then we can't manage His church (1 Timothy 3:4-5). Your children need you more than your church. It's too bad we get our pride so wrapped up in our service for God and our 'success' in the eyes of others that we miss what is most important. God gave us our children to disciple for Him. Nothing is more important! He will never lead us to neglect our children for the sake of other things. They are precious to Him and He entrusts them to us. He will never give us too much to do so that we don't have time for them. That comes from wrong priorities.

One of my greatest joys in life is watching my children and their families serve the Lord and follow Him. "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth." (3 John 4). Each one of them has chosen to stay faithful to God and serve Him wholeheartedly. I take great pleasure in that, although I don't take credit for it. That is between them and God and there are too many factors involved for me to think I did that. I can rest in the fact that, as far as I was able at the time, I did my best to love them and teach them about God. I certainly wasn't perfect, and I did have responsibilities that demanded time and attention, but I always knew they were my number one priority and I greatly enjoyed raising them for the Lord. God gets the credit for how they turned out, but I am thankful I don't have to live with too many regrets. As they say, no one on their death bed wishes they would have spent more time at work! Make sure this is right in your life now. (April 5, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

1 Timothy 3:4-5 He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?)

Titus 1:6 An elder must be blameless, the husband of but one wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient.

Proverbs 22:6 Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.

I'm sure you would agree and say your family is your number 1 priority, but what if you had to prove it? What hard proof can you present that shows you put your children before your work?

If your children would be old enough to talk (and perhaps they are) would they say that they know they come before your work?

Pray for each one individually, bringing their needs, their weaknesses and their futures before the Lord in prayer

BLOG 38: GOD PROMISES STRENGTH FOR THE WORK

I can do everything through him who gives me strength. Philippians 4:13

The world is big today on affirmation: "You can do it," "Just do it." We convince our children that they can do anything they want. We even expect that of ourselves, which sometimes leaves us feeling like a failure when we aren't able to do anything and everything. Some even quote Paul as saying, "I can do all things" (Philippians 4:13). But Paul isn't saying we can do everything, he is saying that we can do everything God wants us to do "through Christ who gives me strength"(Philippians 4:13).

Being a pastor or church leader can seem to be a very big responsibility. Sometimes the work seems too hard for us. There may not be many results and we wonder if we should do something else instead of pastoring. Being a godly pastor can be a very difficult job, but if God wants you to do it then He promises to give you the strength you need. Perhaps you are facing a problem in your ministry. There may be trouble in your church or family. You may not know what to do about it. Remember, God promises to give you strength for whatever He wants you to do.

Every passage in Scripture must be taken in context and in Philippians 4 Paul is talking about the importance of being content in life, no matter if we have a lot or very little. The key, Paul says, is contentment. In addition, Paul says he "learned" to be content. A newborn baby is anything but content. It wants what it wants and wants it immediately. Patience and acceptance of life as it is doesn't come easy as children grow. It doesn't come naturally to any of us. On a scale of 1 to 10, how content would you say you are? Where would God place you on that scale?

Are you jealous of those with ministries that seem to be larger or more successful than yours? Are you expecting too much from your people, or from yourself? Ask God to help you be content with those you minister to, and to be content with what you can do. It's fine to want to grow and do better, but we must still be content with what we have.

There is no excuse to be anything but a 10 in contentment, because God promises to give us the strength we need to accept life as it is. If Paul can learn, through God's power, to be content with prison, persecution, near-death experiences, rejection, beatings and betrayal by friends, God will be able to give us contentment as well - but we must turn to Him for it.

If God wants us to be content, He will give us the strength to be able to do it. The principle is clear: if God wants you to do (or stop doing) something, then He will give you the strength to do it. A Christian can never say "I can" in their own power, nor can they say "I can't" with God's power available. (April 12, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

When is the last time you said, "I can't"? Confess that as sin. It is a lie. Memorize this verse, Philippians 4:13, and repeat it over and over all day.

BLOG 39: AVOID SINS TRAPS

David was 37 years old when he was made king over Israel. God blessed and prospered all he did. The nation became wealthier and larger than it ever had been, or ever would be again. The Philistines, Moabites and Syrians were defeated. Israel's armies were victorious in all their battles.

When everything was going well David, at age 53, decided to not go to war, as he should have, but to stay home. When a leader neglects his God-given responsibility trouble comes, and it did for David. David sinned with Bathsheba and sinned again trying to cover up his sin. There are lessons for us as leaders in this also.

For one thing, leaders should never neglect their responsibility, even when things seem to be going very well. Another lesson is that leaders are not exempt from temptation, in fact the more we try to follow Jesus the more our sin nature and Satan and his demons oppose us. So, instead of being exempt from temptation, we are hit all the more.

The sin with Bathsheba was a trap Satan has been setting up in David's life for years. He had several wives. When he saw a woman he wanted, he would marry her and take her as another wife. Because he was the king, it was very easy for him to do. The problem was that Bathsheba was already married, but David took her for himself anyway. Satan sets traps for all of us. It may start as a small sin but gradually it grows. It could be lust, or greed, or pride. It may be jealousy, deception,

anger or fear. Whatever it is, if we don't have victory when it is small, the sin will grow until it destroys us!

Church leaders are especially open to some of these sins. Others admire and honor us. Women may treat pastors with more respect than own wives do. We can like the attention and want more of it. Soon we may start neglecting our duties at home and in ministry, and give in to temptation, like David did. Even if we never act on the temptation, if we allow pride or lust in our hearts, we are guilty of sin.

Never think that because God is using you as a leader and blessing your ministry that you can't or won't sin. We are human and will sin. That is not an excuse to allow sin. Rather it is to warn us and keep us alert. When we sin, we must admit it and confess it (1 John 1:9). David didn't do that. He had a pattern of hiding and covering up sins in the past. That made it tempting to try to cover up his sin with Bathsheba. All that did was add more sin, including murder. He was far from God. The whole nation as well as his family suffered. Finally, he repented and was forgiven, but the nation never attained the heights it had before his sin. Sin may seem appealing when we are tempted but when we give in sorrow and misery follow. We WILL reap what we sow (Galatian 6:7-9). (April 19, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

What are the sins you aren't having victory over in your life right now? Can you see them taking root and growing stronger? What are they? If you don't know where you are weak, you are even more open to being defeated by these things. What must you do to have victory over them? Who can you go to for prayer, counsel, accountability and help to have victory? What can you learn from David's sin?

BLOG 40: MONEY IS A GREAT SERVANT BUT A TERRIBLE MASTER

Money is a great servant but a terrible master. I learned good financial principles from my parent's example and that has helped me avoid a lot of financial problems. Money is great when it serves me, but if I start to serve it then it becomes a terrible master.

God has provided well for me financially. We don't have an extravagant lifestyle and we don't earn a lot of money, but we've kept our expenses down and are quite content to live within our means. My wife and I both are careful with our money but still enjoy sharing generously. We find a balance that works for us between spending and saving.

The danger with money is when it becomes a substitute for trust in God. Too many people evaluate themselves and their 'success' in life in terms of dollars and possessions. Money does not bring security. In fact, the more money God entrusts a person with the more they are accountable for their stewardship of this important resource.

We've established some principles concerning money which we have tried to pass on to our children. One is to not spend what you don't have. God gives us 24 hours of time in a day and that's all we have. It's a limited resource and we must learn to live within it, although we often try to stretch it to its limit. Unfortunately, today we can spend money we don't have, and the temptation to do so can be great. But that will catch up with you and will cause many problems. Make sure you don't spend money you don't have. Don't go in debt!!!

A second principle we teach is that you can only spend your money once. While this might seem obvious, the truth behind it is that if you use it for the wrong thing then it won't be there for what God intended it to be used for. God gives us the amount of money He knows we will need to live on plus extra to use for His Kingdom. He knows what He wants us to use it for. That's why a budget can be a good way of discovering God's will for the use of your money and make sure you stay within

your limits. I shouldn't spend money I have (principle 1) but when I do spend it, I must also spend it for what God intended it to be spend for (principle 2). If not, I won't have it for what I really need, nor will I properly use some of it for His Kingdom. That's why we always remember that we can only spend our money once so we need to make sure we use it wisely. (April 26, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

Philippians 4:11-13 I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. 12 I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. 13 I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

1 Timothy 6:10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.

Hebrews 13:5 Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."

Are you spending money you don't have? Why is that unwise to do?

Do you have a workable budget you stick to? If not, how can you be sure you are making the best use of the money God gives you?

If Jesus would sit down with you tonight and all your financial expenditures would be laid out before Him, what would He say? Would He make any suggestions? If so, what?

Pray and commit your finances to God. Ask Him to direct you in their correct use. Write down any changes you need to make and apply them immediately.

BLOG 41: GOD PROMISES SPIRITUAL GROWTH

I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. Philippians 1:3-6

This promise from Philippians is one of my personal favorites because it assures me that one day, I will be exactly what God created me to be. Often it doesn't seem like that will ever happen. In fact, sometimes it seems like I am losing ground instead of moving ahead. But God promises me that He will complete what He started at my salvation.

Growing in Christlikeness is the goal of all of us (Romans 8:28-29), but it is a lifelong process which we will never finish while on this earth. Paul refers to this process as a "good work," although many times it feels anything but "good." It seems I learn best from discomfort. And it definitely takes "work" for spiritual growth is a long, slow, hard process which is often painful. There is no such thing as instant spirituality, despite what some may claim.

I recently heard the process of spiritual growth compared to a rock tumbler. Rough stones are put in and tumbled around until they become smooth. The tumbler bounces the rocks against each other for weeks or months until all the rough edges are removed. That's how stones in the bottom of a stream become smooth as well. God uses the rubbing of life's pains and troubles to smooth our rough edges to make us more like Jesus. We see that in Paul's life as well as Peter, John, Abraham and everyone who grew spiritually. We have God's promise that one day we WILL be smooth with all our imperfections and rough edges gone.

I can't do this in my life but God can and will. I don't always see it happening in my life but God promises it so I trust Him with this promise. If you aren't applying this promise to your life regularly you should!

God not only does this in our lives, He also does it in the lives of our family and the people in our ministry. We can do our best to teach and lead them, but if they grow or not is between them and God. We can't force them to grow stronger spiritually or become more like Jesus. But we don't have to. Even when we get disappointed and frustrated with them and the things they do, we have this promise that God is working in them so they will grow in their faith. This is a wonderful promise for us in our lives and for those to whom we minister. (May 3, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

What has God done in your life in the last year to make you more like Jesus? Where is He working now? What can you do to cooperate with the work He is doing?

BLOG 42: LEARN HUMILITY FROM PETER

Simon Peter was the leader of the disciples (Matthew 9:35-10:4; Mark 6:6-9; Luke 9:1-2). Originally named Simon, Jesus changed it to Peter to describe his eventual strength and stability (Matthew 16:18; Mark 3:16; Luke 6:14; John 1:42). He was a very outgoing, friendly, talkative person who liked everyone and wanted everyone to like him. Unfortunately, though, he often didn't have a lot of self-discipline. He met Jesus through his brother Andrew who was a follower of John the Baptizer (John 1:40-41). Jesus challenged him to leave his fishing nets and follow Him full time (Matthew 4:13-22; Mark 1:16-20; Luke 4:31; 5:1-11). Peter was a natural leader, but only because of his forceful personality. It took a while for him to learn how to be a godly leader. Jesus patiently worked with him through his mistakes to help him become one of the greatest leaders in the early church. He'll do the same with us if we let Him.

A person can't be a godly leader if he isn't humble. Pride is self-centeredness, but a godly leader must be God-centered. We can't be both at the same time; we are one or the other. Peter had a big problem with pride, and until God taught him to be humble, he wasn't very usable for God. God often teaches us humility by letting us fail when we do something out of pride. That's what happened with Peter as well. Peter wouldn't let Jesus wash his feet when He washed the others (John 13:1-20). Sometimes it's hard to humble ourselves and let God minister to us, to accept His forgiveness for our sins, to encourage us when discouraged, or to let Him help us when we think we can do something by ourselves. It's important to learn to do that.

Soon after washing his feet, Jesus told Peter he would deny Him (Matthew 26:34; Mark 14:30; Luke 22:34; John 13:38). Peter thought he was too strong and that would never happen (Matthew 26:35; Mark 14:31). He didn't heed Jesus' warning because he trusted in himself. But Peter did deny Jesus three times (Matthew 26:69-75; Mark 14:66-72; Luke 22:55-60; John 18:16-27).

It started with Peter's pride and self-confidence in not letting Jesus wash his feet then insisting Jesus was wrong and he wouldn't deny Jesus. Jesus warned that Satan was going to sift him like wheat, but Peter thought he knew better (Luke 22:31-38). Then in Gethsemane, when Jesus told them to pray, they wouldn't fall into temptation, Peter fell asleep and didn't pray. When Jesus was arrested, Peter attacked Malchus, and Jesus again had to correct him. Peter was doing what Peter wanted, not what Jesus wanted. When He was arrested, Jesus told the disciples to flee, but Peter followed, pretending to be someone who didn't know Jesus. Peter's lack of humbly trusting what Jesus said led to his denials. In his pride he thought he wouldn't ever deny Jesus, but he did – 3 times!

When the rooster crowed, Peter remembered Jesus' warning. At that very moment he saw the bloody and beaten Jesus and realized Jesus had heard him curse and deny knowing Him. Terrible shame and guilt came over him. He hadn't wanted to fail Jesus, but he did. He failed in that which was most important to him, staying faithful to Jesus.

Peter learned a lesson he never forgot that night, though. He knew he couldn't trust himself, that he was too weak to have victory without Jesus' help. His pride was broken, and he humbled himself to

Jesus. We see a different Peter in the book of Acts. He put his confidence in Jesus, not in himself, and God used him in mighty ways. He wrote, warning others to be alert to Satan's temptations (1 Peter 5:8-9) and to stay humble (1 Peter 3:8; 5:5-7). Learning humility was a very painful lesson for Peter, but it is one he had to learn to be useful for God.

That is true for each of us who would serve Him today as well (Psalm 51:17). Paul, too, had a problem with self-sufficiency and pride. God gave him his "thorn in the flesh" to keep him humble (2 Corinthians 12:1-10). In His love, He will do whatever is necessary to break us from our pride as well. (May 10, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

Would your mate say you have a problem with pride? Pride is easy to see in others but very hard to see in ourselves. Can you listen and learn when someone corrects you? Are you quick to apologize when you hurt someone? Will you admit it when you are wrong about something? Do you blame others when things fail? Are there people you look down on and don't think are as important as you are? Do you think you are due special privileges from God or others because of your position of leadership?

BLOG 43: GOD PROMISES TO USE EVERYTHING FOR OUR GOD

We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose. Romans 8:28

This familiar verse is sometimes misused to say that no matter what happens, God will turn it around so it becomes good. That isn't what He is promising. Sin is still sin. Evil is still evil. God can and does bring good results despite sin or evil, but He doesn't turn them into something good. Abuse, loss, loneliness, suffering and pain are never good, but somehow God works in the situation to bring something good for His people. It may not seem it at the time, but that's His promise and God keeps His promises!

Paul was a trained Jewish theologian who persecuted and killed Christians (Acts 7:27-8:3; 9:1). God used "all" things in his life for God's glory. He used Paul's theological training to help him write doctrine in the New Testament. God used his persecution of Christians to expose Paul to the faith and testimony of those who died for their faith. He also used it to humble Paul and show his salvation was all by grace. Paul never forgot these things and was forever grateful for them.

A mistake we made with this verse is thinking just in material terms. We think when we lose a good job that God owes us a better one, or when we lose something in the service of God that He will give us more and better back. However, most of the 'good' He does for us is spiritual, not physical. He uses physical suffering and material loss to teach us trust, patience, compassion. Gentleness and other Christlike qualities as He forms us into Jesus' image (Romans 8:29). These spiritual traits are of much more worth than any earthly possessions anyway, for they last for all eternity.

God is always working. He keeps the universe, the church and you and I functioning. He is working for "good." It may not be health or financial or relational improvement, instead it could be growing in faith and trust, learning to depend on Him or having others see how we respond to tragedy. The ultimate goal, as the next verse (Romans 8:29) tells us, is to be "conformed to the likeness of His Son." The best "good" God can do for us is to help us become more like Jesus. And that doesn't come by everything in life being easy and perfect!

God uses our ministry to stretch our faith in Him. He asks to do things that are impossible without His help so we learn to depend on Him. He allows sorrow and pain to help our compassion grow. He uses the problems we face pastoring to humble us and show us our need of Him. He uses the ministry as a tool to make us more like Jesus.

This promise doesn't apply to everyone, though. There are two conditions given. 1. We must use our free will to respond to His love for us by "loving Him". 2. We do that because He has "called us" through His sovereignty. The verse only is true for believers who are living for Him. Suffering in the lives of unbelievers or believers who are not following the Lord are for the purpose of bringing them to Him. That is 'good.' But for us who are His and living for Him, He has much more and all of it is "good." (May 17, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

Take a few minute to think of some of the most recent difficult experiences you've had. How can you apply Romans 8:28 to the? What 'good' came from them?

Are you going through trying times now? Keep on the lookout for God's 'good' through it. It'll be there. It must, for God promises it will be.

BLOG 44: BE A SERVANT LIKE JESUS

There are many leadership lessons we can learn from Jesus. One of the most important is servanthood (Mark 9:35; 10:42-45; John 13:1-17; Matthew 20:25-26). Servanthood is more than an action – it starts with a humble heart attitude. Jesus humbled Himself to become a man and served us by dying for us (Philippians 2:8).

One of our biggest difficulties in being like Jesus is dealing with our self-centeredness and selfishness. We think about ourselves first. What is due me? What do I deserve? Who has wronged me? What makes me happy?

The best leaders are first of all servants. The army looks for men who can take orders before they can become officers who give orders. No one can be a good leader for Jesus until he first learns to be a good follower of Jesus (Matthew 16:24). God must come before self, serving must come before being served (Matthew 6:24; Luke 16:13).

Don't look for a person who can lead to put in a position of leadership. Instead, first look for someone who can serve. They become the best leaders. God's requirements for church leaders have much about serving others, but nothing about being able to lead (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Peter 5:1-4). The word "leader" is in the Bible 6 times, but "servant" 900 times! Jesus didn't teach His followers how to lead, but He spent much time teaching them to follow. Jesus didn't invite Peter, Andrew, James and John to become leaders, but to be followers of Him. The best leaders in the Bible didn't seek to lead, just to follow and serve: Nehemiah, Moses, Paul, David, Esther, Peter, Gideon, Isaiah, Joseph and others.

A godly leader must give up his or her personal rights to find greatness in service to others, just like Jesus did for us. We are all to be servants, and probably we will all say we are servants. However, how do we respond when someone treats us like their servant? Does our pride rise up, or do we do what we can to serve them?

Leaders for Jesus are to build into the lives of others. We are like the coach of a sports team. The coach is there to help the players be all they can be. The players aren't there to build the reputation of the coach. As church leaders, we to build up the Body of Christ. We are to serve the people, not expect the people to serve us. It's the same for men with their families. God puts us in leadership to serve our wives and children, not to have them serve us. If we want to lead like Jesus, we have to become like Jesus. And Jesus was a servant. (June 21, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

Would your family say you are a servant who does what is best for them before thinking of yourself? Or would they say you put yourself first and expect them to serve you? Would God say you are a servant leader? When is it hardest for you to serve others? What can you do to become a better servant?

BLOG 45: SATAN IS REAL BUT GOD IS GREATER

When I started pastoring 50 years ago, I never imagined I'd have a ministry in spiritual warfare. I didn't even know what spiritual warfare was until about 30 years ago. I knew some Christians who struggled with sin and didn't seem to have victory no matter how hard they tried or how much they trusted God. No amount of counseling helped. It seemed like something greater than themselves was controlling them. One of my own children was being influenced by something evil as well. God in his mercy brought some men into my life who taught me about spiritual warfare and deliverance from demonizing.

Paul says "we are not ignorant of Satan's devices" (2Corinthians 2:5-11) but I was very ignorant. Since that time, I have been ministering to those in need of spiritual warfare counseling. I have read many books and talked to lots of people. God has been teaching me and helping me learn how to help those who are attacked by Satan and his forces.

Being involved in this is very humbling but also very encouraging. Seeing God's power at work in a very real way is simply awesome. Having a front row seat as lives are changed and people who have been defeated begin to live in victory is wonderful to see. The internet opens up many doors to minister and often I hear from people throughout the world. I counsel them through email and a web site (<https://www.christiantrainingonline.org/our-ministries/spiritual-warfare/>). I thank God for the privilege! I have no idea why He chose me to be trained and gifted in this but I'm glad He did!

Satan often works through fear, controlling people through his demons when they are afraid of them. Other people think Satan doesn't exist and we shouldn't think about him or demons. This ignorance leaves them open to demonic work. Both extremes are wrong. Satan is not someone we need to fear for God is greater than him (1 John 4:4) but neither can we ignore him. Instead, we must know how to have victory over him (2 Corinthians 2:5-11). I have written two books about this, have a web site with much information, and write a weekly blog about spiritual warfare. For more information on the subject of spiritual warfare contact me at jerry@schmoyer.net and I'll send you a free copy of my Spiritual Warfare Handbook or answer any questions you may have. (May 31, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

2 Corinthians 2:11 in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes.

Ephesians 6:10-12 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

How aware are YOU of the enemy's schemes against you, your family and your ministry?

If Satan were to oppose you or your ministry, what kinds of things might he use to discourage and defeat you?

What can you do to have victory over this?

BLOG 46: GOD PROMISES TO NEVER LEAVE US

Joshua had a big challenge ahead of him. As if taking Moses' place wasn't enough of a challenge, he was to lead the Jews into the Promised Land and drive out the strong nations entrenched there. When he turned over leadership, Moses had important advice for Joshua: ***"Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you."*** Deuteronomy 31:6

Moses didn't tell him, "You can do it!" The truth was that Joshua couldn't do it – not by his own strength and ability. That's why Moses said "God can do it!"

We may feel like Joshua. The work is too great for us. God is expecting too much. I can't lead these people; it is too hard. God's promise to Joshua is true for us today. We will always have God with us helping us, guiding us, protecting us and leading us. Joshua followed God and with His help the Promised land was conquered. When we remember His promise to us we will be able to do whatever He wants from us as well.

The writer of Hebrews quotes Moses' words and applies them to times of financial difficulty and material loss. Whether we have difficult decisions and battles to fight, like Joshua, or are facing personal challenges, like the writer of Hebrews refers to, God is with us. ***I will never leave you or forsake you. Hebrews 13:5***

The emphasis in the verse is on the word "never." "**NEVER** will I leave you..." is how the Greek is structured. Under no conditions or circumstances will He desert us or turn His back on us. We never have to pray for Him to not depart, for He already said He won't. That's a promise, and God never breaks His promises!

Sometimes we think no one cares or understands, that even God has left us. When the situation we face is hard and painful we may feel He must have left us. The truth is that He can't and He won't. He promises to never turn from us. He never left Moses. He was with him at birth and through his years in Egypt. He was with him for the 40 years he was a shepherd in the wilderness. And He was with Moses when he returned and led the Jews to freedom. Moses' wasn't perfect during those times: He murdered a man, had an anger problem and struggled as a father and husband. Yet God never left Moses.

God never left Joshua, either. He was with him at Jericho and throughout one battle after the next. He was with Joshua as he conquered and subdued the Promised Land. Joshua didn't have to do it alone. He couldn't have. He didn't have to for God was always there as He promised.

He will never leave us, either. If we are in danger like Daniel was, He will be with us. If we don't always sense His presence, as the disciples during the storm on the Sea of Galilee while Jesus slept in the boat, He is still with us. Even if we leave Him, He will never leave us. He promised! (June 7, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

What are you facing today? Are you facing it with God or in your own strength? Are you believing the lie that you are alone and no one cares? Whatever is going on in your life, this short promise is one you should memorize and repeat daily.

BLOG 47: BE A SERVANT LIKE PETER

When Jesus went back to heaven, Peter found himself as the new leader of the disciples. He saw a need and was willing to fulfill it. He said they should choose someone to replace Judas (Acts 1:16-26). He preached on Pentecost (Acts 2). He allowed God to heal the lame man through him (Acts 3). He courageously defied the Sanhedrin (Acts 4) and dealt with the hypocrisy of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5). Confronting sin among believers is always hard to do, but it is something we, like Peter, have to do to keep the church pure.

Wherever he was needed, Peter served. He traveled to Samaria to preach and deal with Simon the magician (Acts 8). He was a leader at the Jerusalem Council, which decided Gentiles didn't have to become Jews before they could become Christians (Acts 15). He traveled to wherever his help and encouragement was needed. He visited Lydda (Acts 9:32), he allowed God to heal Aeneas and bring Dorcas back to life through his ministry (Acts 9:40).

Peter was even willing to take the gospel to a Gentile, Cornelius, even though entering a Gentile home was something he had been strictly forbidden to do as a Jew (Acts 10). We must be willing to go wherever God wants and do whatever He asks. He may send us to talk to someone we may think is below us, like Peter felt about Cornelius. But we must obey Him anyway. No one is too rich or too poor for God's love. Others may not think we should minister to those who seem to be beneath us, but if God leads, we must take his Word wherever He wants.

Peter took Mark with him as he traveled and ministered. His purpose was to train Mark so he could minister on his own. Mark wrote a gospel, the Gospel of Mark, based on what he heard Peter say about his time with Jesus. So, when you read Mark, you are really reading Peter's words. Make sure you always take someone with you to train when you do ministry. An important part of being a leader is training other leaders!

Peter served in many different ways and places. He did whatever was needed, and he went wherever God sent him. He didn't tell God what he wanted to do or where he wanted to go; he let God decide and then followed His guidance. After all, a good leader first of all must be a good follower!

As leaders, we must be sensitive to where God wants us to minister and what He wants us to do. We can't look at other ministries and want to be like them. We can't think bigger is better and be concerned about how our ministry looks to others. We are not trying to impress anyone. God is the only one whose opinion we should be concerned about. We are here to serve Him, not expect Him to serve us. God will say, "Well done, good and faithful servant" when we do what He wants, not just what we want. We must be like Peter and do what God wants, not what we want to do. (June 14, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

Does God know He can assign you anything and send you any place He wants? Are you, willing to serve anywhere? Is there anything you don't want to do to serve God? Is there any place you wouldn't go if He sent you? Is there any person or group you wouldn't serve if asked? Is anything too large or hard to trust God to do through you? Does anything seem too unimportant or menial for Him to have you do it? Think of the various places and ways God has used you in the past. Thank Him for each one of them.

BLOG 48: INVEST IN YOUR HEALTH EVERY DAY

Healthy living has always been a top priority of. As a child I became convicted of the importance of proper diet, rest and exercise. God has blessed me with excellent health even though I am in my 70's. It's taken time and effort, but it has been worth it.

God has given me one life and one body in which to live my life. While I have no desire to stay on this earth longer than God wants, I can affect the quality of my time here. Being a good steward of what God has given me includes stewardship of my body. Eating healthy food is a must. Getting enough rest and sleep are also essential. Exercise is crucial, not optional.

Although exercise takes time I know I have gained more productive time than I have lost. I function more efficiently all day and sleep better at night when I exercise. I rarely get sick and have missed hardly any time due to illness my whole life. My quality of life is better even if I don't live any longer. I save money and time by not visiting doctors and being sick. I set a better example for others. I enjoy life better. I even enjoy my times of exercise each day. I know the time I have invested in exercise have been well worth it in all ways.

While I confess to a love for chocolate, I have always tried to eat a healthy diet as well. That, too, takes time and discipline, but it is also worth it. My weight, health, heart and overall health is greatly affected by my diet. I feel better, function more fully and enjoy everything more because of it.

The exercise in practicing self-control is good as well. Gluttony is a sin and we are responsible to be good stewards of the wonderful body God has given us.

In addition, I have always tried to keep up on my rest. I need to average 8 hours of sleep a night to function at my best efficiency and so that has been a priority as well. Rest and relaxation as well as hobbies and times of fun and enjoyment are also important to balance work and stress in life.

I owe it to my family and church, my wife and children, myself and especially to God to be a good steward of all He has given me, including my health and body. So do you! (May 24, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

1 Kings 19:3-6 Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. ... Then he lay down under the tree and fell asleep. All at once an angel touched him and said, "Get up and eat." He looked around, and there by his head was a cake of bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water. He ate and drank and then lay down again.

Ps 127:2 In vain you rise early and stay up late, toiling for food to eat — for he grants sleep to those he loves.

1 Cor 9:27 No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.

What are some of the good things you do to stay healthy?

Is God convicting you about your stewardship of your body? Where is improvement needed: diet, rest or exercise (or more than one)?

Write down several steps you can take starting today to become a better steward of your health.

Pray and ask God to give you the self-control needed to make these changes starting now.

BLOG 49: GOD'S PROMISES AND SPIRITUAL WARFARE

Satan is a liar. He always was and always will be. "You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44). He lied to Eve in Eden when he tempted her to disobey God and told her "You will not surely die" (Genesis 3:4). In contrast, Jesus is the way, the truth and the life (John 14:6) and His truth brings freedom (John 8:32) not bondage.

God gave us His Word so we could learn and follow the truth and not be misled. The Bible not only teaches us His truth, it reassures us of His promised involvement in our lives. There are hundreds of promises in the Bible. Victor Storms counted 7,487 promises from God to man in the Bible. These promises are like checks from God to be used as needed. They are only good on this earth though - no need for them in heaven. Some Christians know God's promises and rely on them at the necessary times. They live in peace and victory. Other Christians don't know the great resources available to them and live full of anxiety and defeat. Which are you?

These promises are especially important for spiritual warfare, where we face an enemy that is wiser, stronger and more experienced than we are. We need to know and use God's battles to win our battles against our enemies, just like Joshua needed them to have victory as the Jews moved into the Promised Land. "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go" (Joshua 1:9). Joshua followed God's promises and they led him to victory in their physical wars. The same is true for us in our spiritual battles.

Knowing and using the promises of God is very important, especially when fighting Satan and his demons. If not fear, confusion, deception and feelings of helplessness which overwhelm us and we'll be taken captive to live in bondage. God can and will set us free as we use His Word as our offensive weapon, the sword of the Spirit (Ephesians 6:17). That's how Jesus had victory when tempted by Satan in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1-11).

There is no one weapon that fits all circumstances, we must know which to use when. You use a fly-swatter to kill a fly, not a shotgun. But a flyswatter wouldn't stop a grizzly bear. In spiritual warfare we need to know all the promises at our disposal so we know which one to use when. This series of blogs will help you understand the promises, the checks from God, the weapons we have available to us so we know how and when to use them. The better we know them the more efficiently we can use them and the sooner we will have victory. So read these blogs, memorize them so you always have them with you and use them in your daily life. (June 28, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

Quoting Scripture is our "sword of the Spirit" (Ephesians 6:10-18) and that is how Jesus had victory over Satan's temptation (Matthew 4:1-11). This is a great verse to counter fear and remind us of where the real power lies! Memorize Joshua 1:9 this week. "Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go" (Joshua 1:9). When will you need this weapon? Use it to fight fear, discouragement and weakness.

BLOG 50: NEHEMIAH: A GODLY LEADER IS A MAN OF PRAYER

Because of their continual disobedience, the Jews were taken captive by Babylon. True to His promise, God allowed some of the Jews to return home about 50 years later. They were led by Zerubbabel. They rebuilt the destroyed temple, although it was far less grand than the original one. Haggai and Zechariah preached to them. Esther lived during this time and God used her to preserve the Jewish nation. The great majority of the Jews preferred staying in Babylon where life was easier than it would have been returning and rebuilding the destroyed city.

About eighty-five years after that, Ezra led a smaller group from Persia to Jerusalem. Then, fifteen years later, God chose Nehemiah to lead the third and final group to return. His grandparents had been taken into captivity when Jerusalem fell. They continued to put their faith in God, though, for the name they gave Nehemiah means "The Lord Comforts."

Nehemiah had a very important place in the government of King Artaxerxes. He is called the "cupbearer" of the king (Nehemiah 1:11). In earlier times the cupbearer was the one who drank first from everything given to the king to make sure no one was trying to poison the king. By Nehemiah's time it had become a position of a top assistant and advisor to the king.

In the fall of 446 BC, in the capital city of Susa, word came to Nehemiah about the awful condition of Jerusalem and the Jews living there. The walls of the city were never rebuilt, and that brought great disgrace to the people and their God because all the nations around them saw it as proof that the God of Israel could not take care of His people. The people had been back for 150 years, but hadn't taken any steps to restore the city. This really bothered Nehemiah, and he prayed and fasted for many days when he heard the news (Nehemiah 1:1-5).

Although he lived hundreds of miles away, Nehemiah was personally concerned with the needs he heard about. Neither he nor his parents had ever been back to Jerusalem, so they had not caused the problems; the people in the land caused them by not rebuilding the walls and the city. Still, he cried over their failure. He had compassion for them even though they were suffering the consequences of their sin. He identified with their needs and didn't criticize or blame. He was hurt because God's reputation was hurt.

Nehemiah was a man of prayer (1:4; 2:4, 9; 5:19; 6:9, 14; 13:14, 22, 29, 31). He is often found praying, and it is a main theme of the book. He goes to God first with everything that happens in life, just like Daniel. In this first prayer, when he hears about Jerusalem, Nehemiah pleads for God's love and mercy on His people. He confesses the sins of the people (as did Daniel) and acknowledges that God is righteous. Then he asks God's help in correcting the situation. He remembers God's promises in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 30 to one day bring the people back to the land.

Prayer is a very important trait for leaders today as well. We can't lead others unless we are following the Leader of all Leaders – God Himself. We must spend time in prayer talking and listening to God so we know the direction He wants us to go, as well as how He wants us to lead. If not, we just go our own way, and that leads to disaster. Nothing of real lasting value can be done without prayer. Praying makes us wait on God instead of rushing in our own direction, opens us to God's plan, and activates our faith so we trust in Him in all we do. (July 5, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

When you hear of a Christian or a church which is struggling, or failing to stay faithful to God, do you criticize and judge, or does your heart break for them because God's heart breaks for them? Do you have compassion and concern for God's people who are not obeying God? Do you pray for God to have mercy on them? Are you concerned for the harm they are doing to God's reputation? Do the needs of your people lead you to faithfully fast and pray for them? Are you a leader who is a man or woman of prayer?

BLOG 51: NEHEMIAH: A GODLY LEADER CAREFULLY PLANS

(This is blog 2 in a series of blogs about leadership lessons from the life of Nehemiah)

When Nehemiah heard the Jews back in Jerusalem had turned far from God, he prayed and fasted for four months. During that time God put an idea, a thought, in his mind. He had been praying for someone to go to Jerusalem and correct the situation there – perhaps he should be that person! Then one day the king asked what was bothering him. To be anything but joyful before the king was forbidden, but Nehemiah was honest and told the king he was sad over the state of his home, Jerusalem. Nehemiah had a very good reputation with the king, for the king asked Nehemiah what he would like to do about it. Nehemiah had the courage to tell him the plan God had given him, which was to return and rebuild Jerusalem (Nehemiah 2:1-5).

For four months Nehemiah had patiently prayed and waited for God's timing in this. He had prayed, knowing it all depended on God, but he had also done his part and planned what would be needed to do this work in Jerusalem. When the king asked for details about how he proposed to help Jerusalem, Nehemiah had all the answers (Nehemiah 2:6-8). He was patient in prayer, but he made plans so when the time was right, he could move ahead. We must patiently wait for God to open doors for us, but when they open, we must be prepared to move through them. We must plan ahead for work to be done.

A godly leader is a person who plans. Nehemiah knew the answer to the king's questions about how long he would be gone, what materials and helpers he would need, letters of permission to travel and work, etc. He had anticipated the needs and planned how to take care of them. A godly leader doesn't just pray, he also plans. He does both at once. He is patient for God's timing, but when the time is right, he is ready to move ahead because he has been using the time to prepare. He anticipated the difficulties and made plans to overcome them before they happened.

For example, one of the reasons Jerusalem hadn't been rebuilt was because the neighboring nations wanted to keep it weak. They had told the king the Jews were planning to rebel, so he commanded they not rebuild or improve the city or wall. Nehemiah knew that only Artaxerxes could

reverse his edict and that Nehemiah would need to prove to these neighbors that he had permission to rebuild the city. That is why he asked for the letters. A godly leader patiently plans for the future.

Some leaders today are so anxious to start something, they barely pray about it, but just jump right in and then struggle to make it work. Others will patiently pray and wait, but then when they can begin, they are unable to do so because they aren't prepared to move ahead. They haven't saved enough money or trained the right people or made plans as to how to accomplish it. A godly leader must be patient, but also make good plans.

Are you guilty of quickly starting something new without enough prayer and planning? Or do you hesitate when there is an opportunity because you are afraid to take a chance and do something new? Do you pray and wait, but fail to plan so that when you can begin you don't have the resources you need to make it happen?

It took Nehemiah several months to get ready for the trip and more months to travel to Jerusalem. It was almost a full year after hearing about the problem that he finally got to the place where he could do something about it. Some might have been impatient and wanted to get to work right away, but not Nehemiah. He spent time resting up and getting to know the leaders in Jerusalem (Nehemiah 2:11-12).

He gathered information about the situation there by going out at night and looking at the city and walls by himself (Nehemiah 2:13-16). He did it at night so others wouldn't wonder why he was doing this or try to influence where he went or what he saw. He wanted to gather all the facts he could before making any decisions.

A decision is only as good as the information it is based on. Too often leaders make quick decisions without all the facts, only to find out later what they decided wasn't the best decision they could have made. Sometimes we take the word of one person only later to find out there was more involved that we didn't know about. If we let one person influence us without finding out all the facts, we won't make wise decisions. We must be patient and gather all the information first. It is during the time we gather information that the Holy Spirit quietly speaks to us and gives us needed direction. We must be sensitive to what He says, not quickly jump to conclusions. A godly leader is careful. He looks before he leaps. (July 12, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

Think of a time you responded too quickly and didn't know all the details. What was the result? Do you do that often? Do you have the necessary patience to withhold judgment or decisions until you have all the facts? What can you do to become more careful in your decisions?

BLOG 52: NEHEMIAH: A GODLY LEADER MUST TAKE ACTION

(This is blog 3 in a series of blogs about leadership lessons from the life of Nehemiah)

In the last blog we talked about the importance of being careful to get all the information needed to make a good decision. Being careful is fine and important, but then there comes a time when a leader must act. After he had gathered all the information that was available, prayed, thought and planned, then Nehemiah took action. He challenged the leaders and the people to move ahead and rebuild the city and its walls (Nehemiah 2:17-18).

It is important to know when to be careful, but also important to know when to take action. Sometimes a leader can move ahead quickly without taking time to gather all the details. Others can hesitate too long and not act when it is time to act. Both extremes must be avoided. We all tend to go to one extreme or the other. My wife and I balance each other out with this. Perhaps God has given you a mate or friend who can help you as well.

Notice, too, how Nehemiah motivated them to act. He didn't blame or criticize. That just discourages people. He identified with them. He said, "You see the trouble WE are in... Come let US rebuilt so WE will no longer be in disgrace" (Nehemiah 2:17-18). A godly leader identifies with the people to motivate them to action, so they want to follow. A good leader knows where he is going, knows how to get there and knows how to take others there with him. Nehemiah could take others with him because he was one with them. He didn't act like he was more important than them, telling them what to do. Nehemiah shared his God-given vision and plan to rebuild the city and gave them hope it could be done, so they were willing to follow him.

Do you have a balance between caution and action? Who has God put in your life to help you find that balance? Can you identify with people you counsel, teach or lead so they trust you and willingly follow because you give them hope for the future? Or do you scold and criticize them for where they fail? How does God motivate you, with hope and encouragement or with criticism and condemnation?

When the time is right to act, a godly leader must have the plans ready to move ahead. These plans must include others in the work. He must give direction, but he needs the cooperation and help of others to make it happen. He must wisely delegate the work, no matter the size of the project. That's what Nehemiah did. He assigned various groups of people to different sections of the wall and made rebuilding it their responsibility (Nehemiah 3:1-32). He was wise in how he did it. He assigned people sections of the wall near their own homes. That way they wouldn't have to travel far to get to work, they would do their best job because they were protecting their own homes, and if attacked while building they would stay to defend their own homes. They were motivated to do a good job, not forced to do something they weren't sure about.

Also, Nehemiah expected everyone to work. Those who were leaders or who were rich were used to having others do work for them. Nehemiah said there were none too good to work, and all were treated the same. No job was too unimportant to be done. He set an example of that by helping with the work himself. He worked right along with the people.

Nehemiah prayed and had great faith in God, but he didn't stop there. He planned ahead and he organized the work. He delegated work to others. Faith is not a substitute for organization and delegation. God is an organized God. Look at the world around us and how well everything works together. Everything God does is planned and well organized. Our work should also be that way. (July 19, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

Are you able to delegate work in your ministry, or do you think you need to do everything so it gets done right? Can you trust others to share your work, even if they do things differently than you? Would others say you are organized? Is your time organized so you are able to do all the important things first? If you aren't good at organizing things, who can you get to help you who is good at it?

BLOG 53: NEHEMIAH: A GODLY LEADER HAS COURAGE

(This is blog 4 in a series of blogs about leadership lessons from the life of Nehemiah)

When I was younger, I thought that if I was doing what God wanted and doing it God's way then God would bless the work and it would go ahead with great success. I soon found that isn't true. I'm sure you have found the same thing. In fact, when we are doing God's will God's way, we often get more opposition. The world, the flesh, and Satan and his forces oppose what we do in any way they can.

Nehemiah experienced that as well. The foreigners living nearby, under the leadership of Sanballat, strongly opposed the rebuilding of Jerusalem. They dominated the Jews and took

advantage of their broken-down walls. They became rich while keeping the Jews poor. When the work on the wall began, they mocked the builders and threatened to kill them and destroy their work (Nehemiah 4:1-14). A godly leader must be able to handle opposition and criticism. There will be ridicule and even threats.

What was Nehemiah's response? He didn't let fear rule, instead he prayed twice for peace, protection and wisdom (Nehemiah 4:4-5, 9). When we face these things, we must take them to God in prayer and listen to His encouragement and guidance about what to do (James 1:5). Don't expect God to always remove them, for sometimes He has a different plan. For Nehemiah, God didn't stop or remove the opposition. He allowed it to continue so the people would trust Him more and see His protection and provision. He does the same with us today.

Nehemiah trusted God and prayed, but he also armed his workers to protect themselves (Nehemiah 4:9). He had them keep working, but also carry weapons with them (Nehemiah 4:15-23). We must pray as if everything depends on God, but also work as if everything depends on us. Use common sense and defend yourself when necessary, but keep doing what God wants you to do. Don't give in to fear or discouragement. Opposition will come. A godly leader is ready for it and keeps moving ahead.

How do you handle opposition to your ministry? Do you expect God to always prevent it from happening? Are you faithful in praying about every aspect of your ministry and life? Do you do your very best to handle each situation that arises?

While the people were busy rebuilding the walls and defending themselves against possible attack, the crops were neglected, so there wasn't enough food when harvest came. The people were starving and unable to get food. Those with money loaned it to the poor, but at very high rates, taking advantage of them and their hunger. Many had to sell some of their children into slavery so the whole family didn't die of starvation. This bothered Nehemiah very much. He vowed to stop the practice (Nehemiah 5:10-13) and he did.

We will face times when rich and powerful people take advantage of the weak and poor. A godly leader must stand up for those who can't stand up for themselves. That is what Jesus did, and we must follow His example. Pray for wisdom in how to handle the situation. Ask for advice. Take time to think it through. Then, with God's help, do what must be done to make things right.

Nehemiah confronted the rich and powerful Jews and made them give back what they had unfairly taken. It took courage to do that, for these were the people who controlled the city. Nehemiah needed their support to continue improving Jerusalem. It takes courage to be a godly leader. Doing the right thing is often doing the hard thing. Opposing greed and oppression in the rich and powerful is not easy, but it is important. Many leaders give in those who oppose them in order to keep the peace, but that is compromising with sin, and God is never pleased with that. Always do what is right, no matter the cost. Jesus commands it (Matthew 25:34-46; James 1:27). (July 26, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

Do you have courage to defend the helpless and stand against those who oppress them? How do you handle the fear that comes from making enemies when you do what Jesus would do? Think of a time you compromised instead of taking a stand. Was it worth compromising what is right? What should you do next time? Who do you know who you can start helping?

BLOG 54: NEHEMIAH: A GODLY LEADER HUMBLY FOLLOWS GOD

(This is blog 5 in a series of blogs about leadership lessons from the life of Nehemiah)

After Nehemiah returned from Babylon to Jerusalem, he led the Jews in rebuilding the wall of the city. Not everyone cooperated though. Wealthy people didn't want to help. Not only did Nehemiah tell the rich what to do, he set an example for them to follow. He was willing to do what he asked of them, and even more. Because he was appointed the governor of Israel by the king, he had the right to receive a salary for his services. However, he never took any pay for his work. He never used his position to help himself financially in any way. In fact, he fed 200 people a day at his table and paid for it from his own personal funds (Nehemiah 5:14-19).

A godly leader does not take advantage of his position and privilege. He does not use it for personal gain. He is a person of integrity and honesty. He has a reputation that no one can criticize (1 Timothy 3:2). Nehemiah saw himself as a servant to the people. He was building God's kingdom, not his own.

Nehemiah could have become proud because of the importance of his work and position. Everyone looked up to him. It would have been easy for him to start believing that he was someone special. The same is true of leaders today. Because of the special privileges and blessings God gives us, we can start thinking there is something special about us. That is pride. Pride is one of Satan's most effective weapons against pastors (Proverbs 16:18). It is especially dangerous for younger or new leaders (1 Timothy 3:6). Be careful for yourself, for none of us are immune. When we think we are beyond being tempted by pride, we must be aware, because feeling that way is pride in action!

Nehemiah stayed humble. He was honest and open: a man of integrity who served the people and set an example for others by not taking a salary for his work. However, that doesn't mean pastors today should not take a salary. Nehemiah was very rich and could afford to support his family without taking a salary. Most of us cannot do that. There are many other ways we can sacrifice for the Lord. Nehemiah's example for us is humility, integrity and service. It's good for people to share with those who have taught them (Galatians 6:6). The Bible says the pastor deserves his wages (1 Timothy 5:17-18). That's the only way we can have time to minister.

If God were rating you, how would He score you on your integrity and honesty? What about your humility? What about your service? Is there any place where you can start improving?

Nehemiah faced opposition from the rich Jews within Jerusalem. He also was opposed by foreigners who lived outside the city. When their threats to attack the walls didn't stop the rebuilding, these neighboring Gentiles tried to kill Nehemiah. They tried to lure him into a trap outside the walls where they could murder him (Nehemiah 6:1-4). Nehemiah was too wise to fall for this trap, but he still had to fear for his life. Fear is something all leaders must deal with. Timothy was fearful and wanted to leave Ephesus, but Paul wrote 1 Timothy to him telling him to stay.

When the trap to assassinate him didn't work, the enemies tried using slander and false accusations to undermine Nehemiah's authority. They accused him of selfish motives and untrue schemes (Nehemiah 6:5-9). Nehemiah took it to God in prayer. Rumors can be very dangerous and damaging. The source is hidden, so the lies cannot be challenged and corrected. Little things become big things. What is said can be exaggerated to hurt the person. It is almost impossible to correct. In fact, the more we do to try to change gossip, the worse it gets. All we can do is pray and leave it to God. Live a godly life so those who are open to seeing the truth about you can see it. Gossip was something Nehemiah had to live with. The Jews who were related to gentiles by marriage kept complaining and criticizing him because his standing up for the poor and weak caused them to stop taking money from them.

A third scheme to remove Nehemiah was to bribe a priest to lure Nehemiah into a part of the temple where only priests were allowed to go. He told Nehemiah to come so he would be safe and protected (Nehemiah 6:10-15), but if Nehemiah had done this, God might have struck Him dead for such a blatant disobedience (2 Samuel 6:7). That is what they wanted to have happen.

Nehemiah, though, kept his eyes on his purpose for being there. He didn't let the fear from threats to his life cause him to get discouraged or lose his faith. He focused on what God wanted him to do and didn't let anything else interfere. (August 2, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

Are you aware of the traps Satan and others set to ensnare you? Do you know, and do, what is necessary to have victory over them? When does criticism and gossip hurt you the most? What can you do to get through such times?

BLOG 55: NEHEMIAH: A GODLY LEADER FOCUSES ON OTHERS

(This is blog 6 in a series of blogs about leadership lessons from the life of Nehemiah. If you missed the previous blogs, you can email me at jerry@schmoyer.net)

When Nehemiah first got to Jerusalem, the focus was on rebuilding the walls of the city. When that was completed, it was time for spiritual rebuilding to start. Ezra and others worked with Nehemiah. He didn't try to do everything alone. Nehemiah was the political leader while Ezra was the spiritual leader. Ezra taught the people, and a great revival took place, the first ever recorded among the Jews (Nehemiah 8:4 – 10:39).

Today, too, teamwork is necessary in any ministry. No one man can do it alone. We need help from others, and others are able to do things we aren't gifted to do. Moses needed helpers, so did Paul. Churches in the New Testament had a team of elders who shared the load as each did what he was gifted and trained to do. We, too, need to share the workload with others. Men, include your wife in that group. She is gifted by God to serve in ways you aren't. She can add wisdom and insight that can be very helpful.

Ezra taught God's Word (Nehemiah 8:5-6) and God used it to bring revival. The people stood all day while Ezra taught. When he was done, they didn't want to go home, but stayed to do the same thing the next day. God had put an appetite in them for His Word. Always focus all you do on God's Word. The main responsibility of each leader is to teach God's Word (1 Timothy 3:2; 2 Timothy 2:24).

With whom do you share your ministry load? Whose gifts do you use to help you in the work you do? What gifts does your wife have that help you? Do you let her use them? Do you have an appetite to learn God's Word for your own growth and so you can share it with others? Ask God to give you more desire to know the Bible.

Unfortunately, the story of the Jews in the Old Testament doesn't end with this revival. The last recorded event before 400 years of silence is not a good one. Nehemiah's time away from the king in Babylon ran out, and he returned to his responsibilities in Babylon. His brother replaced him as governor in Jerusalem. For a while things went well after the revival, but gradually the people again drifted from God and into sin. When Nehemiah returned after being away for 11 years, he found things in a very bad state. Gentiles were allowed into the temple store rooms to sell things and the people had stopped tithing. They weren't keeping the Sabbath so they could work more and make more money. They were intermarrying with unbelievers and sinful practices were coming into their worship (Nehemiah 13:4-10). God had sent Malachi to preach to the people, and he addressed these sins but they didn't repent (book of Malachi).

When Nehemiah saw how things were, he prayed before he did anything. He always did this. Then he took the necessary actions to set things right and correct the sinful practices (Nehemiah 13:11-31). It must have been discouraging to him to see that all his hard work had not lasted and needed to be done again. I'm sure God often feels the same way about us!

A godly leader must persevere no matter how many times he has to do the same thing or how long it takes for changes to come. Then, when people go back to sin, we must persevere even longer

to get them to change their ways and follow God again. Sometimes it takes great love and great patience to do this, but it's an important trait for a godly leader. That's how Jesus is with us and we must be like Him with others. (August 9, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

How do you respond when someone you have taught and trained for a long time turns from the Lord? What do you do when your work shows little or no progress for many years? Can you faithfully persevere and continue to serve even when there are no results? Think of how Jesus perseveres with you, and follow that example in how you are with others.

BLOG 56: ALL ATTACKS ARE FATHER-FILTERED (Job 1)

Satan not only attacks God's kingdom on a world-wide scale, but he opposes individuals who are part of that kingdom as well. **Job** is a prime example of this. He lived around the same time as Abraham. He is a picture of a righteous man, following God, facing his own warfare because he is faithful to God (Job 1:6-12; 2:1-7). There are several lessons we can learn about spiritual warfare from Job's conflict with Satan. Read **Job 1:6-12; 2:1-7**.

One of the ways Satan attacks God's kingdom and people is by bringing accusations of sin against believers (Zechariah 3:1-4; Revelation 12:10). Because God is holy and must judge sin, Satan tries to point out the sins of believers in order to bring God's wrath upon them. However we are safe from condemnation because Jesus paid the price for our sins on the cross (Romans 8:1). Still, Satan is forever tattling on us to God.

We don't know how Satan is allowed in God's presence, but in some way or form this must happen for he accuses Job to God (Job 1:1-6; 2:1-7). God allowed Satan to attack Job, but with certain limits which God imposes (Job 1:12; 2:6).

LESSON FOR TODAY 1: All Satan's attacks against us are 'Father filtered,' allowed by God for His glory and our good (Romans 8:28). This painful suffering of Job's served as an example of faithfulness to all heavenly beings, and to the millions who have read of Job in the Bible.

Satan can only do what God allows. Satan had to have permission to attack Job, and even then, God limited what he could do (Job 1-2; 1 Kings 22:19-23). God actually used his evil plan for good (Romans 8:28; Genesis 50:20). He used the lies the demons gave the false prophets to bring about the destruction God wanted (1 Kings 22:19-23). He used Satan's afflictions on Job to be a faithful witness and example to Satan and his forces then, and to untold millions of believers since. He used all that Joseph went through to save the nation of Israel (Genesis 50:20). He uses what you and I go through for our growth and for His glory as well. When you look at nature you see God is a God who never wastes anything, but makes multiple good uses of everything. He does the same with our pain and suffering as well. Not one tear, not the slightest struggle is wasted but is used for His plan in our lives (Romans 8:28).

LESSON FOR TODAY 2: One other item of interest in this account is the way Satan was able to attack Job and his family. He used evil men (Job 1:13-15), nature (lightning, Job 1:16), hostile men (take animals, kill servants, Job 1:17), natural disaster (wind to destroy a house and kill Job's children, Job 1:18-19), and sickness and pain against Job himself (Job 2:6). While we aren't to fear Satan or give him credit for more power than he has, still he clearly has more ability to use nature, people and sickness than we often recognize. He has many weapons in his warfare against us.

While not every natural disaster, attack by evil people or physical sickness is from Satan, this probably does happen more often than we imagine. We aren't to fear him for God is greater (1 John 4:4), but we are to recognize the attacks of our enemy so we can properly fight against them (2 Corinthians 2:5-11). If you are facing some of these right now, follow Job's example of not sinning by accusing God of wrongdoing (Job 1:22; 2:9-10). Stay faithful to God and keep your trust in Him no

matter what (Job 1:21). See it as part of your warfare and don't let Satan defeat you through it. (August 16, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

Does it give you comfort to know that all Satan's attacks against you are -Father-filtered? Think of someone going through a really rough time and share this truth with them. Visit, call, write or email them to remind them that God is still in control of all that happens.

BLOG 57: WHY SUFFERING? (Job 2)

One of the first questions to come up when we read the story of **Job** is to wonder why God allowed this to happen to him when he clearly didn't deserve it. Why do the innocent suffer? Let's see what we can learn from Job. First, read **Job 1:6-12; 2:1-7**.

LESSON FOR TODAY 1: Why does God allow people to suffer and struggle? How can a God of love allow so much evil to continue? God doesn't defend Himself or explain what He allows. He gives us a free will choice as to whose kingdom we will pursue. Sin and the resulting evil are the natural consequences of turning from Him.

The fact of pain in the world is not a reason to see God as less than loving. Still, innocent people suffer. We can't try to evaluate God's person and character by these things for He has proven His character and love by leaving heaven, becoming a man, living on earth, then going to the cross to take on the punishment for every sin we would ever commit. That proves His love for us beyond a shadow of a doubt. If it weren't for that we would all spend eternity in hell. So, anything less than hell from now on is because of His grace and mercy. Why He seems to show more love and mercy to some than others is not up to us to judge. God isn't accountable to us. We cannot stand in judgment of Him until we know all the facts as He knows them and see everything as He sees it. Many things seem unfair to little children but they must trust their parents. Getting an injection from a doctor, having a pretty shiny knife taken away, things like these seem to a child that a parent doesn't love them. But a child doesn't have the perspective to truly understand all that is involved and we don't either. We do know that facing things we don't understand gives us an opportunity to trust. Our faith is stretched and we grow. God is glorified as we see Him deliver and as others watch us continually trust Him no matter what happens. Spiritual warfare itself is often very painful. It is just one of many forms of suffering God uses for our good and for His glory. Often deliverance isn't a sudden, complete act. God allows the struggle to go on for it teaches us to fight and to trust Him.

LESSON FOR TODAY 2: A related question is why God would allow Satan to attack us at all when He could prevent it. If He is a God of love why not deny Satan and demons any opportunity to attack? Then we wouldn't have to resist or learn to fight? Life would be much simpler and easier. But that isn't God's purpose, nor is it how He works. Why didn't God just kill all the Canaanites and not have the Jews have to go through warfare against them? The Jews had a free will to follow God or not, and if they followed, they needed to learn to obey and to fight as God would have them. Perseverance, faith, teamwork, patience, obedience and many lessons were tied up in this. God used it to stretch their faith, to give them opportunities to grow and see Him work through them and to show others His glory by what He could do through His people. The same is true of us today. (August 23, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

Do you still ask God "why" questions all the time? What answer does He give you? What can you tell someone who asks why God allows suffering in the world?

BLOG 58: ANGER & UNFORGIVENESS: OPEN DOORS FOR SATAN (2 Corinthians - 1)

The early church faced many difficulties as it spread. Attacks from without were repelled by turning to Jesus for guidance and power. It was the attacks within the church that were, and still are, the most effective for Satan. The church in **Corinth** had more than its share of troubles, mostly brought on by their own sin and disobedience. Demons can use those sins as openings to come in and magnify the damage among believers. Paul wrote letters to the Corinthians to them to warn and educate them about these things. The warnings and teachings apply to us today as well.

In 2 Corinthians he warned the believers to **be aware of Satan's schemes** so they aren't tricked and defeated (2 Corinthians 2:11). The brother who was living with his father's wife and was disciplined by exclusion from church fellowship (1 Corinthians 5:1-5) evidently repented and was restored to fellowship (2 Corinthians 2:5-6). Now Paul encourages them to forgive the man and treat him with love and acceptance (2 Corinthians 2:7-10). If they don't forgive him, Paul says, Satan will use that to work against them (2 Corinthians 2:11).

LESSON FOR TODAY 1: Paul is warning them that Satan will use their unforgiveness as an opening to attack them. One of the leading causes of demonizing is unconfessed anger. Anger includes any form of unforgiveness, bitterness, hate, jealousy, gossip, criticism, etc. Paul says these can "give the devil a foothold" (Ephesians 4:26-27). He tells the Corinthians that if they don't forgive each other Satan will use that to "outwit" them (II Corinthians 2:10-11). Jesus Himself said that those who don't forgive others will be turned over to tormenting demons to bring them to repentance (Matthew 6:14-15; 18:34). This anger includes anger toward others, parents, self, or God. There can be no removing demons who claim this access until all anger is truly confessed and put under the blood of Jesus. This is one of the first things that usually comes up when we counsel people and pray for their deliverance. Do NOT take this lightly! Don't rush through this step. Spending time praying for God to show anger and unforgiveness is time well spent.

Many verses warn about the danger of unconfessed unrighteous anger and how demons can use it to gain access to the angry person (2 Corinthians 2:10-11). "In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold" (Ephesians 4:26-27).

LESSON FOR TODAY 2: Anger comes from mishandling hurt and pain. Instead of feeling the hurt we turn it into anger for revenge or control. This allows demons to use it as an opening. There is a lack of control that opens the door. Also, it is almost like a prayer for power to hate someone, and demons seek to answer that prayer. They made Saul angry at David, so much so that he tried to kill David (I Samuel 18:10-11; 19:9-10). Paul says there is a very close connection between anger and demonizing (Ephesians 4:27).

Pain must be handled as pain, not turned into anger. You can't bury something alive and think you are getting rid of it. The hurt must be dead - faced, admitted, healed, removed, forgiven. When a person buries hurt alive it keeps poisoning everything until it is dug out and destroyed.

While there is a legitimate use for anger ('righteous indignation') most of what we face is not right. Anger is a secondary emotion, unlike fear which is a basic emotion. Wrong anger is always the result of mishandling another, deeper emotion like fear or pain. Let's take pain, first of all. When a person hits their finger with a hammer what do they do? Usually, they get angry. What they feel is pain, but it comes out as anger because anger is a much easier emotion to handle than pain. When someone says something critical or threatening it hurts, but the natural response in many is to get angry. That way they don't have to face the pain – but it stays and causes more and more anger. That's where fear comes in. It's not just pain that causes anger, but fear of pain. Fear is at the root of anger in other ways as well. To seek to manage our fears we try to control our lives and circumstances (thus the control emphasis part grows). We feel that is necessary to prevent pain and other things we fear. We use anger as a control tool. The adrenaline rush makes us feel in charge

instead of a victim. We learn that people can be manipulated and controlled by our anger (or the threat of it) and we use that to control as well. This is another reason why it's important to deal with and get victory over the fears down inside. When they go the anger and control issues will become much more manageable. A person can't stop their anger as long as what causes it is still inside pushing it out. They must get the root cause out, and that is where dealing with the fear comes in. (August 30, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

Do you or someone you know struggle with anger? What have you learned from this blog that can help bring victory? Write down the main lessons that apply to you so you don't forget them.

BLOG 59: GOD PROMISES FREEDOM

Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” John 8:32

Everyone wants freedom. It's built into us to be unrestricted and unhindered. We don't want anything or anyone forcefully controlling us. Yet very few people are truly free. Many are in physical bondage; even more are in emotional or spiritual captivity. Everyone seeks freedom, for their body and especially for their soul. Yet there is only one way to liberty and that is through Jesus. He not only makes it available; He promises it to those who know Him and His teaching. His truth is what sets us free.

Satan's lie is that there is no truth, or, if there is, no one can know it. He tells people there are no absolutes, you can make your own truth and it'll be truth to you. But Jesus promises there is truth, and that we can know it and apply it. What wonderful provisions He make available for us.

Stephen knew the truth and taught it in his synagogue (Acts 7). Paul listened to him but rejected the truth and took part in his stoning to silence his words. But what Stephen had taught stayed with Paul and after he became a Christian, he taught the same truth. It had set Stephen free and then it also set Paul free. Ezra also taught God's truth to the people (Ezra 7:10) and they accepted it and found freedom in obeying God's Word. The same happened when King Josiah found the law of God which had been lost and neglected. He had it read and applied and God greatly blessed the people (2 King 22).

Truth is important because it brings freedom. Satan's lies say we will never be free from the sin or difficulty we face because it is too strong for us. We hear, "Others may be free, but never you," or "God won't free you." But God promises that freedom is available, and it comes through knowing and applying His truth. We know Satan is a defeated foe (1 John 4:4) and when we commit to living for Jesus and resisting Satan there will ultimately be victory (James 4:6-8). We know Jesus has given us power and authority over demons (Luke 9:1-2; 10:17-20). Knowing God's truth about spiritual warfare and applying it to our lives will enable us to win our battles and gain freedom.

Freedom doesn't mean an absence of battles or challenges. Freedom starts within, in our own minds and hearts. First, we must find freedom from fear and anger, lust and jealousy, pride and greed. Freedom doesn't have to do mainly with our circumstances without, but our bondage within. Truth starts within and that's where freedom first begins as well. God never promised to remove our trials and hurts, but He did promise to give us peace within (freedom from fear and stress). We can be free from fear, guilt, shame, anger and all the rest by knowing and following Jesus. It's available to every believer.

The Ethiopian Eunuch read God's Words of truth and listened as Philip explained them to him (Acts 8). He accepted their truth and found freedom from his guilt and emptiness. The people Jesus healed found freedom from physical bondage, but the greater freedom came to those who saw the truth of who He was and were freed from their sin. His truth made them free as well.

I grew up in liberal Christianity. I was intrigued by the occult and explored various cults but nothing satisfied until I came to Jesus and found His truth for all my needs. I'm still learning and growing, but I do know that truth is only found in Him, and that His truth does indeed set us free. Have you found that as well? (September 6, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

Memorize John 8:32. When might you need to apply this truth to your life? When can you use it to help someone who isn't a believer?

BLOG 60: GOD PROMISES US POWER AND AUTHORITY

When Jesus had called the Twelve together, he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases, 2 and he sent them out to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick. Luke 9:1-2

When we travel to India each year to train pastors we arrive at large, modern airport. It looks like it could be located in any major US city except for one thing. Soldiers with automatic weapons are walking around everywhere. The orders they gave were quickly obeyed. Most were very young men. If they hadn't been in uniform with their rifles no one would have paid them any attention. The uniform and weapon showed that they were representing the authority and power of the Indian government and therefore were to be obeyed. Like those young men, we don't have any authority or power in ourselves, but when we represent Jesus and have His authority and power, then the forces of evil must obey.

The promises here are that Jesus gives power and authority to His followers to have victory over Satan and demons. Let's look at each of these separately.

Authority, 'exousia' in the Greek, is used 108 times in the New Testament and refers to the right to use power. He gave the disciples the authority to enforce His spiritual commands and laws. Policemen have authority, a badge, which allows them to enforce the laws of the government. It's not their own authority but that which comes from their government. It is delegated authority, like a husband has to a wife and a parent to a child. Everything Jesus did was because God had given Him authority to do it (John 5:19). He had laid aside His own divine authority (Philippians 2:6-8) to live life as any other human being. All He did was by God's own authority given to Him, as it is to us as well.

Jesus has given us that same authority to use today (John 14:12; Matthew 28:18-20). Satan deceives us into thinking we are powerless victims but that is a lie. As God's children we have access to the same resources Jesus did when He lived on earth. God has given us His full blessing because we are His children. We are born into His family; He is our Father (Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:6) and we are His children (John 1:12; 1 John 3:2). He put His Holy Spirit inside us (John 14:17). He gives us an equal inheritance with His Son, Jesus (Romans 8:14-17).

Not only did Jesus give His disciples authority, He also gave them **power**. A policeman needs authority, a badge, but sometimes he needs power to enforce that authority – a club or gun. 'Power' is used 118 times in the New Testament and refers to power, might, strength and force. Our word 'dynamite' comes from it. God has also given us His power as well as His authority (Acts 1:8; Luke 10:17).

We also have this power available to us (Acts 1:8; John 14:12). It is His power that transforms us into a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17) as He makes us a new man (Ephesians 4:24; Colossians 3:10). His power delivers us from temptations and trials when we rely on Him (1 Corinthians 10:13; 2 Corinthians 12:14). He has power to put His divine nature in us (2 Peter 1:4), give us abundant life now & eternal life in heaven (John 3:16; 10:10).

Jesus gave His followers power and authority to drive out ALL demons (Luke 9:1) – none are greater than His power. He did not enable His followers to cure all diseases, though. He said we could drive out ALL demons but didn't say we could cure ALL diseases. Some He will remove in response to our prayers, but only with demonizing are we assured that ALL must obey and yield. When Jesus returns all disease will be gone, but we don't have authority to remove all of it now.

Sceva was a Jewish exorcist who tried using Jesus' name as a ritual chant to remove a demon from a man. He was doing it in his own strength for he wasn't a believer in Jesus. The demon knew this and knew he didn't have to obey Sceva so he attacked and severely injured Sceva and his 7 sons (Acts 19:14-20). The power and authority is not in us, nor in using Jesus' name as a lucky charm. It is only found in Jesus who works through us when we are closely connected to Him.

Always remember the power and authority you have in Jesus. You can pray and preach in His name and power. Use it to encourage people when they need it, give counsel with the wisdom of God's Spirit, rebuke demons in Jesus' name, ask God to heal if it is His will, claim protection for your family and yourself, teach His Word with authority, witness to others with power, forgive those who hurt you and show unconditional love to all. We don't have to live in defeat nor do we ever have to fear Satan or his forces. We have everything we need for victory in Jesus, but we must use the power and authority He gives us because on our own we can do nothing (John 15:5). (September 13, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

This short verse is important to memorize and use. When do you need Jesus' authority in spiritual warfare in your own life? When do you need His power to have victory in your spiritual battles? When those times come, ask Him for them and trust Him to work through you.

BLOG 61: GOD PROMISES SUFFICIENT GRACE

But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. 10 That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong. 2 Corinthians 12:9-10

God's promises only seem to be important when we really need them. When things are going fine, we don't think of them, but when we are in over our heads and need a lifeline, we reach out for something true and solid to hang onto and that's when God's promises mean the most. That's certainly true of me. I have been going to India for many years. Ministering to pastors there is a great blessing and wonderful privilege. It's an amazing opportunity and I thank God for it. I also thank Him for His presence and promises, for without them I wouldn't be able to minister there. This promise, "**when I am weak, then I am strong**," has been especially precious to me in India. I have faced physical, emotional and spiritual weaknesses while in India unlike anything I have ever experienced elsewhere. I've had this promise to hang on to. "When I am weak, then I am strong." In fact, the weaker I was, the stronger I was. The less strength I had, the more I depended on His and always found His sufficient for whatever I needed. I became very weak, but He never did!

You see, we are always weak. It's just that we don't always realize it. For some foolish reason we think we have strength and resources comparable to what we face in life. That's why God lets us sometimes see our weakness, so we can better give credit where it is due - to His strength getting us through life. What could you face without Him? Where would you be if His Spirit and presence left you entirely on your own? What if you had to live life just by your own resources? What would your life look like now? What kind of shape would you be in? This promise isn't just for when things get really really bad. It's for every day of our lives.

There is another promise in this verse. One is that is just as important as the one we first looked at. It is that **His grace is sufficient**. Paul was writing from personal experience. He had a thorn in his flesh, something he describes as an angel/messenger of Satan (2 Corinthians 12:7-8). It was a demon. The demon was causing him tremendous pain and great difficulty in his ministry, so he prayed 3 times to have the demon removed. But God didn't remove the demon. You would think if anyone would have their prayers answered it would be Paul, but not so. He wasn't delivered from the demonic oppression. God doesn't always deliver us, either.

BUT, when God doesn't deliver us from demonic oppression, He always helps us to endure what comes against us. That's what He did with Paul. Paul discovered God's grace was sufficient to enable him to handle the pain and oppression and to keep on with life and ministry anyway. God doesn't always remove what we face, even when it is demonic. That's an important lesson to remember in spiritual warfare. God never promised to always remove every demonic work in against us. But He does promise to give us grace to sustain us if He doesn't remove it.

I counsel with many Christians who insist God deliver them right away. If it doesn't happen, they go from church to church, or deliverance counselor to deliverance counselor. They insist God wants them delivered instead of considering God may have a reason for allowing the demonizing to remain. They become focused entirely on their problem. Eventually they may even turn from God because He doesn't seem to be handling their situation the way they want it handled. God will always take care of our needs. However, He just doesn't always do it the way we demand. If you have been struggling with a situation for some time, especially a demonic one, and it isn't going away, turn to God for His sufficient grace to see you through.

God's grace was sufficient for Paul. It was sufficient to sustain Joseph through years of prison, Daniel in Babylon, Job through his suffering and countless believers who have faced martyrdom. It'll be sufficient for you as well.

Why would God ever allow a demon to have access to Paul of all people? God allowed it to keep Paul humble. With his great talent and gifts and his very successful ministry he could have gotten proud. Paul was a very confident, self-assured person anyway. He had to be to carry out the ministry God gave him. But he also needed to remain humble and dependent on God. This "thorn in the flesh" did just that. It pointed out his weakness and drove him to God where he could experience God's sufficient grace. (September 20, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

BLOG 62: "IGNORE THE PROBLEM AND IT'LL GO AWAY" (Marriage Lies)

If only this lie was true, we'd all have perfect marriages and friendships! Single or married, we are often tempted to avoid facing difficulties in our associations with others. What if we could ignore every difficult issue and live happily ever after? It doesn't take long to find that doesn't work!

Of course, Satan doesn't want us to face and work through sins in our lives or relationships. He is using them to bring hurt and damage to all involved, so he wants them to continue. He wants us to keep them secret so he can feed them and keep them alive. He loves it when we keep our problems and defeats in the darkness, but the darkness is where he rules and reigns. He loves when we think if we ignore a problem it will go away.

The lie behind this is that **a great marriage doesn't take work – it just happens**. "Our great love overcomes all obstacles, just give it time." "If we ignore the issues long enough, they'll fade and be gone, so don't make a big deal of it." The same lie is used to undermine relationships of those who aren't married as well. It can be easier to let something painful go because we feel it'll be even more hurtful to face it and work it through.

The truth is that **marriage takes commitment, work and forgiveness**. It's been said that great marriages are made in heaven. They come in kits and you have to put them together yourselves. And believe me, it's not easy assembling a godly marriage! It takes honesty, openness, confession, forgiveness and a humble, teachable spirit. It also takes time, both quality and quantity, to work through issues and keep growing. A marriage ceremony takes about an hour, but a marriage takes a lifetime.

Instead of overlooking uncomfortable situations, identify the problems and face them together. It's not about blame or whose fault it is, but about what each person can do to overcome the problem. The enemy is not your mate, it's the problem. Your mate is your teammate in overcoming it. Attend a marriage retreat, get godly Christian counseling, read good books and talk to mature Christian couples who have worked through similar situations together. However, you do it, you must **face the problem**.

That's not just true of current, ongoing problems, it's also true of difficulties and sins from long ago. **Problems in the past don't stay in the past**. Even issues from before you met your mate must be worked through. Past baggage like pornography, unhealthy past relationships, sexual immorality, addictions, dysfunctional family of origin, rage, abuse, etc. must be dealt with. Don't think you can ignore them and they will go away, they pop up again and can be very destructive. It takes courage to recognize, admit, face and work through these matters. God forgives all sin in our past (1 Corinthians 6:9-11), but the consequences often remain and need to be overcome. If it's something you can deal with together, do so. If it's bigger than that, get help. Just don't believe the lie that says that if you ignore it then it'll go away! (September 27, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

If there are any issues in your past or your mate's past that seem to pop up and influence your relationship today, pray about them. Pray together regularly, and follow God's leading as He starts working to heal these areas.

BLOG 63: "MY MATE NEEDS TO CHANGE" (Marriage Lies)

Every counselor knows they can't listen to just one side of the story when there are relationship conflicts. No matter how clear everything seems or how convincing the person may be, the other side needs to be heard before conclusions can be drawn. That's because there are always two sides. Seldom is it all one person's fault while the other is completely innocent. Counselors know that, but Satan feeds that lie to anyone who will listen.

Single people can feel this way about their relationships with family or friends. Difficulties arise there as well. Are they faced or do we pass the blame off on someone else? It's very easy to see the speck in someone else's eye and miss the log in your own (Matthew 7:5).

It's so easy to think that whatever happens **is all their fault**. We say, "If they were like when we first met, we'd be fine, they've changed and expect too much of me." "I've tried for years and it hasn't helped, now it's up to them."

The lie behind the lie here is quite obvious: **"It couldn't be my fault."** "I'm doing OK." "If they would change it'd be all right." "If they would accept me like I am and stop trying to change me, our marriage would be OK."

Sometimes the lie is the opposite: **"It's all my fault."** "I'm a mess and hopeless." "I'll never change." "I'll never be good enough for them." "It's impossible, so why should I even try?" "I'll never be perfect." Satan doesn't care which form the lies takes because it all comes from pride and self-centeredness. He is the originator of pride and knows all about it (John 8:44; 1 Timothy 3:6).

The solution in both extremes is the same, **look for where you can grow**. Unrealistic expectations of ourselves, our mate or our marriage are the basis of many marriage problems. We bring assumptions into our relationship that are often idealistic and not possible, then wonder what is wrong when they aren't met. Singles do that as well as married people. The truth is that no human being can meet our deepest needs, only God can do that (Philippians 4:19).

When we believe the lie that it's my mate that needs to change, not me, then we develop a taker mentality, not a giver. We need to confess our critical, judgmental attitude. Jesus condemned those who look for fault in others but ignore the bigger problems in their own life (Matthew 7:5). To change John Kennedy's famous quote, we should ask not what our mate can do for us but we can do for our mate. That's what Jesus does for us.

We can't change anyone else, only ourselves. We are called to unconditionally love our mate, like Jesus loves us (1 Corinthians 13). We need to honestly and humbly ask God to show us where we need to grow and mature so we can be a better Christian and mate. God promises to help us grow (Philippians 1:6). There is nothing we can't overcome with His grace (2 Corinthians 12:9). No matter what issues we face in our life or our marriage, God's grace can help us cope and, through it, grow to become more Christ-like. (October 4, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

The only person you can change is yourself? How are you coming along with that? How willing are you to let God change you? Take a few minutes to give Him the authority to change you where you need to be changed.

BLOG 64: "IT'S OK TO FIGHT SOMETIMES" (Marriage Lies)

When I was growing up, I knew a couple that fought over and over. I had never seen anything like it. There was yelling, cursing, complaining and criticizing one day, then the next day all would be normal. I never knew when it would start or stop. It went on their whole married life. It embarrassed me and it scared me, but it was just a way of life for them. It was normal – or was it? Is it OK to fight now and then?

The answer is no. We won't always agree, we will hurt each other and bring out emotions in each other, but fighting to win and/or hurt someone is never right. Still, that **it's OK to fight sometimes** is a common lie to that many believe. The lie says that it's no big deal because every couple fights from time to time. "Fights aren't that bad; they help clear the air and let emotions out – or so they claim." But it's a lie. If it's between married couples or friends doesn't matter. Fighting does much harm but no good.

The opposite side of the coin is that we should never disagree about anything because if we do, something is wrong with our marriage. That isn't true either. **Disagreements are inevitable, but not fights.**

Satan is all about anger (John 8:44) and loves to provoke people who love each other to get angry with each other. That's a weapon of his we need to know how to counter. The Bible says to **never go to bed angry** (Ephesians 4:26) – and that doesn't mean to stay up and fight all night! It means we need to learn to communicate and work things through. No one really wins in a fight. One person may get their own way, but the relationship loses. Usually the louder, angrier, stronger person comes out on top, except when the quieter one is so good at their passive aggression, they 'win.' When we are wrong, we need to admit it and when we are right, we need to keep quiet. That's good advice!

Each couple needs to learn to **communicate**, which really means to learn to listen and understand what the other is saying. One person, usually the more introverted person, should talk

first and explain their concern in a gentle, quiet way (1 Peter 3:4). The other must focus on understanding what is said. When the listener can repeat to the speaker what they are feeling and saying, then the other can address what is said. But they shouldn't speak, argue, disagree or say anything until they can repeat the first person's words in an acceptable way. Speaking we can do – listening we are very poor at. Make it your goal to be a good listener. If you want to read more about this look on my web site <https://www.christiantrainingonline.org/our-ministries/family/articles-books/> or write me at jerry@schmoyer.net.

Most fights are not about the thing you are arguing about. You probably follow the same pattern with different topics or subjects. What's really behind them is a person's pride and ego. She feels unloved and is hurt. He feels disrespected and is hurt. Stubbornness, pride and self-centeredness are what fights are about. Discussions are about issues; fights are about control and winning. No, it's never OK to fight. (October 18, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

Do you and your mate fight to win? Or do you listen to each other to better understand where they are coming from? Do you feel 'listened to and understood' in your marriage? Does your mate?

BLOG 65: PETER: GROWING IN FAITH

Simon Peter was the leader of the disciples (Matthew 9:35-10:4; Mark 6:6-9; Luke 9:1-2). Originally named Simon, Jesus changed it to Peter to describe his eventual strength and stability (Matthew 16:18; Mark 3:16; Luke 6:14; John 1:42). He was a very outgoing, friendly, talkative person who liked everyone and wanted everyone to like him. Unfortunately, though, he often didn't have a lot of self-discipline. He met Jesus through his brother Andrew who was a follower of John the Baptizer (John 1:40-41). Jesus challenged him to leave his fishing nets and follow Him full time (Matthew 4:13-22; Mark 1:16-20; Luke 4:31; 5:1-11). Peter was a natural leader, but only because of his forceful personality. It took a while for him to learn how to be a godly leader. Jesus patiently worked with him through his mistakes to help him become one of the greatest leaders in the early church. He'll do the same with us if we let Him.

Throughout His time on earth, Jesus challenged Peter's faith so it would grow stronger. He put Peter in positions where he needed to trust and see Jesus' work in his life. After fishing all night and catching nothing, Jesus told him to go back out and try again. He did, and he caught a great number of fish (Luke 5:4-7). Jesus did this to strengthen Peter's young faith. As Peter got older, the tests got harder, and he learned to trust and obey even when his nets came back empty!

Jesus later told Peter to catch a fish, and in its mouth, he would find a coin he should use to pay their taxes (Matthew 17:24-27; Mark 9:33). Peter trusted and obeyed Jesus. As the challenges increased, Jesus called Peter to come to Him walking on top of water (Matthew 14:28-29; John 6:19-20). Peter obeyed, but when he saw the waves, he became afraid and started sinking, then he turned to Jesus for help and was delivered. That is often what happens to us when God stretches our faith as well. We get our eyes off Jesus and onto the circumstances around us. We start sinking. The sooner we get our eyes back on Jesus the better!

Peter's faith grew while he was with Jesus. He was the one who spoke for all and affirmed the deity of Jesus in his great confession of faith (Matthew 16:16; John 6:68-69). In his first letter, 1 Peter, he talks a lot about the importance of faith and submission to God. Of course, he still had failures, like when he denied even knowing Jesus. But he did repent and was restored. (October 11, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

As you look back at your life, can you see God doing things to stretch your faith? What have been some of the hardest times you've had trusting Him? What did you learn from them? Is He stretching your faith in any way right now? Based on what you have learned in the past, how should

you respond now?

BLOG 66: PAUL: A LEADER MUST BE TRUSTWORTHY (1)

Paul is one of the greatest leaders in the history of the church. God used him in mighty ways to start churches and to write more books in the Bible than anyone else. There are many wonderful leadership lessons we can glean from his life, but we will look at some from the final chapters of the book of Acts, Paul's shipwreck experience. It is said that trials and difficult times bring out the best in leaders, and that is certainly true of Paul.

Paul was converted on the road to Damascus (Acts 9) and went to Arabia to learn and grow spiritually. He spent most of his ministry on three missionary journeys, starting churches and writing letters to other churches (Acts 13-20). After 30 years of ministry, he was arrested in Jerusalem for something he didn't do and eventually transferred to Rome for trial (Acts 21-26). Although traveling as a prisoner in chains, Paul showed his leadership skills in several ways on that trip. There are important lessons we can learn from him. Read Acts 27:1 - 28:10.

1. A GODLY LEADER CAN BE TRUSTED Paul was a prisoner under the authority of a centurion named Julius who was assigned directly to Caesar (Acts 27:1). He was in chains, kept in the hold of the ship. His faithful friend Luke traveled with him at his own expense. In order to accompany Paul, he would have had to sign papers becoming Paul's slave. That was the only way he could go. While Paul gets the recognition and credit for all he did, it wouldn't have been possible without Luke's help and support in addition to his medical skill and help. I have been blessed with several men like that in my life, including P. K. Moses who helps me with my books and conferences in India. He is a fine man of God and a great servant who makes all I do possible.

At the first port where the ship landed, Julius allowed Paul to go ashore to get some medical help for conditions that developed or worsened while in prison (Acts 27:2-3). Paul had friends there who could provide what he needed.

What was unusual was that the Roman soldier, Julius, allowed Paul to go ashore. It means he must have trusted Paul and his friends. If he lost any of his prisoners, he would be put to death, so he had to trust there was no trap on shore to free Paul, and that he would return as promised. What did Paul do to earn such respect and trust from a man who had just met him?

Those who knew Paul were convinced he cared about them and did all he could for their good (Matthew 20:25-28). He could be trusted to keep his word. They knew he wasn't just using them for his own purposes. He treated everyone this way: free and slaves, adults and children, men and women, high social standing and low standing. Jesus did the same thing. Paul served others and didn't expect them to serve him. Trust comes through integrity and character (1 Timothy 3:2, 7). (October 25, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

Do people trust you? Do you have a reputation, even among those who don't know you, of being honest and keeping your word? Do the people you work with know you put their needs before your own? Do you treat all the same, whatever their age, sex, wealth or social status?

BLOG 67: PAUL: A LEADER INITIATES (2)

We have been looking at leadership lessons from Paul when he was a prisoner being taken to Rome (Acts 27:1 – 28:10). In the first blog we saw a leader is someone who must be trusted. Now we'll learn another lesson in leadership from Paul.

2. A GODLY LEADER TAKES THE INITIATIVE TO LEAD From that port they sailed for a few days

until landing at another port (Acts 27:4-5). There they switched to a larger ship carrying grain from Egypt to Rome (Acts 27:6), which would be safer for sailing in the open sea. There were 276 passengers on board. As they traveled on the new ship, they tried sailing against the winds, and it was hard sailing. They again landed, this time at a place on the island of Crete (Acts 27:7-9a). By now it was early October and too late to make the long sail to Rome. Strong winds and hurricane conditions were beginning, making sailing too dangerous until the spring. In fact, despite being a prisoner, Paul warned the leaders that it would be dangerous trying to go on (Acts 27:9b). Trying to cross now could be very dangerous.

It wasn't Paul's place to speak. The captain and the owner of the ship had the final say, yet Paul spoke up. That was a courageous thing to do. He had a strong conviction about what needed to be done so he shared it. He was gentle and polite, but he put himself into the position of a leader. He didn't criticize or put down the others. Nor did he demand to have his way. He didn't use anger to force his will. But he did state what he felt.

God expects pastors to be leaders (1 Peter 5:1-4). For some that is easy, but for others very hard. Being a leader came naturally to Peter for he liked to be surrounded by people who would listen to him. But it wasn't until he learned to put Jesus first in his life that he became a godly leader. For those who are shy or reserved it's harder to be in front of others and make decisions for the group. I am that kind of person. It's always been hard for me to initiate and lead. I do better at finding what the majority want and going that way, or letting someone more outgoing than I take over leadership. But I know that isn't right. Since God gave me leadership over the people and ministry under my responsibility, He also will give me the guidance I need to lead them. I need to trust that what God wants is right and best, and follow it. It's especially hard for me when someone criticizes me or opposes my leadership. Being a leader isn't about being popular and liked by everyone. It's not about pleasing the people but about pleasing God. That is what Paul did, and what we all must do. (November 1, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

Is it hard or easy for you to lead? If it is easy, do you make sure you are doing what God wants and not just what you want? If it is hard, what do you do to have victory over your fear and stand for what you know God wants? Can you think of a time you initiated and lead as God wanted? How did it turn out? Think about a time you hesitated to lead, or went your own way instead of God's way? How did that turn out?

BLOG 68: PAUL: A LEADER TELLS THE TRUTH (3)

We have been looking at leadership lessons from Paul when he was a prisoner being taken to Rome (Acts 27:1 – 28:10). In the first blog we saw a leader is someone who must be trusted. Then we saw that a leader must initiate. Now we'll learn more lessons in leadership from Paul.

3. A GODLY LEADER IS STRONG DURING DIFFICULT TIMES Although Paul didn't think it was the right thing to do, the captain and owner of the ship both decided to sail. They wanted to get to a better place to spend the winter until they could go the rest of the way to Rome. They only needed to go 40 miles, and it seemed like a safe gamble (Acts 27:11-13). After they started the short trip the weather quickly changed and a hurricane swept over them (Acts 27:14-15). They couldn't control the direction of the ship and did all they could to keep the ship from sinking, even throwing all the cargo and equipment overboard to lighten the ship (Acts 27:16-19).

The storm continued without stopping for many days. Everyone was awake trying to help keep the ship afloat. It was impossible to eat or sleep. At any moment the ship could break apart and they would drown. The emotional and physical stress was tremendous, and after many days of this they were exhausted and gave up hope of surviving (Acts 27:20-21a).

It was at this time that Paul's leadership instincts came into play. He stood up and reminded everyone that if they had listened to him they wouldn't have had this happen (Acts 27:21). He wasn't trying to show that he was right and they were wrong, he wanted them to realize he knew what he was talking about. They didn't listen to him before, but now maybe they would. Paul tells everyone to not fear dying, for God had assured him that they would all survive. The ship would be lost, but they would be safe (Acts 27:22-24). Paul believed what God told him and confidently passed it on to the others. He wasn't expecting people to follow him, but to trust and follow God. God had spoken, and what He said would come about.

Are you able to declare God's truth, especially during difficult times? Can you call people to follow God and trust in His Word and promises? Are you able to clearly discern God's leading for you and your ministry so you can pass it on to others? Do you stick to it no matter how difficult the circumstances become? Can you lead with authority because you know it is God who is leading and you are just following Him (Matthew 7:28-29)?

4. A GODLY LEADER ENCOURAGES OTHERS A godly leader always tries to encourage and build up the people he leads. He doesn't criticize, scold, or get angry with them. We all respond to encouragement better than criticism. That's how God Himself deals with us as well. That's what Paul did with the people on the ship, even though their refusal to listen to his advice got them into this situation. He encouraged them by affirming his trust in God (Acts 27:25-26). He set an example of one who wasn't afraid, but believed in God and trusted His promises.

Paul gave the people hope that they would live. He looked beyond the current circumstances to what God had promised. He was open and honest with the people, and they respected and trusted him.

That doesn't mean Paul never corrected people, for he did (Galatians 2:11-14). But he did by speaking the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15). Jesus says we are to go to the person in private first, not bring it up in public unless he refuses to repent (Matthew 18:15-18). Even then, the whole purpose is to restore, not condemn. That's what God does with us (Romans 8:1). (November 8, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

Do people come to you for encouragement during difficult times? Are you good at encouraging people? Do you do what you can to help even those who haven't taken your advice and have gotten into trouble because of it? Are you able to privately correct others in love? Can you control your anger and frustration, replacing it with compassion and sympathy? Are you able to treat others the way God treats you?

BLOG 69: PAUL: A LEADER MUST TAKE A STAND (4)

We have been looking at leadership lessons from Paul on his trip to Rome (Acts 27:1 – 28:10). Here we see how to take a stand against sin and set a good example.

5. A GODLY LEADER STANDS AGAINST SIN After 2 weeks of being violently tossed around by hurricane, the ship finally started approaching land (Acts 27:27-28). That meant the water became shallower and the danger of hitting rocks and being broken up were much greater (Acts 27:29). There was no way the people could swim to shore in that kind of weather.

While waiting for the morning light, some of the sailors tried to take a lifeboat to make it to shore by themselves. This would have left the rest of the ship without their help the next day when it was greatly needed. Paul discovered what they were doing and warned Julius that they must be stopped or everyone would drown (Acts 27:30-31).

It seems Paul's leadership was now respected and trusted. Julius listened to what he said and acted on his suggestion (Acts 27:32). Paul has proven himself and they willingly followed him. Giving

someone a title does not automatically confer leadership. Those who show others they have their best interests in mind and know how to meet their needs earn it. As a prisoner who most likely would die a cruel death in Rome, Paul should have been the one trying to escape. Instead, he stopped others from doing so for the good of the group. He is not looking out for himself and personal gain, but for the good of everyone.

Notice, too, that Paul didn't confront the fleeing sailors himself, but went to the one in authority to do so. He followed the chain of command. There are times we may be tempted to take things into our own hands, but it is better to work with the authority, be it the father of a family, the local government, or the head of a business. The same is true when dealing with people who are part of someone else's ministry or church.

Are you able to stand against sin, no matter who does it or for what reason? Can you point it out in love, privately at first, in a way that will restore the offending person? Do you work through those who are in authority over the person instead of taking things into your own hands? Can you point out sin no matter what others say to criticize you for doing so?

6. A GODLY LEADER SETS A GOOD EXAMPLE Knowing the next day would be hard for everyone, Paul urged the people to eat to gain some much-needed strength (Acts 27:33-34). He set an example by starting to eat first (Acts 27:35). This encouraged everyone to do the same thing (Acts 27:36).

As leaders of the people in our ministry and children in our family, we must set a good example for them. We can't expect them to do what we say unless we first do it ourselves. We are always being watched, even when we don't think so. Little things, which we may not even notice, are observed by others. We need to keep a good reputation among unbelievers, but we also need to set a standard for believers. By setting a good example, we also show others how to live for Jesus and how to respond under various situations. We can't expect our children or our people to do what we say if we aren't doing it ourselves! (November 15, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

What example do you set for your children? What about the people in your ministry? Do you see any bad habits or traits in them, which they picked up from following you? When have you set a good example for others? When have you set a bad example? Whose example do you watch and follow? Why?

BLOG 70: PAUL: ALWAYS BE READY TO SERVE (5)

We will conclude our series of lessons from Paul's trip to Rome and shipwreck (Acts 27:1 – 28:10).

7. A GODLY LEADER USES ANY OPPORTUNITY TO MINISTER The next day developed as Paul had said. The ship got closer to the shore before breaking up and sinking, but all the people drifted to shore on boards from the ship (Acts 27:37-41). The soldiers were about to kill the prisoners before leaving the ship, because if any escaped they would die, but out of respect for Paul and what he had done Julius stopped the plan (Acts 27:37-40). Everyone was saved (Acts 27:41). But the story isn't quite over yet.

On shore they built a fire to get warm and dry. There was a poisonous snake in the wood Paul picked up, and it bit him. Some thought that was judgment on him because he didn't drown in the sea. However, he didn't show any adverse effects of the poison (Acts 28:1-6) and the people were very impressed.

The chief official of the island welcomed them into his home. His father was in bed, very sick. Paul prayed for him and he was healed. Others on the island who were sick came, and Paul prayed for all of them. All were healed. Paul was able to minister to everyone and share the gospel to all on the

island. They provided for the shipwrecked people all winter and helped supply them when it was time to leave (Acts 28:7-10).

Despite being tired, wet, and hungry, and having just been bitten by a poisonous snake, Paul saw an opportunity to pray for someone in need and did so. As a result, God opened the door for him to minister to everyone on the island. We see that throughout Paul's whole life. He was always looking for opportunities to minister and took advantage of all he could. God says we, too, must always be ready to minister by word or deed (1 Peter 3:15). (November 22, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

Are you always ready and willing to minister to others in any way you can, no matter how bad the time or what is happening in your life? Do you sometimes hesitate to reach out and help someone if you are busy? Do you really pray for all those whom you say that you will? Do you ask God for opportunities each day to minister for Him, and then look for them throughout the day? Or do you sometimes get so busy doing what you have planned that you don't notice the needs of others around you?

This is just one incident in Paul's life. Many other lessons can be learned from other aspects of his life and ministry. This is a good example of leadership under tough circumstances. They are good lessons for us to follow.

We have seen from the life of Paul that to be a godly leader we must

1. Be trustworthy
2. Take the initiative to lead
3. Be strong during difficult times
4. Encourage others
5. Stand against sin
6. Set a good example
7. Use any opportunity to minister

Do you have these? Which are evident in your life now? Which are you lacking? What do you need to do to start to improve? Pray about these things and ask God help you have each of them in your life.

BLOG 71: EVERYONE NEEDS A PAUL (Timothy 1)

When God calls a person to serve Him, He also equips that person. He gifts them and puts others in their lives who can train and guide them. As they grow and mature, He then leads them to younger believers into whom they can build. Barnabas disciplined Paul, then Paul trained Timothy.

Timothy's mother, Eunice, and his grandmother, Lois, were godly Jews. His father was not a Jew. He allowed his son to be named "Timothy," which means "honored of God." Timothy was taught the Old Testament growing up (2 Timothy 1:5; 3:15). Evidently, his family was well-to-do for they were able to offer hospitality to Paul when he was in Lystra on his first missionary journey. Perhaps Paul recovered there from being stoned (Acts 14:19).

Paul developed a close relationship with the family, especially Timothy. He led Timothy to salvation (Acts 15:6-19) and became his spiritual father and mentor (Philippians 2:22). Timothy was young, probably a teenager. He was shy and insecure, the opposite of Paul.

Paul returned to see him on his second missionary journey. He discovered that Timothy had been following and serving Jesus. He had a good reputation among the Christians there (Acts 16:2). When Paul left, Timothy traveled with him. Paul mentored and trained him.

Timothy traveled with Paul for the next 15 years. He assisted in starting churches and helping them grow (2 Timothy 4:5). Most of the time he ministered in Ephesus. Ephesus was a very important city and the center of the early church. Paul spent more time there than any other one place. It was an evil city under Satan's power. God did miracles through Paul to show His power was greater than Satan's power (Acts 19).

Many important events happened in Ephesus. It is where Apollos came to the knowledge of salvation. John and Mary lived there and trained many important church leaders. Mark wrote his gospel in Ephesus. John wrote 3 epistles from there as well. The church in Ephesus was very important and it was a great responsibility for Timothy to be assigned by Paul to serve there. Paul had been training Timothy for just such a responsibility. Everyone needs a mentor.

Paul was Timothy's mentor and Timothy was Paul's student. Every church leader needs to have someone to mentor them, like Timothy had Paul. Paul had Barnabas and Luke as his mentors. Each leader needs to have someone to help them grow. As they mature in the faith, they need to find someone to train, like Paul trained Timothy. We all must be building into younger leaders to prepare them for their future roles in church leadership. You need someone to help guide you as well as someone you can be training.

Paul had someone more mature in the faith to mentor him (Barnabas and Luke) and someone younger into whom he could build (Timothy). Paul also had someone of equal standing in life and maturity, a friend to share burdens with. Silas was such a man in his life. We, too, need a close ministry friend with whom we can share burdens and find encouragement. (November 29, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

2 Timothy 2:2 The things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.

Who is your mentor? Who are you mentoring? Who are your close ministry friends with whom you share your troubles and triumphs? Every pastor and leader should have some in each of these categories. If you don't, ask God to show you who can fill those roles in your life.

BLOG 72: TIMID TIMOTHY (Timothy 2)

(READ 1 Timothy 1:1-3, 18-19) Do you ever get afraid? Some church leaders are quiet and shy. They may be fearful of what might happen. That is something I have had to face, especially as a younger Christian. Timothy had the same problem. In fact, the main reason Paul wrote 1 Timothy was to urge Timothy to stay in Ephesus and straighten out the problems the church was having. Ephesus was a very important city, and the church there was the leading church of its day. But fearful Timothy was facing difficulties that made him want to quit and leave Ephesus.

Paul was Timothy's friend and spiritual father, but he used his authority as an apostle to command Timothy to stay and correct the problems the church was facing. He starts his letter saying, ***"Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the command of God"*** (1:1). Timothy certainly knew who Paul was, but Paul is reminding him of the responsibility God gave Paul to oversee His church and its leaders.

"As I urged you ... stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain people not to teach false doctrines any longer" (1:3). Paul had told Timothy this in person, but he still wants to leave because the problems there are causing him stress and anxiety. He can't handle them so he wants to quit and run away from them. He is discouraged and afraid.

What were the problems the church was facing? There were leaders and others who were teaching false doctrine (1:3-11), some strong-willed women who were pushing their wrong beliefs

(2:11-15), disorder and disunity among the people (3:14-15), struggles for power among leadership (5:21-22) and gossip and criticism of godly leaders (5:19). Timothy was not taking a stand against these things. Some people were criticizing him and saying he was too young to lead (4:12-16; 6:11-14). The church had many difficulties that needed to be addressed. Some of these problems continued for a long time. Thirty years later, John would write that this, his home church, had lost its first love (Revelation 2:1-7).

These were serious issues that needed to be fixed, but Timothy wasn't doing his job. In fact, it was putting so much pressure on Timothy that he was having health problems from the stress and anxiety (5:23). He was afraid of confronting the people who were influencing the church in wrong way.

Everyone experiences fear from time to time, some people more than others. Many church leaders fear failing in their ministry and being criticized by their people. I admit that I did, maybe you face this as well. We must remember that this fear does not come from God (2 Timothy 1:7). If we believe God is in sovereign control of everything, then we have nothing to fear. We can either let fear or faith motivate us. We can't follow both, just one or the other. Do you ever get fearful or discouraged? What do you do to have victory over it?

We, too, can want to quit when ministry gets hard. When we don't see the results we wanted and we face pressures and problems, we may want to leave the ministry, or switcher to an easier task. We can also get discouraged by problems in our marriage or with our children. Financial or health struggles can seem overwhelming. Being defeated by sin in our lives can also make it hard to continue.

Paul's advice to Timothy is good advice to us as well. ***"I give you this instruction ... fight the battle well, holding on to faith and a good conscience"*** (1:18-19). "Fight the battle" is a command, not an option. We are in a battle with our sin nature, the world and Satan and his demons. We can't win by quitting; we only win by fighting. We must fight our fears, discouragement and desire to quit by keeping our faith and trust in God strong. By "faith and a good conscience" (1:19) we can have victory. When we know God's Word and believe His promises, we will trust Him and live a life pleasing to Him. If not, God's Spirit will convict us through our conscience so we know to repent and return to living for Him.

Serving Jesus can be hard. The battle can get very hard at times. There will always be opposition to God's truth and light. By keeping our eyes on God and our faith in Him, we can have victory over our fear. (December 6, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

2 Timothy 1:7 For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.

Do you regularly spend time studying the Bible so your faith and obedience will grow? Or are you discouraged or fearful and wanting to quit the work God has given you to do? Are you fighting your battles, or are you giving up and letting discouragement win? Trust God's promises to always be with you and give you strength for the battle and keep fighting with God's help.

BLOG 73: APOSTATES AMONG US (Timothy 3)

(READ 1 Timothy 1:4-20) When I was a young Christian, I met some well-meaning older Christians who wanted to me everything I should or shouldn't be doing as a Christian. They felt they knew God's will for me in every situation. They told me how I should dress, talk and act. What I was to read, watch, listen to or do was all decided for me. The better I followed their demands, the more I was accepted by their group. Failure to do what they believed was right resulted in disapproval and

rejection. When I conformed to their expectations, I started to believe that I was better than other Christians who didn't do so.

My motive for what I did was fear of criticism by them and by God. I was trying to impress them and God. The result was self-centeredness and pride. Fortunately, God showed me the truth of His grace and set me free from that bondage. The same thing was happening in Ephesus so Paul urged Timothy to correct those who were putting people into bondage.

Paul warns Timothy about those who 'major on minors' (1:4). He has even stronger words for "apostates," those who once believed and followed the truth but now have turned from it (1:6). They didn't leave the church or Christianity, but stayed within to spread their lies and legalism (1:8). He explains that the purpose of the law is not to earn salvation or impress God, but to point out sin in our lives (1:19-10). He reminds Timothy that the message of salvation is "good news" (in Greek "gospel"). Legalism is bad news but grace is good news (1:11).

Then Paul uses himself as proof against the false teachers and teachings (1:12-14). He is an example of God's grace, for without grace he would be nothing. He kept all the laws but that only brought him guilt and condemnation. He couldn't do anything to earn or keep his salvation. Despite his sin, God showed Paul grace by granting him salvation and appointing him to minister for God.

Paul is so grateful for God's mercy shown to him that he bursts out in praise to Jesus (1:15-17). Since he was the worst of sinners, God's grace in his life shows God's patience and love for the people He has created. We must thank God for His love and patience to us as well. We should praise Him along with Paul: ***"Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen" 1:17).***

The false teachers like Hymenaeus and Alexander are not like Paul. They turn from God's truth and influence others to do the same. Paul is ever grateful for God's grace in his life (1:19-20). Paul has been fighting the good fight (1:18) but they have not. This is a not-so-subtle warning to Timothy to faithfully serve like Paul instead of falling by the wayside like Hymenaeus and Alexander.

Paul summed up his feelings in 1:15-16: ***"Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners – of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display His immense patience as an example for those who would believe in Him and receive eternal life."*** (December 13, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

Can you say these words of Paul's? Read over them, saying them to God.

God doesn't expect us to be perfect, but He does want us to be faithfully living for Him and "fighting the good fight." Are you trying your best to do so?

BLOG 74: PRAYING LIKE PAUL (Timothy 4)

(READ 1 Timothy 2:1-8) It would have been wonderful to hear Paul teach and preach. It would have been even more special to hear him pray. How did he pray? What did he pray for? In 1 Timothy 2:1-8 Paul explains prayer to Timothy. It gives us insight into Paul's prayer life and also helps know how we should pray.

"I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people" (2:1) Paul begins by listing WHAT they should pray. "Petitions" are personal prayers for our own needs. "Prayers" refer to reverent communication with God, connecting with Him from our heart to His, sharing our feelings and desires with Him. "Intercession" focuses on praying for the needs of others. "Thanksgiving" reminds us to always have an attitude of gratitude when we pray.

Prayer is talking with God, connecting to Him in a deep level. It is sharing our needs, joys, questions and problems with Him.

Prayer is for us, but it is also for others. Paul tells Timothy WHO to pray for: all people, but especially for those in authority (1:2). Paul then gives three reasons WHY we should pray for those in authority (2:2-4). 1) For everyone's sake, to live "peaceful and quiet lives" (2:2). 2) For believer's sake, to live "in all godliness and holiness" (2:2). 3) For God's sake, because praying for authorities to rule in peace "is good and pleases God our Savior" (2:3). God wants everyone to know and follow Him (2:4), and it is harder to spread the gospel in times of turmoil and stress. The whole reason God created mankind is to have fellowship with Him. That's also why He came to die for us when sin separated us from Him. He wants us with Him because He loves us.

WHO are we to pray to then? Paul tells Timothy we pray to God through our mediator, Jesus, the go-between. Jesus is God Himself who became man so He could ransom us by paying the price for our sins and reconcile us to God (2:5-6). Paul thanks God for the privilege of letting others know about these wonderful blessings from God (2:7). Now that privilege is ours. Are you grateful for the honor you have of sharing God's truth with others? Do you thank Him for that blessing?

Finally, Paul talks about HOW to pray, the mechanics of prayer. ***"I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing" (2:8).*** "Prayer" is in the present tense, meaning we are to pray any time and all the time. "Men" are to initiate and take the lead, in their families, church and nation. Prayer can be done "everywhere," not just in church.

The place doesn't matter, but the heart attitude does. It must be done in all sincerity: "lifting up holy hands." There are many positions for prayer used in the Bible: lifting up hands, lying on face, kneeling, sitting and standing. No one is better than the other. What matters is the heart, for it must be "holy." Sin separates us from God, it blocks our prayers. How can we closely connect with God when we have rebelled against Him by sin? Sin breaks human relationships in families, marriage and among friends. It does the same with our relationship with God.

Paul especially warns against the sins of anger and disputing (2:8). He is probably referring to the conflicts going on in the Ephesus house churches and why their prayers aren't being heard. Timothy must resolve these conflicts and provide godly leadership for the church so their prayers won't be hindered.

This gives us a glimpse into Paul's prayers and how he taught others to pray. His life was filled with prayer. The early church was characterized by prayer. They spent much time in prayer (Acts 2:42). Healthy Christians and churches must do the same today. (December 20, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

James 5:16 The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.

Do you believe prayer is important and that it changes things? How much time do you spend in prayer each day? Do you make sure there is no sin in your life when you pray? Do you struggle with anger? Are you not getting along with someone? Confess your sins and turn from them now.

BLOG 75: CAN WOMEN BE PASTORS? (Timothy 5)

(READ 1 Timothy 2:9-15) Have you ever had problems in your church that you didn't know how to handle? That was Timothy's problem. Paul wrote 1 Timothy to tell him what to do to correct the difficulties in the church in Ephesus. He talked about men initiating leadership in prayer (2:8). Then, he gave some guidelines for women (2:9-15). Evidently some of the difficulties were created by women. He begins by stating that women should dress modestly (2:9-10).

Their appearance should be neat, sensible and clean. Their focus should be on their inner beauty, not just an outer show or appearance. Peter says the same thing in more detail (1 Peter 3:1-6). Perhaps some women were showing off their wealth and focusing attention on their appearance. God's people are to be known for modesty and humility, not for pride in their appearance.

Women aren't just to dress modestly (2:9-10), they are also to act modestly (2:11-15). ***"A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet" (2:11-12).***

"A woman should learn" means there must be godly men to treat her and teach her the same way Jesus treated and taught women: with respect and kindness. Women are equal to men as a person, they are just under men in duty and responsibility. An employer is not a better person than his employees, but he has a function that is above theirs. That is true of men and women.

Paul says women should learn in "quietness." He does not use the Greek word for "silence," because he is not saying they can't talk. He is referring to controlled speech. She must recognize that in God's order men are responsible for taking charge of the church and family. She must not interfere with her husband or pastor fulfilling his leadership role in her life. Paul repeats this command in 2:12: "she must be quiet."

To further help Timothy control the unruly women in the Ephesus house-churches he says they must be in "full submission" (2:11). When a woman trusts in God and submits to Him, she submits to His order of authority as well. The Bible does not say all women are to submit to all men, it only says wives are to submit to their own husbands (Ephesians 5:22-33; 1 Peter 3:1) and women to their church leaders (1 Timothy 2:11-12). That doesn't mean women can't lead women or children, share their testimony, pray, sing or do similar functions in church. It is only positions of authority over men that are denied them. The Bible is full of outstanding women who served in this way: Miriam, Deborah, Esther, Mary, Martha, Phoebe, Anna, Abigail, etc.

Paul specifically says women aren't to be telling men what God wants them to do. They can make suggestions, offer wisdom and opinions and share their thoughts and feelings. Any husband or church leader would be foolish to not listen what a godly woman has to offer. Women often have insight and perspective that men lack. A woman cannot have the final say, overruling what male leaders think God wants. Woman can and should serve in many capacities in a church, but not as the primary pastor/leader.

I know of fine women who pastor, often because there is no man to step up and take the responsibility. That was the case when Deborah was the only one willing to lead Israel because Barak didn't want to lead (Judges 4:6-10). We can assume she was under her husband's headship even when leading Israel (Judges 4:4). I would never judge a woman who feels God is calling her to a ministry, that is between her and God. But we can evaluate her actions by the Word of God and Paul makes it clear a woman is not to lead men.

After making such a strong statement, Paul supports it from Scripture (2:13-15). He doesn't say that men are to be the leaders in the church (and family) to restrict women, but to benefit them by allowing them to function in the role for which they were created. Women are natural care-givers and can experience a great amount of compassion and love. Sometimes they think they are doing what is best when it is really against what God wants, as was the case of Eve giving the fruit to Adam (Genesis 3).

Paul points out that Adam was the one responsible for the sin in Eden. He knew better and sinned willingly while Eve thought she was doing what was right (2:14). When godly men stand and fulfill their role as leaders in a loving way, following the example of Jesus, it is much easier for women to trust and submit to them as they do to Jesus. There will always be some women who want to

usurp more authority than God has given them, but the majority are glad to follow godly men who lead with gentleness and compassion. Instead of focusing on how to restrict women, the church should focus on training and equipping men to initiate Christ-like leadership. That's what Paul was telling Timothy to do and that's what is needed today as well. (December 27, 2021 Doylestown, PA)

MEN: Do you treat the women in your life the way Jesus treated the women in His life? What do you need to do to be more Christ-like in your dealings with women?

WOMEN: Do you show honor and respect to the men who have authority over you, trusting them as you trust Jesus? When you submit to Jesus, you are trusting Him to lead through your husband and church leaders, even if you disagree with them. If you can't trust them, you can trust Jesus.

BLOG 76: WHAT DOES A PASTOR DO? (Timothy 6)

(READ 1 Timothy 3:1-3) Being a leader of God's people is a great privilege but also a big responsibility. It's important to know just what God expects us to do. Paul tells Timothy, and us, in 1 Timothy 3:1.

"If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task" (3:1).

"Overseer" (Greek word episcopos from which we get 'Episcopal') is one of several words used for person we would call 'Pastor' today. The "overseer", also translated "bishop", was the title used for the leader of a group of Gentiles. It literally means 'guardian' and was used for the spiritual leader of a Gentile church (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:7-9; 1 Peter 5:1-4).

Churches with Jewish roots called their spiritual leader an "elder" (Greek presuteros from which we get 'Presbytery'). He was the man in charge of a Jewish synagogue. When synagogues became churches, they used the same title for their leader (1 Peter 5:1-4; 1 Timothy 5:1,17,19; Titus 1:5-6). Literally the term means 'commanding officer.' An elder and an overseer referred to the same role: pastor. They just came from different cultures.

The term "pastor" (Greek poimen, literally 'shepherd') refers to one who protects, guides, leads and feeds sheep (Ephesians 4:11; 1 Peter 5:1-4). The fourth term used is "minister" (Greek diaconos, from which we get 'deacon'). It literally refers to 'one who waits on tables,' a servant. Deacon is an office in the church, but the word is also used for pastors since they are servants of God (1 Timothy 4:6; 2 Timothy 4:5).

All these terms refer to the same person, the pastor or spiritual leader (or leaders) of a group of believers. They describe what a pastor does. The overseer/bishop refers to the pastor's responsibility to organize the church and oversee its operation. Elder is similar, but while overseer was used by Gentile believers, Elder was used by Jews for the leader of their synagogue. He was a man with authority, dignity and maturity. The people looked to him for spiritual leadership as well as carrying out the daily functions of their group. Neither of these were expected to do all the work themselves, but they were responsible to plan, delegate it and oversee to make sure it was carried out correctly. That is what pastors and church leaders are to do. We don't have to do it all ourselves but must make sure it is done.

Paul says in Ephesians 4:12-16 that pastors are to "equip the saints for the work of ministry." We don't have to do everything, but we are responsible to make sure it all gets done. God gifts each believer differently. No one person can do everything. We must use the gifts God has provided through others because all parts of the church work together, just like all parts of our body work together (1 Corinthians 12).

Leaders are to lead following the example of our leader, Jesus. We are to lead in mercy, kindness and by serving others, just like Jesus did. That's what the title minister refers to as well. A

minister is a servant of God. We serve His people. That doesn't mean we do everything they want or expect. We do what God wants us to do for them, what is best for them in the long run. A good parent doesn't do everything their children want, they do what is best for the children if they understand and like it or not. We serve our children, and the people we lead, by doing what is best for them. We serve God by obeying and trusting Him in all things.

Shepherd (pastor) sums it all up. We protect our sheep from danger, from false teaching, from sin and from those who would harm or mislead them. We give guidance and direction to them to help them grow and mature in the faith. We lead by example and word. We feed them by teaching them God's Word. This is a very important responsibility for shepherds of sheep and people!

“If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task” (1 Timothy 3:1). Being a church leader is very noble, special, honorable and privileged responsibility. But it is a “task” – it is a job assignment that requires work. There is no better work a person can do than serve God. (January 3, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

Would God say you are faithfully serving Him? Are you serving your sheep? Do you protect, guide, lead and feed them?

BLOG 77: WHAT GOD LOOKS FOR IN A LEADER (Timothy 7)

(READ 1 Timothy 3:1-3) Some churches today choose men to become leaders because they are confident, successful businessmen or important, educated community leaders, even if they aren't living a godly life. When we make men church leaders just because of their status in the unbelieving world, problems arise in the church. The difficulties in the house-churches in Ephesus should have been taken care of by qualified leaders, instead they were often the ones causing the problems! Most of the troubles Timothy faced would have been prevented if he would have had good men serving under him. To help him find the kind of leaders God wants, Paul gave him a list of qualifications in 1 Timothy 3.

“Now the overseer is to be above reproach, faithful to his wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money” (3:2-3).

Paul says the pastor “is to be.” This is a command, not a suggestion. The leaders in Ephesus must be men like he describes. There are no exceptions. They must “be,” which is in the present tense, referring to them now. They may not have been this way in the past, but they have grown in faith and now can serve. It's not the past that matters. Paul, who is writing this, was responsible for the torture and death of many Christians but God used him greatly. Also, “be” refers to their character traits. What matters is who they are, not what they can do. Paul doesn't list gifts, talents, education, training or skills. He tells what kind of men they must be.

He says they must be “above reproach,” meaning there can be no cause for blame or criticism in their current life. When wrong they must apologize. When they sin, they must confess the sin. They don't have to be perfect, but must be striving to live and act like Jesus, who they represent.

After this first general, over-all description, Paul goes into detail of what it means to be above reproach. He starts first with his marriage: “faithful to his wife.” This means he must be a godly husband to the woman he is currently married to. It doesn't mean he can't serve if he is single or widowed, it means if he has a wife, he must treat her as Jesus treats him. He must put her needs before his own and serve her in love while initiating leadership in a gentle, considerate way. If a man doesn't have a godly relationship with his wife, he can't be a pastor. Peter adds that if he isn't treating his wife as he should, his prayers won't be answered (1 Peter 3:7).

Next Paul gives a description of this person. He is to be “temperate” meaning moderate in all things and “self-controlled” literally meaning “have a sound mind,” one who makes well-thought decisions and good choices. He is to live in a way that others honor and admire (“respectable”) and show hospitality by generously sharing with those in need (“hospitable”).

Because teaching God’s Word is a major responsibility of pastors, Paul includes “able to teach” to this list. He must be someone who studies God’s Word and then uses the gifts God has given him to pass those truths on to others.

This describes the kind of person he must be. In contrast are some things he absolutely cannot be if he is to lead God’s people. “Drunkenness” is mentioned first. The Bible does not forbid drinking wine, but it cannot be to excess. “Not violent but gentle” means he must be considerate and sensitive of others and not have a short temper. Also, he cannot be someone who is argumentative and wants his own way (“quarrelsome”). He cannot be greedy (“lover of money”).

Then Paul goes back and elaborates on the first character trait he mentioned because it is so important. He must “manage his family well”, because if he can’t take care of his family, he won’t be able to take care of the church (3:4-5). He doesn’t have to have a perfect marriage or perfect children, but he needs to be following Biblical guidelines in dealing with the problems and difficulties every family faces. He must lovingly and gently initiate solutions for every situation that arises, just as Jesus does with Him.

Paul concludes with a warning that a leader cannot be a new believer because Satan can tempt him with pride and defeat him (3:6). He must be a maturing believer who has experience living for Jesus and knows how to have victory over temptations and trials. Pride and self-centeredness are real problems for many pastors. Unfortunately, a proud or self-centered person cannot see this in themselves and they don’t take it well if someone points it out to them. It’s hard to grow in humbleness, but very important.

Then Paul concludes with a general statement, “he must have a good reputation with outsiders” so they will think well of the God that he and the church represent. This is the same as “above reproach” he started with and summarizes all he has said. (January 10, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

How do you rate yourself against these qualifications? In which character traits are you strong? In which are you weak? What can you do, starting today, to improve in your weak areas?

BLOG 78: WHAT GOD LOOKS FOR IN A CHURCH WORKER (Timothy 8)

(READ 1 Timothy 3:8-16) We saw in the last blog that it is very important for those who lead a group of Christians to have godly character traits so they can set a good example for Jesus. The church in Ephesus didn’t have this and it resulted in many problems. The unqualified leaders were unable to correct errors in the church, and were causing many of the problems themselves. Godly leaders are a must. This applies to anyone in any type of leadership role in the church, including those who help the leaders.

The apostles in the early church in Jerusalem were so busy taking care of the physical needs of the people that they didn’t have time to study the Bible and pray, so they ordained deacons to assist them by taking care of physical needs of people and property (Acts 6). Paul describes these people in 3:8-10: ***“In the same way, deacons are to be worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain. They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons.”***

The godly characteristics for church leaders (3:1-7) are the same for helpers (3:8-12). “In the same way” means they are to be no less godly. They may have different spiritual gifts but they, too, must be good examples of Jesus. Like the overseers, they “are to be.” Paul is commanding Timothy to have qualified people who in the present time are “worthy of respect.” They, too, are to be honorable and have a good reputation among those who know them. They must be “sincere,” having no deceit, dishonesty, hypocrisy or deception. They can’t be “indulging in much wine,” nor are they to be greedy and be “pursuing dishonest gain.” They must be faithful in all they do (3:9) and must have proven themselves to be competent and dependable (3:10).

Again, Paul emphasizes the importance of being a godly husband and father (3:12). Those who serve are commanded to meet the needs of their family before anything else. Those who meet these standards and faithfully help the leaders will be blessed now and, in all eternity, (3:13).

While all Paul has said so far is for male leaders, there is a place for females to serve as helpers of leaders as well. These women deacons can minister to women and children, often much easier and more successfully than men can. **3:12 *In the same way, the women are to be worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything.***

They, too, are commanded “to be” godly women setting a good example for Jesus. They are to be “worthy of respect” just like the men. They cannot be women who gossip, criticize or slander others (“not malicious talkers”). Instead, they are to be self-controlled, especially when it comes to drinking wine (“temperate”). Because of the responsibility given to them they must be “trustworthy in everything.” They will be looked up to and respected. They will know things about others that no one else knows. They can cause much hurt and damage if they aren’t mature, godly women.

Paul includes this whole subject about what kind of a person a leader or helper must be so Timothy can correct the problems in Ephesus (3:15). He encourages Timothy by telling him he wants to come in person (3:14). It would not be good for Paul to arrive and find Timothy hasn’t corrected some of the problem areas in the Ephesus house-churches. Thinking about Christ’s church brings to mind a hymn of the early church and Paul quotes some of it as a way of praising Jesus (3:16). (January 17, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

“I am writing these instructions so that you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God’s household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of truth” (1 Timothy 3:14-15).

If Paul were writing you a letter about your church, what would he say? What problems would he point out? What would he tell you to do about them? What would he say about the leaders and workers in your church?

BLOG 79: HOW TO SPOT A FALSE TEACHER (Timothy 9)

(READ 1 Timothy 4:1-5) When I was a young pastor, a man who was a false teacher came to my church, although I didn’t know he was a false teacher until later. He was very friendly and everyone liked him. He knew the Bible well and seemed to be a committed Christian. Before long, though, problems started coming up in the church. Each one could be traced back to things he was teaching people which weren’t Biblical. Because he was so convincing, many people believed him and followed his false ways. It was very difficult removing him. Some people left and never came back. The same thing happened several years later, only this time it was a woman instead of a man. The results were the same. She gathered a following because of her pleasing personality and acting very spiritual. False teachers like these people, can cause much harm in a church, especially if the leaders don’t stand up for the truth and remove the person. It wasn’t easy for me to do, nor was it easy for Timothy.

Paul has just described what godly leaders and workers are to be like. Next, he wrote about those who are ungodly, who work from within to bring destruction. Satan has always been more successful at attacking the church from within than from without. We must know how to protect God's sheep and have victory over those who would mislead them.

“The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons” (1 Timothy 4:1). “Some” is a figure of speech meaning “a vast number.” The nearer it gets to Jesus’ return, the greater the number of those who turn from the faith. This isn’t just Paul’s opinion, “the Spirit clearly says” it and there can be no denying it.

“Abandon” is the Greek word from which we get “apostasy.” It literally means “to turn away from, to depart.” Some who claimed to be Christians will voluntarily turn from the truth of the Bible and reject some of its basic truths. But they don’t turn from the church or from calling themselves “Christians.” They stay in the fellowship and mislead whoever they can. Attacks from without usually make the church stronger as Christians stand together against the opposition. Attacks from within are much harder to defeat. People are deceived and start believing lies. This doesn’t come from God’s Spirit. Actually, it comes from Satan: “deceiving spirits and things taught by demons.” Satan first did this with Eve in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3) and continues to do so today. He is very good at it.

We see many examples of this today. There are Christians, churches, even whole denominations who deny Jesus was born of a virgin and is both God and man. Many within the church don’t believe the Bible is the inspired Word of God. Eternal punishment is rejected because they say a loving God could never send anyone to hell. Some claim to be prophets or prophetesses and say they receive special knowledge from God. Others teach God wants everyone healed and wealthy. Still others say that we must do certain things to earn or keep salvation. They deemphasize sin and push legalism and humanism. There are even some who go so far as to say abstaining from sex or certain foods makes you more spiritual (4:3-5). They claim to be knowledgeable authorities and speak with confidence and pride, but they are spreading lies for Satan. Timothy faced this and we still do today as well.

Paul calls these people “hypocritical liars.” ***“Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron” (4:2).*** They may convince themselves they are right in what they believe, but that is because they have deadened their conscience against the Spirit’s warnings (4:2).

Paul is reminding Timothy that false teachers will come, and as the time of Jesus’ return approaches there will be more of them. While they seem sincere, they deceive and mislead those who don’t have a good knowledge of God’s Word. Don’t fear their opposition, stand true. Preach grace, not legalism. (January 24, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

When have you had to deal with false teachers? What happened? What should you do as soon as you know someone is teaching something contrary to God’s Word? Ask God to show you if you are ignorantly teaching anything that isn’t true.

BLOG 80: COMMAND AND TEACH (Timothy 10)

(READ 1 Timothy 4:6-11) Last blog we saw how to spot false teachers. Paul then told Timothy what to do about them: “If you point these things out to the brothers and sisters, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus, nourished on the truths of the faith and of the good teaching that you have followed” (4:6). Timothy was responsible to challenge false teachers and correct them. He had

to teach the truth to the believers so they wouldn't be misled. In order to do this Timothy had to know God's Word very well. He had to study it and teach it consistently.

Timothy had been taught by Paul and others. He needs to put what he has learned into practice in his life and not let fear keep him from facing the challenges of ministry. He was "nourished on the truths of the faith." Now he needs to nourish others so they will be godly Christians and leaders as well. He had "followed good teaching." Now he had to provide accurate, godly teaching for others to follow. We have been taught and trained by others. Now we must pass those things on to other Christians.

The best way to spot a counterfeit is to know in detail what the original is like, then you can see where the fake deviates. That is true in counterfeit money, art or jewelry. It's also true with God's truth. Anything that isn't taught by Scripture is to be rejected (4:7a).

"Godless myths" and "old wives' tales" refer to popular beliefs that aren't taught by the Bible. They may seem interesting and get attention from those who don't know better. These things may be debated and argued, but they are not true. Some people like to look for secret truths that others haven't yet discovered. In 2 Timothy 4:2 Paul calls this "itchy ears:" wanting to hear something new and different. They are looking for a short-cut to spiritual maturity, an easy way to have easy victory in life without learning and growing. They are bored with the truths of God's word and want something new and different.

It takes self-discipline to study and teach God's Word accurately and thoroughly. An athlete has to have will power to train his body (4:7b). Physical training to make our body as healthy as possible is good, but spiritual training for our heart and mind are much better (4:8). This is not just a suggestion; it is a requirement for all Christians (4:11). "Command and teach these things" (4:11). If people know the Bible, they will be able to discern error and avoid it. If they don't know the truth, they will be open to any and all lies that the enemy spreads.

Timothy was a minister ("diakonos" servant), but Paul said he needed to be a "good" minister. Anyone can be a pastor, church leader or church worker. But being a "good" one is what matters. We must be effective in carrying out the responsibility God has given us.

Think of who taught and trained you for ministry? Thank God for them. Who are you discipling and mentoring?

Are you a student of God's Word? Do you know it better than you did a few months ago? Do you have a deep desire to know and apply it to your life? Are you faithful in teaching it to others so they won't be misled by false teaching?

Would God say you are a GOOD pastor or church leader? What are your hardest struggles in faithfully serving Him? (January 31, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

BLOG 81: PAUL'S COMMANDS TO PASTORS TODAY (Timothy 11)

(READ 1 Timothy 4:12-16) If Paul was speaking at a pastors' conference today, what would he tell us? That would be very helpful to know. We can study what he wrote to Timothy about pastoring. He would probably tell us the same things today. Paul gave Timothy characteristics of a godly leader (4:1-13) and warned him against false teachings and teachers (4:1-5). He also commanded Timothy to teach and preach God's Word (4:6-11). Then Paul summarized and concluded what he told Timothy to do to protect the people from the false teachers who had arisen among them. He gave him 8 commands, which are very important for us as well.

1. ***Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young (4:12a)*** Evidently people weren't showing respect to Timothy because of his youth and inexperience. Because Timothy was fearful of rejection and criticism, he didn't stand up to those who opposed him. When we speak for God we have God's authority, so we have nothing to fear. Don't let anyone look down on you for any reason. Jesus has called you to serve and if He is behind you it doesn't matter what anyone else thinks.
2. ***but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity (4:12b)*** Don't worry about what others think, just live faithfully for God. That will set a good example for others.
3. ***Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching (4:13)***. "Devote yourself" means it is a top priority, the most important responsibility a pastor or leader has. We must know, teach and apply God's Word whenever we speak to our people. That is to be our first priority.
4. ***Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through a prophetic message when the body of elders laid their hands on you (4:14)***. God has gifted each pastor in different ways. No two of us are alike. So don't compare yourself to others or try to be like someone else. That just brings discouragement.
5. ***Be diligent in these matters (4:15a)***. "Be diligent" means to take care, to be deeply involved in preaching and teaching God's Word and in using your spiritual gifts.
6. ***give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress (4:15b)***. Make preaching, teaching and ministering in the areas where God has gifted you your top priority. Others will be encouraged as they see your growth. That will set an example for others to follow.
7. ***Watch your life and doctrine closely (4:16a)***. Knowing God's Word is very important, but if it is just head knowledge and doesn't affect the way we live, then something is wrong. Spend time in prayer, praise, worship and meditation each day. Don't just grow in knowledge, grow in your relationship with God. People will watch how you live to see if it matches up to what you say!
8. ***Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers (4:16b)***. Perseverance is necessary to keep going when things get hard and we get discouraged. It's not easy to be a mate, parent or church leader. Timothy wanted to quit but Paul said he must persevere, not think of quitting. We, too, must keep moving ahead in our life and ministry no matter the difficulties or trials we face.

If Paul were leading a pastors' conference these are the things he would command of pastors. Would you follow his directions? (February 7, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

Which of these commands apply most to you? Which are the hardest for you to follow? Why? What can you do to better apply them to your life?

Do you know what your spiritual gifts are? Are you using them, or do you spend most of your time trying to do things that you are not good at?

BLOG 82: HOW TO TREAT YOUR SHEEP (Timothy 12)

(READ 1 Timothy 5:1-16) I heard a pastor say that pastoring a church would be easy if it weren't for the people. That is very true. The hardest part of pastoring is dealing with the pride, self-centeredness, stubbornness, rebellion and sin of people. I'm sure God would say that about us as well! I love studying the Bible and teaching/preaching, but ministering to difficult people can be a real challenge. People can be critical, rude, demanding and insensitive. Timothy, too, was having

difficulty with rebellious, troublesome people as well so Paul gave him advice on how to treat people.

“Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father. Treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity” (1 Timothy 5:1-2). Paul’s advice is simple: treat everyone like family. Be respectful and kind to those who are older than you, even when correcting sin in their lives. Treat them as you would your own parents. Those who are younger we should also treat with gentleness and respect, as we would a brother or sister whom we love.

Paul then focuses on a situation Timothy was facing in Ephesus. The church helped widows with food and clothing, but just which widows qualified for support? When free help and food are provided, some will claim they are in need when they really aren’t. Paul said there are certain qualifications a widow must meet to be financially supported (5:3-10). They must have no family to support them (5:4), because: ***“Anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever” (5:8).*** This is the first condition and is repeated three times it is so important (5:4, 8, 16). These strong words show how necessary it is for families to take care of each other and not assume the church will do it for them. Yet often times relatives expect the church to provide so they don’t have to. Timothy had to teach his people that they were responsible for their family and so do we.

There are other requirements to be met for widows to be supported by the church. They must have a close relationship to God (5:5), not live a self-centered life (5:6) and be unable to earn a living because they are over 60 (5:9a). They had to be a loyal mate when married (5:9b), have a good reputation as a godly person (5:10), have been a good mother to their children (5:10) and hospitable to strangers (5:10). Having helped other Christians as well as anyone in need (5:10) and being devoted to holiness (5:10) are also necessary. Limits have to be set on who a church helps financially or everyone will come for free money and there won’t be enough for those who really deserve it and need it. We must be good stewards with the resources God gives us today as well. Sometimes it can be hard to turn away someone who is demanding or who may complain to others about us, but we must be careful in how we use God’s money.

Having talked about helping older widows who have a need, Paul then talks about what to do about younger widows (5:11-15). Should they also be financially supported? Paul says they should not be given money because if they don’t work, they may use all their free time unwisely (5:13). They may put men and sexual desires before God (5:11). They may get involved with ungodly people, misuse their time, become nosey gossips and waste their life (5:13).

If those who can support themselves have to do so they will take responsibility for their own lives, settle down with a family of their own and grow to spiritual maturity (5:14).

To summarize, Paul says we are to treat others with respect, as a close family member whom we love. The Golden Rule applies here: treat others as you want them to treat you (Matthew 7:12). We are to sacrificially help those who are in real need. But we aren’t to support those who can help themselves or who have family who should help them. If there is government help available that must be used instead of church money as well. Not doing so just wastes God’s resources and doesn’t really help them. It enables others to not do their God-given duty.

We are responsible to treat people as Jesus treated them, even when it isn’t easy. Ask Him for patience, love, wisdom, compassion and kindness as you interact with others, especially people it is hard to get along with. (February 14, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

Are you following these guidelines in your family and church? Is there anything you, like Timothy, need to change in how you treat people or support those in need?

BLOG 83: SHOULD PASTORS BE PAID? (Timothy 13)

(READ 1 Timothy 5:17-25) Paul instructed Timothy about how to treat people. He talked about financial support for widows in need. That brings up the questions of financially supporting pastors. Should they work for their salary instead of taking money from the church? After all, didn't Paul support himself as a tent maker? Paul told Timothy just what he thought about a pastor being paid in 1 Timothy 5:17: ***"The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching."***

"Elder" was the Jewish term used for the leader of a synagogue, the same as "Overseer" was used of a Gentile leader. They both refer to the person we would call "pastor." Paul said there two main responsibilities for these men. First, they were to "direct the affairs of the church." They didn't have to do everything themselves, but they had to see it got done. They were like the principal of a school, like the leader of a synagogue. In Ephesians 4:12-13 Paul says pastors are to "equip God's people for words of service." Pastors don't do all the work themselves; they train others to minister and serve.

The second responsibility for pastors is "preaching and teaching." Shepherds must feed the sheep or they won't mature and grow. The same is true of pastors. Teaching the Bible is how we equip others to serve (Ephesians 4:12-13). We can get so busy with all the other responsibilities and duties of leading a church that we neglect studying the Bible and developing good messages to teach His Word. That is very wrong (Acts 6:4).

Pastors who direct their church and feed their people are "worthy of double honor." A pastor receives honor and respect from the people to whom he ministers. He is also to receive financial support so he has time to study, pray and minister. If he works for a salary, he has far less time to serve. Pastors are as worthy of financial support as they are of respect and honor. How do we know Paul is talking about paying a pastor here? Read the next verse.

"For" means he is giving proof of what he just said. His proof is what "the Scripture says" (5:18). He quotes two Old Testament passages to prove that people should pay pastors: Deuteronomy 25:4 and 24:15. Not only do pastors need the money to live and minister, people need to learn to share and sacrifice to contribute to the ministry. God gives His people extra finances so they will have some to pass on to their pastors, but often in their greed they want to keep it all for themselves. Those who pastor well are to be honored and supported. But what if a pastor isn't serving well and people complain about him? Then what?

When there is criticism of a pastor, it has to be proven by 2 or more people and not just gossip (5:19). If there is truth to what is said, the offending leader must be publicly corrected (5:20). If the sin was publicly known, the correction and repentance should be public as well. It's important to be fair and impartial when evaluating accusations against a pastor. Treat him as you would want to be treated.

A lot of these problems with pastors can be solved by making sure the men who are chosen to be pastors are godly, mature men (5:22, 24-25). Don't be too quick to ordain someone who shows promise (5:22). Give them time to mature. Make sure you know them well and watch their lives (5:24-25). If you put unworthy men in places of responsibility, it is partly your fault when things go wrong.

All of this is very hard on Timothy who is fearful of confrontation and criticism. The stress and anxiety are so bad he wants to leave. It is even affecting his health, so Paul advises he drink a little wine for his stomach's sake (5:23). Water was unsanitary and a little wine could help. The content of alcohol in wine then was very low. Many medications today have alcohol in them, so a small amount

could be beneficial to him. That was just treating the symptoms, though. Timothy needed to trust in God confront his fears to be truly free, and so do we.

So, we see that pastors who direct their church and preach and teach well should be given honor as well as a salary they can live on. We shouldn't listen to criticism of pastors unless it is proven by at least two people, but if it is true, we must correct the errors in a gentle, loving way. To prevent many of these problems, make sure those you put in position of authority are godly, mature men. (February 21, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

Do you teach your people that it is important for them to give you a livable salary, equal to their standard of living?

Do you handle problems with church leaders in the way Paul tells Timothy? What can you do to improve?

What part of ministry causes stress and anxiety in you? How do you handle it?

BLOG 84: HOW TO RECOGNIZE FALSE TEACHERS (Timothy 14)

(READ 1 Timothy 6:1-5) They say old people repeat themselves and say the same thing they have already said. Paul is in the last years of his life when he writes 1 Timothy, and he wrote about the same thing 3 times, but it wasn't because he forgot he had already talked about it. It was because it was such an important subject and Timothy really needed to get it right for the house-churches in Ephesus to be healthy, growing churches. The subject he is bring up over and over is the problem of false teachers and teachings (1:4-17; 4:1-5; 6:1-5).

First, Paul clears up a problem between Christian owners and their Christian slaves (6:1-2). The slaves shouldn't take advantage of their masters because this would be a bad example and not bring glory to Christ. The same is true for Christian employees. They should be the best workers and not take advantage of their master's kindness. They must do their best in all things.

Having covered that, Paul again turns to the subject so often on Paul's mind when he thinks of the troubles in Ephesus: people teaching anything other than what Paul has taught them and what is in the Bible (6:3). These people are not to be allowed to teach or minister in the church. That is not just because of the wrong things they say, it is also because of the character of such people who would spread lies.

Outside these people may seem godly and friendly, they may be popular and influential. Many others may follow them, but inside they are full of sin and deception (6:4-5). Paul says they are "conceited," blinded by pride and self-centeredness. They may claim to know more than others, but really, they "understand nothing" because they are ignorant of God's real truth. They like to argue because they have "an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words." They enjoy getting in long discussion about minor, unimportant things. They are full of "envy" – they are jealous of other leaders and want attention for themselves. They don't get along with others and have "strife." Sins of the tongue are common. They are known for "malicious talk," they criticize and gossip, they put others down and judge them.

Doing this causes "constant friction between people." Their teachings bring disunity and discord among believers. Because they have a "corrupt mind" they distort things and don't think clearly. They once followed the truth but "have been robbed of the truth" by allowing themselves to believe lies and move into untruth. In addition, they become greedy and want to make a profit from the ministry. They think that "godliness is a means to financial gain." They use Christianity to get ahead in life. They try to impress others and use their position to get ahead financially.

Jesus also warned about these people: ***“Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves” (Matthew 7:15)***. Some may be true believers who have allowed themselves to go astray and turn from the truth, like Balaam (Numbers 22-24). Others may have appeared to be believers, but never came to a saving knowledge of the truth, like the seed on hard ground (Matthew 13:1-23). They work from within the church. Thus, they do not deny Christianity but subtly change important parts of what we believe. The error grows and spreads and ultimately great damage is done. They serve Satan’s purpose for he is a deceiver and a liar (John 8:44).

If Paul saw this as such a terrible problem, we should as well. We must know God’s Word thoroughly so we can pick out any error. Then we must have the courage to confront it and replace it with God’s truth. Timothy wasn’t doing this and things were falling apart. That will be the case today as well if we allow error in our churches. (February 28, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

Do any of the terms Paul uses to describe false prophets apply to you? What about someone you know? If so, what should you do about it?

BLOG 85: COMMANDS FOR THE MAN OF GOD (Timothy 15)

(READ 1 Timothy 6:6-21) Paul concludes his letter to his ‘son’ Timothy with 8 commands. These summarize what Paul has recently said about the temptation to greed and all that has gone before. He warned Timothy about false teachers who used their influence to gain money (6:5), now he reminds Timothy that Christ-likeness is greater than material gain (6:6-8). He warns Timothy of the danger of greed and the destruction it brings (6:9-10). Money isn’t sinful, but the love of money is (6:10). It’s important for us to remember that as well.

Paul’s first command is based on this truth: ***“But you, man of God, flee from all this” (6:11)***. Keep far from what the false teachers are doing and the greed that accompanies them. We, too, must flee the subtle temptation for money and possessions. We can easily see others who are greedy, but it is very hard to recognize in ourselves. Ask God to show you any greed in your heart.

Second, Paul tells Timothy what to seek to have instead: ***“pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness” (6:11)***. Instead of going after what the false teachers seek, his goal should be righteousness (living a holy life), godliness (Christ-like maturity), faith (trust in action), love (unconditional love for all), endurance (perseverance, steadfastness) and gentleness (attitude of humility in how you treat others).

The third command is to keep moving ahead in perseverance, no matter what trials he faces: ***“fight the good fight of the faith” (6:12)***. Living for Jesus is a battle and we only have victory by using God’s weapons (Ephesians 6:0-18) and following Jesus (Joshua 1). Don’t expect God to make your life smooth and easy because you are serving Him. It gets harder so you learn to trust and follow Him.

Fourth, we are to stay faithful because that is the only way to win the battle. ***“Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses” (12)***. Timothy needs to remember his commitment to serve no matter what, and we must as well. Don’t look at your circumstances, look at Jesus and remember your promise to serve.

Fifth, Paul again commands Timothy (and us) to never give up but to persevere no matter what (6:13-16). ***“Keep this command without spot or blame until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ” (14)***. Instead of quitting, Timothy needs to keep moving ahead, no matter how hard it is.

In the sixth command, Paul reminds Timothy that he needs to correct the stubborn false teachers and bring order to the house-churches in Ephesus (6:17-19). He must correct the rich and powerful people who are prideful and greedy. These are the very people he is afraid of because they criticize and look down on him. They need to be taught that godly lives are more important than money and possessions. Material is temporary, spiritual is eternal.

Paul concludes his letter with 2 more commands. The seventh is **“guard what has been entrusted to your care” (20)**. “Guard” is a word used of a soldier protecting precious treasure and “entrust” is a banking term for protecting an investment. Both refer to what Timothy then, and us today, need to do with the knowledge of the gospel that has been passed on to us. We must guard it as something very valuable and pass it on to others. It is a great privilege but also an awesome responsibility to have God’s Word entrusted to us.

The eighth and final command is to have nothing to do with all the false teaching going around which isn’t grounded in Scripture (6:20-21). Paul starts and ends with warnings against false teaching. Even a little error is too much. Even a little bit of rat poison in our drinking water is disastrous. The same is true with God’s Word.

Paul then closes with **“Grace be with you all” (6:21)**. Timothy will need God’s grace to stay in Ephesus and correct the problems that have arisen from allowing the wrong people into positions of leadership and false teachings to be spread.

Paul would tell us the same thing: don’t give up or quit, persevere, don’t let the wrong people lead and don’t let false teaching enter your church. It sounds simple but is harder to accomplish. We, like Timothy, need God’s help to make this happen. May God bless you and be with you as you continue to faithfully serve Him! (March 7, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

What has God taught you from 1 Timothy? What are the main lessons He wants you to learn? Are there any changes you need to make in your life? Write them down so you don’t forget them.

BLOG 86: PACE YOURSELF, LIFE IS A MARATHON, NOT A SPRINT

I enjoy running and have been running regularly since my early teens. I don’t go as fast as I did but I can still go as far, it just takes longer. I don’t mind, though, for running is about getting there, not about getting there fast. I’ve learned the same thing is true in life as well. As I look back on my life of ministry I can clearly see that life is a marathon, not a sprint, so it’s important to pace ones’ self.

The statistic that only one in 10 of those who enter ministry when young will retire from ministry is sad. Many factors contribute to this, but lack of setting a proper pace often contributes in a great way. The ministry is about quality, not quantity. I know that’s hard to practice when starting out with everyone watching and evaluating you by what you do. Just remember, God uses an entirely different yard stick to measure you by than those who watch you.

The apostle John was asked how he justified a hobby of raising pigeons when there was so much that needed to be done for the kingdom. He got his bow and pointed out that, in order to be effective when needed, it couldn’t be tightly strung at all times. A similar illustration goes back to whaling days. The harpooner whose job it was to spear the whale was not allowed to join in the rowing which got the boat in position. He has to be rested and prepared for the important work entrusted to him. All Christians must pace themselves so they are sharp and ready for key events in life.

That doesn’t mean we are to be lazy or avoid hard work, but it does mean we are to pace ourselves so we can finish the marathon, not burn out before the end. We must be a good steward of the time, energy and opportunities God gives us. Even Jesus often said “no” to good things in order

to be able to do the best. He paced Himself, despite only having a little over 3 years to accomplish all that needed doing. Those living for God today are often admired when they are very busy, as if that means they are important and productive in what will count in eternity.

Anyone can be too busy, and there will be times when it is unavoidable, but as a typical life style it is not what God wants. He gives us 24 hours in a day so we know He won't give us 25 hours' worth of work to do. If we have more to do than time to do it, we are doing things He hasn't given us. He wants us to include play, fun, relaxation and enjoyment as well. God has created a beautiful world full of colors, sounds, smells and tastes for us to enjoy. Are you doing so?

I'm retired, but I still keep busy ministering. Age and health mean I can't work as long and hard as I used to, but I can focus on what I can do best and enjoy most in ministry. I don't ever want to stop. Quality wise I'm still productive. I just need to pace myself properly.

The fable of the tortoise and the hare tale has always been one of my favorite stories and has shaped my life philosophy. The tortoise beat the hare to the finish line in a race because it kept going while the hare would go fast, then stop for a while. There's a lot of wisdom in that story – consistency in a pace we can maintain over the long haul is the only way to complete the course. Run with perseverance, not with speed! (March 14, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

Hebrews 12:1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.

Luke 5:16 But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.

Eccl 3:1-2 There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven: a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot, ...

If you keep going at the pace you are currently going at, will you last until retirement? What changes should you make?

How do you determine a proper balance between work and relaxation? Is your life balanced? What does your mate or best friend say?

BLOG 87: JOSEPH: PURPOSE & PERSEVERANCE

Many Old Testament believers faced difficulties in life. Joseph, son of Jacob, was one of them. He was sold into slavery by his brothers, then unfairly put into prison and forgotten. One of the reasons Joseph chose to rise above all that was because God gave him a dream which he remembered and believed (Genesis 37:5-9). He knew this was God speaking to him and calling him to lead his family. He kept his eyes on that goal, knowing it was what God wanted for him. He didn't do it out of pride or wanting to be first, but because He knew God wanted to use him in the future. Whatever ups and downs life brought him, he always remembered that one day God would work through him to rescue his family. So, no matter what happened, he kept hope in God's plan for his life. When he went into captivity as a slave and then when he was put in prison, he never forgot God had a plan and purpose for his life.

God has a plan and purpose for each one of us today as well. He puts a desire in our hearts to accomplish something for Him, and it becomes the guiding light in our heart. This isn't something self-centered like fame, popularity, or a large ministry. These things may or may not come to us. What matters is carrying out the plan and purpose God has put inside you. When I was young, He gave me a vision to pastor and help people grow closer to Him. Later, He put a desire in my heart to help the

pastors in India. There have been many obstacles and problems along the way, but I know that is what God wants me to do, so I continue doing my best to obey.

Genesis 50:20 You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.

Jeremiah 29:11 For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

What is God’s plan and purpose for your life? What desire has He put in your heart to do to serve Him? What goal does He want you to accomplish? In other words, for what reason are you alive and on earth?

Joseph knew God had a purpose for his life, but he had to persevere through many hard times to see it come about. God showed Joseph that he was going to lead his family through difficult times, but for the next 15 or 20 years it seemed that would never happen. He was thrown into a pit by his brothers, and then sold as a slave to Egypt. He stayed faithful despite all that, but his faithfulness resulted in his being thrown into prison. It seemed like he was forgotten by God and others. Still, he stayed faithful in his heart. He had patience. He persevered. What God had said did come true, and later in his life he enjoyed the fruit of his patient endurance.

Leadership takes patience and perseverance. Paul told Timothy to persevere and endure (1 Timothy 4:16; 2 Timothy 2:3). That’s important advice for everyone who wants to be a godly leader. God used trials and difficulties in my life to teach me patience and perseverance. One of my favorite childhood stories is about a turtle and a rabbit that had a race. The rabbit thought he would easily win since he was very fast and the turtle moved slowly. So, the rabbit ran awhile, then ate and rested. He ran some more, then took a nap. The turtle kept slowly moving forward without stopping, and actually won the race while the rabbit slept. The lesson from this is that we don’t have to move fast, but we must persevere and keep going no matter what.

All godly leaders must learn to persevere when things aren’t going as they’d like. Don’t think something is wrong with you as a leader, or that God isn’t with you. God uses things like this to mature us, to stretch our faith, and to make us more like Jesus. Satan wants us to get discouraged and quit. He failed with Joseph, but succeeds with many others. God allows these challenges because He is more concerned with making us more like Jesus than He is with giving us an easy life. (March 21, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

Galatians 6:9 Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.

Are you facing something in life now that isn’t going as you’d like? Are you patiently trusting Jesus and faithfully serving no matter what happens? Do you keep moving ahead, however slowly? Or do you have times of great faith and closeness to God followed by times when you drift and aren’t close to God?

BLOG 88: LESSON IN HUMILITY FROM MOSES

Some men want to be leaders so others will think they are important and be impressed with them. There are other men who don’t want to lead because they are afraid people may criticize them. They fear failure and rejection. In both these cases it is pride that is behind these feelings. Pride makes some men feel better than others, and it leads others to think they aren’t as good as others. Pride doesn’t just mean we think we are superior others; pride also can lead to us thinking we are inferior to others. In both cases the person is self-centered, thinking about themselves before anything else. Pride is self-centeredness, focusing on self.

I have struggled with fear of failure and rejection, and at times that kept me from being a good leader because I was more concerned about what others thought than with doing what was right. Moses had this same struggle. He didn't want to be a leader. He made five excuses to God about why he couldn't be a leader (Exodus 4). He was afraid he would fail, or the people wouldn't follow him, or something would go wrong. That is pride because that is thinking about yourself instead of God. Yet God patiently worked with Moses, showing him that He would be with him, helping him, and that he could be a good leader if he depended on God for wisdom and strength. Moses learned to be humble, and the Bible tells us he was very humble, more than anyone else (Numbers 12:3). Humility means we don't think we are better than others or inferior to others. It means thinking we are equal to others. But it also means realizing that we are in total need of God's help to life for Him and serve Him. Moses learned to be humble.

How did Moses learn to be humble? God used the painful struggles in his life to teach him to depend on God and not himself. He learned to overcome his fear of criticism and rejection by focusing on God instead of himself or others. We cannot have faith in God and fear of others at the same time; one will push the other out. Moses learned to grow his faith in God so it was greater than his fear of others.

Ask God to show you if there is any self-centeredness in you that keeps you from trusting and following Him. Are you afraid of what others will think or say, of failure or rejection? Do you like being a leader because others are impressed with you? How can you become humbler like Moses?

Moses was a good, faithful leader who was used by God, but that doesn't it was easy for him to lead the Jews. Sometimes the people loved and followed him, other times they blamed all their problems on him and wanted to kill him and go back to Egypt (Exodus 14:11-12; 32:1; 7:9; Numbers 12:1,8; 16:1,3). The same was true of Jesus. He wasn't liked by everyone either, and He said that the same would happen to us (Luke 6:26).

The Bible says that when we are criticized, and we will be criticized, we should keep silent and listen (John 19:9; Proverbs 17:27-28). Think about what is said before reacting in self-defense (Proverbs 15:28; James 1:19-20). Learn what good you can from the words spoken and think carefully before responding (Proverbs 15:1; 16:21; 25:15). When you do respond, do so in love and humility. If others don't accept what you say, don't argue. Let God change their hearts in His time. Humble yourself and be quick to apologize if you should (1 Samuel 15:24, 30; 25:28). Don't give in just to keep the peace, but don't get into a fight either (Ephesians 4:31; Proverbs 17:14). Don't defend yourself. Just listen, learn what is helpful, apologize for what you could have done better, forgive them for hurt caused against you and leave in peace. The best place to learn and practice those skills is at home with your mate and family. (March 28, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

Philippians 2:3-8 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!

How do you respond when you are criticized? Does your mate feel free to make suggestions to you? What can you do to better learn from criticism? Do you apologize for your part in things or find reasons to blame the other person? Are you quick to forgive those who hurt you by what they say?

BLOG 89: THE BIBLE GETS MORE PRECIOUS EVERY YEAR

In college and seminary, I developed a great appreciation for the Bible as the living, inspired Word of God. I came away with an awesome respect for it. It is the main tool of my trade. My knowledge of it and skill in using it has grown as I have grown. As I look back on my lifetime as a Christian, I realize there has been a subtle change in my attitude to the Bible. I respect it more than ever, but I've also been developing a real love for it! I love it because it reveals God, and the more I know about Him the more I love Him.

No longer is it just a tool to help me accomplish my ministry, it has become my lifeline to God, my anchor and rock in life. I not only like and appreciate it, I find myself totally needing it. The better I know the facts of the Bible the more I realize there is a depth to it that can never be reached in this life. I am learning it with more than my mind but also with my heart. It has become very precious and special to me.

Several years ago, I was going through a very difficult time while leading pastors' conferences in India. I found myself turning to God's Word in a deeper way than I ever had before. God's comfort and promises were what got me through. God's Word was the only thing that kept me going. I discovered a deeper need in myself for its truths than ever before. I read a chapter first thing every morning and last thing every night. I read it as a love letter from God to me, not looking for ideas for messages or things I can use in my teaching. That has been very refreshing and keeps my focus where it needs to be. It speaks words of life to my heart, soul and spirit. I'm learning to listen with my heart and soul, not just my mind.

My involvement in spiritual warfare ministry has taught me that it is only God's Word that carries authority, not mine or anyone else's. Satan and his demons must obey God's Word when we use it. There is real power in the Word of God when we believe and quote it. That's how Jesus overcame temptations in the wilderness and it's the sword of the Spirit which Paul talks about – our only offensive weapon.

The Bible becomes more amazing to me as I go on in life. The more I know, the less I find I really know! It's simple enough for a child to understand, but the greatest scholar can spend a lifetime in just one part of it and never get to the full depth of it. It speaks to our mind, emotions and spirit all at once.

The older I become and the less of life I have left to live, the harder I cling to God's promises, not just about this life but also about the future. I'm not as interested in covering a lot of ground in my reading and study (quantity) but in going deeper in just a few verses (quality). Don't rush your reading, go slow, meditate, mull over a verse or phrase, ask God to speak to you through it and listen to what He says. Go deep, don't go fast. I don't just want the book in my head, I want it in my heart. (April 4, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

2 Timothy 3:16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,

Psalms 119:9-11 How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word. I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.

Hebrews 4:12 For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

Where are you in your growing love for the Bible? Is it just a tool of your trade, or the living Word of God which speaks truth to your heart?

How much time each day do you spend in devotional reading and study of the Word?

What is your favorite Bible passage or promise? Why?

BLOG 90: SPIRITUAL SHEPHERDS (Shepherds 1)

It is a great privilege to be used by God to minister to others (1 Timothy 3:1). God says He will bless and reward those who faithfully serve (Luke 12:37). We all want to hear Him say: “Well done, good and faithful servant!” (Matthew 5:21-23) When we come to the end of our lives, we want to be able to say what Paul said in 2 Timothy 4:7-8 “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.” I’m sure you want to be able to say that as well.

In order for that to happen, we must be the pastor or leader He wants us to be. He describes what that is by calling us “shepherds” (Acts 20:28). The word “shepherd” means “pastor”. A pastor is a shepherd. All who minister to others, whether as a pastor, teacher, parent or other leader are shepherds.

How do you know if God wants you to be a pastor or leader? The call to shepherd God’s people comes from God Himself. The Bible says He chose us for salvation even before He created the world (Ephesians 1:3). At the same time, He also chose us to have the privilege of serving Him and His people. God puts a desire in our hearts to pastor, evangelize or serve Him in whatever way He chooses. He gives us a burden to see people come to know Him, then shepherd them to help them grow spiritually. God gives us a love for people and a commitment to help them come to Him and live for Him. The desire can be quite strong, as Paul said, “Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!” (1 Corinthians 9:16). As the sheep know the shepherd cares for them, they will begin to respond and look to him for leadership, guidance and direction.

Being a good pastor requires more than a God-given desire. It takes skill and ability to carry out our duties. At the moment of salvation God gives us many blessings and privileges. This includes a unique set of spiritual gifts we need to serve Him. These gifts are tools the Holy Spirit uses to enable us to have the wisdom and skills necessary to care for His people. Each believer has a unique set of spiritual gifts. The current gifts God gives include evangelism, teaching the Bible, serving others, hospitality, helping others, administration and other ways of helping others in their Christian life. In addition, those called to pastor are given the gift of shepherding so they can lead and care for others. This gift includes the desire and ability to lead and guide God’s people to maturity in their faith. (April 25, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

1 Peter 5:2-4 Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.

When did God put a desire in your heart to serve Him? Who are the sheep God has given you to protect and train? In what ways are you like a shepherd of sheep? How is God helping you to do this? What does He want you to do to be a faithful shepherd?

BLOG 91: GOD EQUIPS HIS SHEPHERDS (Shepherds 2)

Being a pastor or leader isn’t easy. Taking care of sheep is a hard, dangerous, difficult job. The same is true of shepherding God’s sheep, our fellow believers. We are to continue to grow as we lead others in their spiritual growth. God promised He would keep working in us to be more like Jesus. God uses leading others to stretch our faith and show us our need of Him. When David was a shepherd, he killed a lion and a bear protecting his sheep. God was using that to prepare him to fight Goliath. He learned to fight in God’s strength and depend on God for victory. He uses what we

face as shepherds of His people to grow our faith as well. God allows things to come into our lives that we can't handle so we will go to Him for help.

Hurts come that only He can heal. Temptations arise that can't be resisted without depending on Him. He allows situations to come that we can't handle so we will draw closer to Him and see Him work through us. Paul says in Philippians 1:6 "He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." That is a promise from God.

When circumstances are difficult and we doubt if we can lead God's people, we need to remember God chose and called us. We need to depend on Him. God is working ON us and IN us so we grow even as He works THROUGH us to help others grow. We minister not just by what we say but even more by how we live. Watching us trust Jesus and grow is a powerful way God uses us to help others strengthen their faith. It is God who calls and equips us to serve Him, to shepherd His people.

Now let's talk about the duties we have as shepherds for God. When God calls someone to do something, He also equips him or her to do it. When God calls us, He equips us with leadership or shepherding abilities. Some believers are skilled in evangelism while others are better at teaching new believers. Some do well at starting new churches others are better at pastoring churches already established. Still others are capable counselors, others are bold prayer warriors and some are fervent worshipers.

Each pastor and leader have different gifts and skills. In Romans 12:6-8 we are told that "We have different gifts, according to the grace given us." We share a desire to pastor, but we are gifted to do so in many different ways. Because of this, God doesn't want us to compare ourselves with other pastors. He just expects us to use the gifts He has given us. There is no greater privilege than serving God in the way He has gifted you. (April 18, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

Hebrews 13:20-21 Now may the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

How has He equipped you to lead and teach the sheep in your care? Are you faithfully caring for them? What spiritual gifts has God given you to use in their care? Are you using them to the best of your ability?

BLOG 92: WHAT IS A BISHOP, OR OVERSEER? (Shepherds 3)

In the previous 2 blogs we have seen that pastors are shepherds. Anyone who ministers to others is called a "shepherd." There are other terms used in the Bible for those who lead God's people. Understanding them can help us better understand our duties and what God expects of leaders. 1 Timothy 3:1 says "If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task."

The word "OVERSEER" is a word the Gentiles used for the leader of a group of people. Sometimes this word is translated "bishop" but it refers to the same person as "shepherd" or "pastor." The Bible never uses the term "bishop" to refer to a pastor who is over other pastors, it is used of every person called to pastor. We see this clearly in Acts 20:28 "Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, by which he bought with his own blood." Here the word Overseer and Shepherd are used of the same person, the pastor of a church.

The command given this person is to KEEP WATCH. This word is used of a night watchman who keeps watch over the city. The pastor, or overseer, is the one who keeps watch over a body of believers. He is their guardian.

Sheep are defenseless and cannot protect themselves. They can't fight or hide or run. They need someone to watch out for them and protect them. David's sheep needed him to protect them from lions and bears. As Christians we are all like sheep (Isaiah 53:6). We all need a shepherd and Jesus is our shepherd (Psalm 23; John 10:11-18). God divides His sheep up into small flocks called "churches". He puts a pastor, or shepherd, over each group. God uses the overseer, or shepherd, to guard His sheep. Sheep need protection from danger, from wolves and lions and from those who would steal them away from their shepherd.

Christians need protection from Satan and his demons and from false teachers. Jesus calls false teachers "wolves in sheep's clothing" (Matthew 7:15; Galatians 1:6-10). They pretend they are Christians and are teaching the truth, but really, they are deceiving Christians and leading them into error and sin. God uses us, His Overseers, to shepherd and protect His sheep from them. We are also to protect sheep from their own errors and sin.

Sheep are dumb animals and will wonder off and get lost. Christians are the same way and will wonder away from God and His truth unless someone is there to watch over them. That's one of the jobs of pastors. (May 2, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

1 Timothy 3:1- Here is a trustworthy saying: Whoever aspires to be an overseer desires a noble task. Now the overseer is to be above reproach, faithful to his wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money.

What are you doing to oversee the people God has given you in your church, group or family? What are you doing to protect them from sin and deception?

BLOG 93: WHAT IS AN ELDER? (Shepherds 4)

In our last blogs we have seen the terms "shepherd" and "bishop" or "overseer." Another term used for pastors is "ELDER." In 1 Peter 5:1 we read "To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed." Peter continues in verse 2 "Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers." Here he uses all three terms: "elder," "shepherd" and "overseer," interchangeably, for the same person and position.

The term "elder" was a Jewish term used for the leader of a synagogue. This is the term Paul uses when he writes to those from a Jewish background. When he writes to Gentile believers, he uses the term overseer. They both refer to the same function but are used in different cultures. The elder was the commanding officer of a Jewish gathering, as in a synagogue. He, like an overseer, would make the plans and be responsible for what the group did. He didn't have to do everything himself, he just made sure everything functioned properly. This is like a principal of a school. A principle doesn't do everything in the school himself, but he makes sure it is all done properly and correctly.

Remember when the people would come to Moses with their problems? All day long there were so many people, Moses couldn't help them all and couldn't get anything else done. Do you know what his father-in-law told him to do? He said he should recruit some other men to help. That also happened when the early church was very busy giving out food and clothing to the widows. The apostles didn't have time to read the Bible and pray. What did they do? They got deacons to do the

work instead. They said “It is more important for us to study the Bible and pray” so they trained others to help the widows. Training others to help is one of our duties as a pastor as well.

Being a pastor or leader isn’t easy. God expects more of those who lead (James 3:1). But He also has special blessings for those who faithfully serve as leaders. Someone once said, “If God calls you to be a pastor, don’t stoop to be a king.” Remember, God is looking for those who are available to serve Him and lead others as they grow spiritually. It doesn’t matter what skill or ability we have, He gives us the necessary gifts and wisdom to do what He wants. Christine Cain states, “God doesn’t choose the qualified, He qualifies the chosen.” (May 9, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

1 Timothy 5:17 The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching.

Titus 1:5-6 The reason I left you in Crete was that you might put in order what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you. An elder must be blameless, faithful to his wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient.

Do you train others to help you lead the people who are your responsibility, or do you try to do everything yourself? Pray and ask God to show you who you can help, or who can help you.

BLOG 94: WHAT IS A PASTOR-TEACHER? (Shepherds 5)

We have seen some names for pastors: “shepherd,” “bishop/overseer” and “elder.” In Ephesians 4:11-13, Paul refers to a pastor as a “PASTOR-TEACHER.” Paul writes in Ephesians 4:11-13 “It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”

Apostles had absolute authority over the church. This office ended in about AD 90 when the last apostle died. Prophets are those who receive a message from God and pass it on. Sometimes this message was prophetic but mainly they preached God’s Word. The prophetic part of their ministry ended when the Bible was complete. Evangelists are specially gifted to share the good news of Jesus with others. Evangelists replaced the apostles in traveling and starting churches.

The term “PASTOR-TEACHER” is one word referring to the inherent teaching responsibility of the shepherd to teach the Bible. One of the main duties of a shepherd is to make sure his sheep have proper nourishment. He makes sure they are fed so they grow healthy. Your body needs nourishment to be strong and healthy. Your spirit needs nourishment to be strong and healthy as well. What does God give us to nourish our spirit? -- His Bible.

In Ephesians 4:12 we learn that the purpose for teaching God’s word is: “To prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.” Again, we see that as leaders we don’t have to do everything ourselves. Our job is to equip and train each person to be able to use their own spiritual gifts to serve. Our purpose is to train others to minister for Jesus as they live their lives. Paul tells Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:2 “The things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.” We train others who then train more people and so on. Paul says we do this so the Body of Christ, the church, grows.

Each Body has different parts doing different functions. We have arms, legs, hands, feet and other body parts that are different but all are important for the body to function. That is true in the church as well. Different people have different gifts, but all are needed to work together to get the

work done. Our job is not to try to do everything but to teach Christians God's Word and train them so they can grow and duplicate it in others. Again, pastors are to teach God's Word, guard and protect the sheep and to oversee the ministries of the church. (May 16, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

Jeremiah 3:15 Then I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will lead you with knowledge and understanding.

Acts 20:28 Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.

What are you doing to help prepare others to live for God and serve Him? Do you look for others who can do things you can't do and give them opportunities to use their gifts for God?

BLOG 95: HOW TO FEED SHEEP (Shepherds 6)

God's first responsibility for shepherds and church leaders is to feed His sheep. We eat several times a day, every day. We need God's word every day, throughout the day as well. We need to teach the Bible to our people. That is a very important part of the duty of all pastors. Jesus commanded His disciples to "Feed My sheep" in John 21:15-17. He said it three times because it was so important. That is one of the most important duties of pastors and leaders. It is important because it is the only way people will grow and God's Word spread.

Feeding the sheep means to teach them God's Word. Some pastors are so preoccupied with other things that they don't take time to prepare a sermon. When they stand to speak on Sunday, they read a few Bible verses, close their Bible and talk to the people. They tell the people the same thing they have already told them before. The people only hear their words, not words from the Bible. Is that feeding the sheep?

How many of you have a wife who is a good cook? She makes food you like to eat? What if you came home hungry and wanted to eat, but she didn't make any food? What if she tells you she was too busy and didn't have time to make food. But she says, "Here is some old food from yesterday, you can eat it." Then the next meal she does the same thing, and the meal after that. Would you like that? Why not? That's not a good way to feed you, is it? That's not a good way to feed your people either.

You need to keep studying the Bible so you have something fresh to feed your people. If not, they won't learn and they won't grow. When your wife feeds you, she plans ahead what she is going to make for you. She puts in a lot of work so it is fresh and nourishing. She makes it so it tastes good and gives you good health. That's what you need to do when you feed your people. When Paul preached, he would take a passage of scripture and explain it to the people. Then he would apply it to their life. Ezra did the same thing.

You need to start early in the week to prepare your sermon. Pick a book you would like to teach the people and start studying it. Read the first verse and think about it. Pray and ask God to help you understand what it means. You can look up references in your Bible or use a commentary. Write down what God is teaching you. Then pray and ask God to show you how this applies to your life. Write that down as well. When you are done with one verse go on to the next verse and do the same thing. Then when Sunday comes you use your notes to teach the people what the first verse means. You tell them how it applies to them. You can use stories or examples from the Bible or life to explain it. Then you do the same with the next verse.

Don't do too many verses in a sermon. It is better to do a few verses well than try to do too many. The next week you do the same thing with the next verses. In this way they will be learning God's Word. You will be teaching God's words, not just your words. The people will learn new truths,

not just the same thing over and over. It will give them something to think about and practice during the week. They will grow spiritually. When you do this, you will be feeding your people. They will grow and become more like Jesus. (May 23, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

2 Timothy 4:2 Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction.

BLOG 96: WHAT IS A MINISTER? (Shepherds 7)

We have seen the terms the Bible uses for pastors: “shepherd,” “bishop/overseer,” “elder” and “pastor-teacher.” One more term used to describe pastors is “MINISTER.” Paul tells Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:6 “If you point these things out to the brothers, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus, brought up in the truths of the faith and of the good teaching that you have followed.” This is the same word translated “deacon” in Acts 6:1-15. The word is used for a servant who waits on tables.

Pastors and leaders are servants of the people. We aren’t to have others serve us but for us to serve them. Some pastors think the sheep are to serve them. They expect the people to do everything they want so the church looks good and people are impressed with the pastor. In their pride, they think they are more important than others. But the Bible says we are to serve our people, not have them serve us. To be true servants of our people we must be humble servants like Jesus. Pride is a common temptation & danger for pastors.

Sheep don’t serve the shepherd; the shepherd serves his sheep. Jesus was a shepherd that served His sheep. Matthew 20:28 says Jesus did not come to be served but to serve. He washed His disciples’ feet and said we are to the same thing. We are to serve our sheep.

But that doesn’t mean we do everything everyone wants us to do. Serving our sheep means we do what is best for them. It’s the same as we do with our own children. What if we did everything our children wanted us to do? Would that be good for them? A parent serves his children by doing what is best for them, not everything they want. Sometimes the children may get upset or not like us. But we know it is more important to do what best for them to grow. Sometimes our people may get upset with us or not like us. They may tell others you aren’t a good pastor or even leave to go to a different church. But we must do what God expects, even if they don’t understand.

So, we have 4 terms for a pastor, - each showing a different aspect of our duties. PASTOR, or PASTOR-TEACHER, refers to a shepherd who leads and feeds his sheep, as we teach God’s Word. OVERSEER is one who guards and protects the people. ELDER is the same as overseer, but used in the Jewish culture. Both overseer and elder refer to someone who plans and guides a group. He doesn’t do everything himself but he makes sure it gets done. MINISTER, or deacon, is one who humbly serves others by doing what is best for them. (May 30, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

2 Corinthians 3:6 He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

Colossians 1:7 You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf,

Colossians 4:7 Tychicus will tell you all the news about me. He is a dear brother, a faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord.

What a great honor to be called a “faithful minister”! Thank God for the privilege of ministering for Him. Ask Him to help you stay faithful. If you are more concerned about others serving you than you are about serving them, ask God to forgive you and help you serve like Jesus serves you?

BLOG 97: I COULDN'T MAKE IT WITHOUT OTHER CHRISTIANS

When my wife and I travel, it seems God always puts other Christians in our way. We look forward to our paths crossing with these friends whom we just haven't met yet! Recently we traveled to Puerto Rico and God sprinkled a steady stream of believers throughout our trip. When I go to India, the help and support of believers there is essential. The further I am from home, the more I appreciate fellowship with a brother or sister in Jesus.

Even when I'm not traveling, I'm still far from my real home in heaven. Here, too, fellowship with other believers is very important. Close contact with believers I have known a long time is a precious, valuable asset to my life's journey. The older I become the more I value Christian fellowship: with those I've known a lifetime as well as with those I just meet in passing.

I'm been learning through the years how to let people get closer to me and how I can get to know them deeper as well. Instead of seeing them as assets (or stumbling blocks) to what I want to accomplish in life, I am appreciating others more and more as fellow travelers who are making their way to the same eternal city I am. I enjoy their friendship, need their encouragement and learn from their example. A long, hard journey is always easier when in the company of faithful companions. That is why God gives us each other to help us through this life.

Have you noticed how an instant bond is formed when you find someone you just met is a Christian? It doesn't matter what culture or country they come from, what color they are or what language they speak. We share the same values and priorities. We have the same world view. Jesus in me connects with Jesus in them. We are children of the same Father – and that makes us brothers and sisters. We fight the same enemy. We'll spend eternity together, so why not start enjoying each other while here?

Jesus Himself needed human fellowship. He would withdraw from the crowds and get away with just the disciples. He needed them. Unfortunately, they weren't always there for Him, like in Gethsemane before His arrest. However, if He needed others, we certainly do as well. The more I progress in life and ministry the more I realize how much I need other believers and what a blessing it is that God puts them in my life. (June 6, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

Acts 2:42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

Hebrews 10:25 Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another — and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Do you really appreciate other believers in your life, or do you just see them as tools to use in helping you accomplish your ministry goals?

How much time a week do you spend in Christian fellowship – fun and closeness with no agenda but to enjoy each other?

When do you most need the support and fellowship of other believers?

Think of those in your past whom God has used to really help you on your journey. Pray for them. Thank them (mail, email or in person) again today for the role they played in your life.

BLOG 98: DAVID: FAITH & OBEDIENCE

There are many lessons we can learn from the life of David. He was a musician for Saul for two years when the war with the Philistines started. They sent their champion, Goliath, to mock God and the Jews. Everyone was afraid of him because of his size and reputation. Saul, the King and the largest of the men, should have fought him, but he was afraid as well. David was bothered by the

shame Goliath was causing God and His people, so he volunteered to fight Goliath. There was no way he would be able to win, for he was not even a soldier and couldn't use the weapons of war, but his faith in God gave him courage to fight. With God's help he won, and the armies of Israel had a great victory (1 Samuel 17:40-54). David's faith in God, which had been growing through the years, enabled him to trust God even in impossible situations.

We all face 'giants' in life. We face impossible situations and circumstances we cannot control. It may be health problems or financial difficulties. It could be problems with others or in our ministries, temptations we struggle with or issues in our families. These are too big for us to handle, so we need to trust God. God allows these things to teach us to trust and to see His provision and deliverance.

What giants are you facing in your life right now? Do you trust God no matter what happens? It may be hard to keep your eyes on Him through it all, but do you do your best to keep your faith in Him and not look to what is happening around you? What is it that usually causes you to be afraid? What can you do to remember to trust God at those times?

Because of David's success against Goliath, he was made an officer in the army. He received Saul's daughter in marriage (2 Samuel 18:21) and became part of Saul's family. He was extremely popular with everyone, but that made Saul very, very jealous. The more God blessed David; the angrier Saul became at him. He even tried killing David, so David ran away and hid. For almost 20 years, until he was about 35 years old, David was hiding from Saul who tried to capture and kill him. Many others who were enemies of Saul joined David in hiding, and he became responsible for the protection and provision of hundreds of people. David had 6 wives of his own and many children to care for as well.

Sometimes he didn't trust and obey God, but took matters into his own hands. He would lie or deceive others (1 Samuel 27:10-12). One time this caused innocent priests who helped him to be killed by Saul (1 Samuel 22:17-21). Another time David and his men killed innocent Amalekites to take their food (1 Samuel 27:8-9). He pretended to be crazy to escape arrest when with the Philistines. He was not perfect at all in his obedience to God (1 Samuel 21:13).

However, most of the time he did depend on God for protection and direction. Twice he could have killed Saul, but didn't because he knew God would take care of Saul in His way and time (1 Samuel 24; 26). He often poured out his heart to God in prayer and praise (Psalm 142). Many of these are recorded as Psalms in our Bible, for many of the Psalms were written while David was hiding from Saul. Many times, he asked God for directions and guidance, and then obeyed what God said (1 Samuel 23:1-4).

Leaders today must obey God's Word and directions in all they do. Sometimes we break a Bible principle if we think it is for a good reason, but there is no reason to ever disobey. Other times we act on our own and do or say things we have never prayed about and brought before God. We will do what those who aren't Christians do to advance our cause or solve our problems. We are more concerned with what others will think instead of what God thinks. Like David, we do things that are wrong to protect ourselves or to advance our own desires. (June 13, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

Can you think of times when you acted or spoke without first going to God and you regretted it? Think of times you disobeyed Him and His Word – how did those turn out? When are you most tempted to act on your own instead of doing things God's way? What can you do to prevent those times?

Psalms 33:18 The Lord watches over those who obey him, those who trust in his constant love.

BLOG 99: WHY DOES GOD ALLOW SUFFERING?

One of Satan's best arguments to turn people against God is the issue of suffering. If God is good, how could He allow suffering? If there is a God at all, how could He allow suffering?

The question as to why some have so little has no clear answer. Why does God allow people to suffer and struggle? How can a God of love allow so much evil to continue? God doesn't defend Himself or explain what He allows. He gives us a free will choice and as a result sin and the resulting evil are the natural consequences or turning from Him. Still, innocent people suffer.

The implication is that either God isn't in control of everything or He isn't good. Either way He loses. No wonder this tool is so effective for Satan and his forces. How can we answer it?

We can't try to evaluate God's person and character by these things for He has proven His character and love by leaving heaven, becoming a man, living on earth, then going to cross to take on the punishment for every sin we would ever commit. That proves His love for us beyond a shadow of a doubt. He definitely is good. If it weren't for the cross we would all deserve eternity in hell from this moment on. So, anything less than hell from now on is His grace and mercy. Why He seems to show more to some than others is not up to us to judge. God isn't accountable to us. We cannot stand in judgment of Him until we know all the facts as He knows them and see everything as well or better than He sees it. So, we trust in His character as revealed by His works in our life. We focus on the known, not the unknown.

Many things seem unfair to little children but they must trust their parents. Getting an injection from a doctor or having a pretty shiny knife taken away may seem to a child that a parent doesn't love them but a child doesn't have the perspective to truly view what is happening. We don't have God's perspective on life either. We fall back on the fact that He is in sovereign control of everything and that that all He does is out of love for us. More than that we cannot know. (June 20, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

Romans 8:35-39 Who can keep us away from the love of Christ? Can trouble or problems? Can suffering wrong from others or having no food? Can it be because of no clothes or because of danger or war? 36 The Holy Writings say, "Because of belonging to Jesus, we are in danger of being killed all day long. We are thought of as sheep that are ready to be killed." 37 But we have power over all these things through Jesus Who loves us so much. 38 For I know that nothing can keep us from the love of God. Death cannot! Life cannot! Angels cannot! Leaders cannot! Any other power cannot! Hard things now or in the future cannot! 39 The world above or the world below cannot! Any other living thing cannot keep us away from the love of God which is ours through Christ Jesus our Lord.

What do you say when people ask how a loving god can allow innocent people to suffer? When are you most apt to doubt God's love and goodness? What have you learned from this blog that can help you better trust Him when you don't understand?

BLOG 100: HOW ARE PEOPLE SAVED WHO NEVER HEARD OF JESUS?

The question often comes up about those who were born before Jesus or those today who never heard of them. Is salvation available for them? If so, how? First let's be sure that salvation is only to be found through Jesus (John 14:6; Acts 4:12; 1 Timothy 2:5). There is no other way, person, religion, etc. to get us to heaven. Only Jesus. But what about those who never heard of Him?

Every person is accountable to God, if they have heard the name Jesus or not (Romans 1:18-32; 3:23). All deserve eternal separation from God (Romans 6:23). He paid for their sins, if they heard

about Him or not (John 4:42; 1 John 2:2). Those who reject His payment for sin will eternally endure God's wrath on sin in hell (John 3:16, 36; Revelation 20:15).

Salvation only comes from hearing God's good news of forgiveness (Romans 10:13-14). We know God is just and would never do anything that was not just (Genesis 18:25; Romans 2:11). All deserve hell; no one deserves heaven, or even a chance at heaven through Jesus (Ephesians 2:1-9). But how can God hold someone accountable for rejecting Jesus if they never heard about Him?

THOSE WHO DO NOT HAVE THE OLD TESTAMENT

First, let's talk about those who do not know about God through His written Word in the Old Testament. They may not have heard about the creator God of Israel, but they do know there is a God for their conscience within makes that plain to them (Romans 1:19, 32; 2:15; Ecclesiastes 3:11). Everyone has something within that tells them there is a God. If they respond to that or deny it is up to their free will choice.

In addition, God has revealed His eternal power and divine nature through nature and what He has created (Romans 1:20). So, man is responsible for what he does about this basic awareness of the existence of God. Suppose you were lost in a dark cave and then found a little lighted arrow pointing in a certain direction. Whose fault would it be if you failed to follow the arrow? Just yours. God has His own little arrows in our heart and in nature. Man must just follow them.

So, what is the bottom line of what needs to happen for salvation? A person must give all of himself that he has to all of God that he understands. I repeat. A person must give all of himself that he has to all of God that he understands. That is true for a child, a mentally handicapped person, or someone who only knows there is a God through his heart and through nature. The more mature we get the more of ourselves we have to give, but even a child can give his heart to God. And a person doesn't need to know more than that there is a God to accept that truth and seek to know more about and follow that God. Anyone can do that, no matter if they have never heard the name of Jesus or read any of the Old Testament.

God wants all men to be saved (1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9). He welcomes those who acknowledge their spiritual need and seek Him (Ezekiel 34:11; Luke 19:10). When a person does accept the reality of this creator God and seeks to better know Him then he is accepting all of God that He understands. Sometimes God will reveal more of Himself to that person through a messenger (Acts 16:6-10), through inner revelation in the form of a supernatural dream, or through other means such as the names and meanings of the stars as He created them. God's promise is still true. "If from there you seek the Lord your God, you will find him if you look for him with all your heart and with all your soul" (Deuteronomy 4:29).

Those who do not turn to Him do not do so out of ignorance, for all are accountable and fully responsible (Romans 1:19-20). However, if they do not respond to Him, they are guilty of rejecting Him (Romans 1:21-23). Man can reject the truth (Romans 1:18) and refuse to honor God (Romans 1:21), turning to idols instead (Romans 1:23). They can ignore God's standard of righteousness, but they are still accountable for doing so (Romans 1:24-32). The serious part is that when someone rejects God, He rejects them (Romans 1:24-32).

Never let it be said that God is unfair in doing so, though (Romans 2:1-16). God is more than fair. He reveals Himself to man within (heart/conscience) without (nature) and all man has to do is accept that truth and, in His heart, acknowledge the God that created him. God may or may not reveal more to him, but if he has given everything, he has in himself to all of God that he understands, God will forgive his sins and give him salvation. It couldn't be any simpler or fairer than that. (June 27, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

BLOG 101: HOW WERE PEOPLE SAVED WHO ONLY HAD THE OLD TESTAMENT?

We saw in the previous blog that the basis of salvation is for a person to give all of themselves that they have to all of God that they understand. God reveals Himself to everyone through their inner awareness of a sovereign God and through His creation. But then, what about those who also have the clearer revelation of God in the Old Testament, but lived before Jesus and only had vague prophecies about his future coming? What would be their standard for salvation? It would be no different than what we already mentioned, giving all of themselves that they had to all of God that they understood. It's just that they would understand God much more clearly from His revelation of Himself in the Old Testament.

You see, the basis of salvation is always the death of Christ. That is the only way God can forgive sin of anyone, because Jesus paid for it on the cross. There is no other way. And the requirement for that pardon to be applied is always faith in God from the heart of the individual requesting forgiveness. What changes through Bible history is the content of that faith, what God has revealed to man. For those who don't have the written revelation of God the content of their faith is in a creator God who is sovereign over all. For those who knew more about Him the content increases. Adam, for example, understood that innocent blood had to be shed to cover his shame and guilt. He and his descendants offered sacrifices as a way of showing their faith in God who would remove their sins.

Now when God revealed the Law to Moses and the Jews on Mt. Sinai, they got a much deeper, clearer revelation of Who God was and what He expected. Their faith in God was shown by living by the rules and regulations in Exodus and Leviticus. It wasn't that doing these things earned their salvation, for salvation is a free gift (Ephesians 2:8-9), but that inner faith shows itself outwardly by wanting to follow God – James' "faith without works is dead" (James 2:14-20). Salvation didn't come by them putting faith in what we they did, but in putting faith in the God who told them to do it. Actually, the law could not bring salvation, no matter how well it was kept. Its purpose wasn't to be a way to earn salvation but to show man his sin and the impossibility of being perfect in god's sight (Galatians 3:14-24). Today our faith isn't shown by our trust in God as seen in His Law, today we are under grace and our trust in in our gracious God to provide free salvation (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Those with the Old Testament had the same truth revealed to them as we have in the New Testament. Man's heart is wicked and corrupt (Jeremiah 17:9) and even our righteous acts are dirty in God's sight (Isaiah 64:6). Because God is holy, He must separate from sinful man. Man cannot reach up to God, only God can initiate the contact by reaching down to man (Isaiah 59:1-2). He reaches down to reveal that the way between God and man can only be open by the shedding of innocent blood (Leviticus 17:11). The blood of animals can't pay for sin, but the sacrifice of the sinless God-man Messiah can pay for it (Isaiah 53:1-12).

So, faith in the provision by the coming Messiah was a key ingredient in the faith content for those who had the Old Testament. They didn't know His earthly name would be 'Jesus,' but that wasn't the issue. Putting faith in this coming Messiah was the critical point. God would provide for their sins for they could not. In order for this to happen the Messiah would have to be "cut off" (crucified, Daniel 9:26). This would be a painful time of suffering for Him (Psalm 22:1-31). This is what God revealed and in what those with the Old Testament had to put their faith (Genesis 15:6). (July 4, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

BLOG 102: SATAN IS ALIVE AND WELL TODAY

Several years ago, Hal Lindsay wrote a book called, "Satan is Alive and Well on Planet Earth." It's still true. However, in our culture, he hides his tracks well. What better way to work unopposed then to convince people you don't exist? It's like being invisible.

People today will tell you that believing in Satan is old-fashioned and superstitious. In our scientific age, they say, we know better. Why should people be wary of something that is only fiction? This comes right from the one who deceived Eve in the garden of Eden.

Lying is fundamental to Satan's plan and purpose (John 8:44). He cannot tolerate truth. When he tried his lies on Jesus in the wilderness temptations, Jesus responded by quoting Scripture. He used God's truth to expose the lies of His enemy. Paul says that the sword of the Spirit is the word of God (Ephesians 6:17). It is our only offensive weapon.

If someone is invisible and be whispering and spreading lies without people knowing where they come from, much havoc can be caused. He tells us lies about himself, lies about God, lies about others and lies about ourselves. How do you know when something is a lie? Anything that does not line up to the truth in the Bible is a lie.

How are we to have victory against this unseen enemy? First, we need to recognize he exists and that he hates us and will do anything he can to ruin our lives. We must be on our guard against this roaring lion who seeks to devour us (1 Peter 5:8-9).

We do this by submitting to God and resisting his attempts to deceive us (James 4:7). Satan may have control of the earth, but he does not have control of God's people. We have a free will to determine who we will listen to and follow.

Isaiah 54:17 reminds us, "No weapon forged against you will prevail, and you will refute every tongue that accuses you. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord and this is their vindication from me declares the Lord."

Our enemy does not fight fair, but he fights. Are you aware of the lies and deceptions he uses against you? Don't go to one extreme and fear him. But don't go to the other extreme and forget about him. Remember who your enemy is. Many times, we fight battles against people in our lives. We feel a family member or an enemy needs to be defeated. They are not the ones we are to fight. Remember who your enemy is. Others may deny him or ignore him, but God's people must always be alert against him. (July 11, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

2 Corinthians 2:10-11 Anyone you forgive, I also forgive. ... in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes.

BLOG 103: WHAT GOD LOOKS FOR IN A LEADER (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9) - 1

READ 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9

When we think of leadership, we usually think of what the person does, his actions in carrying out his role as leader. However, outer actions are based on inner character, not our personality or knowledge. Leadership is first of all something we ARE, not just something we DO. Paul lists qualifications for godly leaders in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. Each and every one has to do with inner integrity and maturity. They are not just a list from which we can pick and choose. They go together to describe one person – a godly leader. The only one who has ever totally fulfilled this whole list is Jesus; so, the more we grow in these qualities the more we become like Him. Let's look at these requirements for leadership.

1. A GODLY LEADER MUST WANT TO BE A GODLY LEADER

The first thing Paul says is that a person must want to be a godly leader. He must "set his

heart on it” and “desire” it (1 Timothy 3:1). Never talk someone into serving, no matter how good a leader you think they may become. God must put that desire in their hearts, and then they must respond to that by being willing to follow and serve. Without these fundamental truths, no one will make a godly leader. No one!

When did God put it in your heart to serve Him? Was it hard for you to commit to doing so? Have you changed your mind about wanting to serve Him? Reaffirm your commitment to serve Him. If you wonder if He called you, I can assure you that if you want to serve Him then that desire has come from Him, unless you just want to serve out of pride or greed.

2. A GODLY LEADER HAS GODLY INNER QUALITIES

For those who are called and respond by wanting to serve, Paul has 25 character traits that describe a godly leader. It takes a lifetime of spiritual growth to attain these, and no one but Jesus has ever attained all of them to perfection. It is a process we begin and continue throughout our lives.

The first inner quality listed is **balance** (1 Timothy 3:2). It refers to someone who is even tempered and avoids extremes, someone not easily deceived or carried away, someone who is always stable and steady and who doesn't fall apart under pressure.

Sensible (1 Timothy 3:2) is similar but a bit different. This person is self-controlled, reasonable and makes good decisions because they approach problems with maturity and experience. They do a good job when hard decisions have to be made.

Also, a godly leader must be **disciplined** (Titus 1:8). This means literally “strength under control.” A godly leader doesn't overindulge in food, sleep or anything else. He knows when to say no (Proverbs 25:28). He is not easy prey to temptation or someone who spends too much money. He does not let anger, pride, greed or laziness control him. (July 18, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate yourself on balance and self-control in your life? How would your mate or best friends rate you? Do you have self-control when you need it? Do others come to you for advice in tough situations because you have a reputation of making wise decisions?

BLOG 104: HOW WELL DO YOU GET ALONG WITH OTHERS? (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9) - 2

READ 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9

In the last blog we looked at what God looks for in a leader. First, a godly leader must want to be a godly leader. Second, a godly leader must have godly inner qualities. In this blog we will look at another character trait.

3. A GODLY LEADER HAS GODLY INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

To be a godly leader means we need to get along with others. Paul lists several qualities God expects godly leaders to have so they treat others correctly.

A godly leader cannot be **quick-tempered** (Titus 1:7) or **violent** (1 Timothy 3:3). He cannot get angry quickly or easily, or be someone who argues a lot with others (Proverbs 29:22). That includes how he treats his wife and children as well. He must remain calm under pressure. There is a godly anger, righteous indignation, like when Jesus sent the moneychangers out of the temple, but it must be done under control and only against sin that demands it. Even then we must be very, very careful we don't end up in sin ourselves (Ephesians 4:26).

Paul adds that a leader can't be **quarrelsome** (1 Timothy 3:3). He can't be someone who is known for arguing. He can't insult others who insult him or criticize others. He can't be a person who dominates the conversation and must always be right about everything (Proverbs 20:3). Instead, a

godly leader must be willing to listen, open to learn, and able to change his opinion when necessary.

This person doesn't have to have his or her own way all the time. They are not **overbearing** (Titus 1:7), not arrogant or prideful. They get along with others and work well as part of a team.

After saying what we are not to be like with others, Paul also says what we are to be like: **gentle** (1 Timothy 3:3). This has the idea of patience with others, being kind and considerate. It means being willing to yield, to forgive and to overlook an offense. People never feel put down or criticized by this person. (July 25, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

Would your wife or children say you get angry a lot? Do they think you always have to be right? Are you willing to listen to them and change your mind if they make good sense? Do others see you as someone who is patient and kind in all your dealings with everyone, no matter their situation in life?

BLOG 105: WHAT IS YOUR REPUTATION? (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9) - 3

READ 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9

In the last two blog we looked at what God looks for in a leader. First, a godly leader must want to be a godly leader. Second, a godly leader must have godly inner qualities. Third, a godly leader has godly interpersonal relationships. In this blog we will look at another character trait.

4. A GODLY LEADER HAS A GODLY REPUTATION

These quality traits deal with how others feel about a leader and what they say behind their back. It has to do with how they describe you to others. It is very important for every Christian to have a good reputation, for we represent Jesus. This is especially important for leaders. Here is what God says our reputations should be like.

He describes the reputation of a godly leader as being **above reproach** (1 Timothy 3:2) and **blameless** (Titus 1:6-7). "Above reproach" means literally "without wrinkles" and speaks of a garment that is smooth and free from folds. Leaders are to have no questionable conduct, no secret sins and no unresolved conflicts with others. We can't have others saying we cheated them or thinking that we have greed or pride. "Blameless" is similar. It is a legal term and refers to someone who is not accused of any wrong doing of any kind. We don't have to be perfect as leaders, but when we offend someone or do something wrong, we must immediately humble ourselves, apologize and make it right.

In addition, Paul says we are to be **respectable** (1 Timothy 3:2). This refers to a person who is worthy of respect and honor, a Christian gentleman.

One way this happens is by being **upright** (Titus 1:8) in all our dealings with others. That means we are to be fair and honest, keep our promises, pay our bills on time, keep our word and always speak kindly of others.

Furthermore, we are to be **hospitable** (Titus 1:8) to those in need. In Paul's day there were no hotels, so people traveling had to depend on others for housing. A godly leader has to have an attitude of sacrifice and caring, being willing to share what they have with others.

The result of all these is that we will have a **good reputation with outsiders** (1 Timothy 3:7). Others in the community think of us with respect and honor. Even if they don't agree with what we believe about Jesus, they know we are good, honest and trustworthy people. (August 1, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

What kind of a reputation do you have in your community? What do those who aren't

Christians think of you? What about Christians that don't attend your church, how do they speak of you? Do people know your word is good and trust what you say? Do people think better of Jesus because they know you represent Him?

BLOG 106: YOUR SPIRITUAL LIFE (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9) - 4

READ 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9

We are talking about what God looks for in a leader. First, a godly leader must want to be a godly leader. Second, a godly leader must have godly inner qualities. Third, a godly leader has godly interpersonal relationships. Fourth, he must have a godly reputation. In this blog we will look at another character trait.

5. A GODLY LEADER HAS A GODLY SPIRITUAL LIFE

Another list of character traits that Paul mentions focuses on a leader's individual spiritual growth and maturity. This, too, is very important for all leaders.

A godly leader must be **holy** (Titus 1:8). He must be a man or woman who lives for God and pleases God. He does his best to make sure there is no sin in what he thinks or does. None of us can ever be perfect, but we must make sure there is no unconfessed sin in our lives. Others should be able to sense the presence of God in his life. He needs to have matured in his Christian walk so he is becoming more holy.

He also needs to mature in His Christian knowledge. Paul says a godly leader must **hold fast to sound doctrine** (Titus 1:9). He must be able to explain and defend the truth of the Word. He must show it in operation as he lives his daily life.

Because it takes time to mature in our daily life and Bible knowledge, Paul also says a leader is **not to be a new convert** (1 Timothy 3:6). The word refers to a new, tender plant, which needs sun and water to grow strong. New believers need to learn God's Word and apply it to their lives. It takes time to mature and grow spiritually. Paul warns that if there isn't enough time for this to happen, the new leader can become proud because of his position and fall in sin. When a Christian has been growing for a while, they can be put in positions of assisting another leader so they can be trained and learn, but they must be under someone's authority and accountable to them until they are mature enough to handle leadership without becoming proud or self-centered.

The final qualification related to his spiritual life is that a leader must be **able to teach** (1 Timothy 3:2). This means first of all that he must have a teachable spirit and be willing to learn and grow spiritually while growing in Bible knowledge. Then he must be able to communicate God's truth to others. Not all leaders are gifted in teaching, but all must do their best to share God's truth with others in any way they can. We are not all gifted in evangelism or prayer, either, but we need to do our best anyway. The same is true of leaders being teachers. This is the only quality that touches upon a leadership skill. The fact that that skill is teaching the Bible shows how very, very important it is for God's Word to be taught by everyone. (August 8, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

Are you growing in holiness and victory over sin? Are there any sins in your life that are defeating you? What must you do to have victory in those areas? Are you faithfully studying and learning the Bible? Can you discern error and show others God's truth from the Word? Do you do your best to communicate God's truth to others? Are you still maturing and growing in your faith and knowledge?

BLOG 107: HOW IS YOUR FAMILY? (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9) - 5

READ 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9

We are talking about what God looks for in a leader. First, a godly leader must want to be a godly leader. Second, a godly leader must have godly inner qualities. Third, a godly leader has godly interpersonal relationships. Fourth, he must have a godly reputation. Fifth, he must have a godly spiritual life. In this blog we will look at another character trait.

6. A GODLY LEADER HAS A GODLY FAMILY LIFE

Paul goes into more detail when he talks about a leader's family life than he does for any of the other qualities he mentions. A godly family sets an important example for others. Having a godly family also shows the leader will be able to lead those in his ministry to holiness as well. In addition, the family is a leader's most important priority, much more so than their ministry. For all these reasons, being a godly father and husband is most important.

Paul says a godly leader must be a **husband of one wife** (1 Timothy 3:2). Literally in the original language this means "a one-woman man" and refers to his faithfulness and loyalty to the woman who is his wife. It doesn't mean a man can't remarry after divorce or if his wife dies. A leader who has been divorced comes under the area of how it affects his reputation to those around him. "Husband of one wife" means a man must be committed to his wife and marriage and show it by all he says and does. He must treat all other women with respect as he would a sister. A leader doesn't have to have a perfect marriage, but he must be doing all he can to meet his wife's needs and see to it that they grow closer and stronger as a couple.

A godly leader must be a good husband, and also a good father. He must **manage his own household well** (1 Timothy 3:4-5). "Manage" means "to stand before and lead." That means he must plan for the future, set godly priorities, provide what is needed and handle family problems. He must do this in an orderly fashion. Home is the best training ground for church leadership because a family is like a miniature church with the same needs and problems. If a man can't lead his family in a godly way, he won't be able to do it on a larger scale with a church, either. A godly pastor serves his wife and children as his most important sheep, and then he serves the rest of the people in the church after them.

This means that he will have **children who obey him** (Titus 1:6; 1 Timothy 3:4). They are to "obey with proper respect" (1 Timothy 3:4). They must "behave and not be open to a charge of being wild and disobedient" (Titus 1:6). This means they respect and obey God and their parents. There are times when younger children, and even teens, may rebel and refuse to obey, but a godly father will discipline them in love and gentleness so they learn to obey. If a man can't deal with his children when they go astray, how can he deal with those in the church who rebel and cause problems for others? His children don't have to be perfect, but as they reach adulthood they should display respect and honor for their parents. This shows they have been raised with love and discipline. (August 15, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

Would your wife say you are a faithful, loyal husband who puts her needs before your own and before the needs of others in your ministry? Would she say that you always treat her with love and respect? Would she say you lead your family in a godly way? Or would she say you treat others better than you treat her and your children? Do your children know you love them? Do they respect and trust you, even when they don't agree with you?

BLOG 108: GODLY PERSONAL HABITS (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9) - 6

READ 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9

We are talking about what God looks for in a leader. First, a godly leader must want to be a godly

leader. Second, a godly leader must have godly inner qualities. Third, a godly leader has godly interpersonal relationships. Fourth, he must have a godly reputation. Fifth, he must have a godly spiritual life. Sixth, a godly leader has a godly family life. In this blog we will look at the final character trait.

7. A GODLY LEADER HAS GODLY PERSONAL HABITS

The last group of qualifications we will look at has to do with the personal habits of a godly leader. These deal with personal thoughts and actions, which others may not see or know. We can keep these hidden from others and pretend to be something we aren't. That is hypocrisy and is a sin God hates! Real character is what we are like when no one is watching us. These traits are things that others may not see or know, but they make us who we really are.

The first two characteristics have to do with our attitude to money and material possessions. We are **not to love money** (1 Timothy 3:3). Money and possessions are not to be our main goal in life. We are not to take pride in them or trust them to provide for our needs. This has nothing to do with how much money or possessions we have, it has to do with our attitude to them. We can be guilty of these even though we have very little material things. It is very easy for money or things to become an idol, something we put before God. That is sin (1 John 5:21).

Paul also says we are **not to pursue dishonest gain** (Titus 1:7). This means we are not to do anything dishonest to gain more money or possessions. We must be totally fair and honest in all our dealings with others.

Instead of loving money and possessions, Paul says we must **love what is good** (Titus 1:8). We must support good people, good causes and good ideas. We must truly love what is good in life and turn from all other things.

A final trait Paul includes is that a godly leader must **not be given to drunkenness** (1 Timothy 3:3; Titus 1:7). A godly leader must have self-control so he doesn't get drunk on alcohol. That means we must have self-control over anything that can be taken to excess, like eating too much or resting and sleeping too much. It also refers to self-control over other things like greed and lust.

Search your own heart and ask God to show you (Psalm 139:23-24) if there is greed in your heart. Do you love money and possessions more than you should? Is there anything in your life that God would say is an idol? If so, confess it and remove it. How is your self-control? Do you do things that Jesus wouldn't do? If so, confess them and remove them immediately.

This list of characteristics and traits is not something we can attain quickly or easily. It takes a lifetime to even come close. Even then, none of us will attain all of these. They are a goal to reach because they are all traits we need to become more like Jesus. While they are specifically commanded for leaders, they are a good pattern for all Christians to follow. I hope looking at these has motivated you to become more like Jesus in how you think and act. (August 22, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

Qualities for leadership in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. A godly leader must:

1. Want to be a godly leader
2. Have godly inner qualities
3. Have godly interpersonal relationships
4. Have a good reputation
5. Have a godly spiritual life
6. Have a godly family
7. Have godly personal habits

Do you have these? Which are evident in your life now? Which are you lacking? What do you

need to do to start to improve? Pray about these things and ask God help you have each of them in your life.

BLOG 109: IS IT HARD TO BE A PASTOR?

Is being a pastor hard? Sometimes pastors or church leaders think that if they are following God and doing His will, serving Him should be easy. But it isn't, not if you want to do a good job. Is being a pastor hard? Only if you want to be a good pastor. If you are lazy, prideful, self-centered, or allowing sin in your life, then it can be easy to be a pastor. If you just do what you want and avoid the difficult parts, being a pastor is easy. But if you want to follow God and do what He expects it is not easy at all. Like being a husband or a father. It's not hard unless you want to do a good job. Then it becomes very difficult, even humanly impossible. It can only be done with God's help.

It is difficult to faithfully serve God and not others and to seek to be like Jesus in all you think and do. Being a good pastor, husband or father takes much sacrifice, much humility and much service. We are often misunderstood, rejected, criticized or hurt by others. We are stretched beyond our human capacity.

Being a godly pastor is difficult because our sin nature rebels against holiness, sacrifice and service. It is hard because Satan opposes us and all we do. He tries to discourage and defeat us. It is hard but God uses it to keep our eyes focused on Him and to follow Him. If it wasn't hard, we'd do it in our own strength. This way we need Him to have victory over sin in our own lives and help others to have victory in their lives.

Do you find being a pastor, or husband or father, very hard? It's good if you do. It shows you're trying to do it the way God wants you to. Don't expect it to be easy – it's the most important job on earth. Don't be discouraged if you find it difficult. Is it easy to be a good pastor or church leader? Not if you do it right. (August 29, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

1 Timothy 3:1 Here is a trustworthy saying: Whoever aspires to be an overseer desires a noble task.

Do you find being a godly leader, husband or father difficult? Does that make you want to quit, or do you try harder to depend on Jesus? Take your struggles to Him – He knows all about them.

BLOG 110: WHAT IS YOUR PURPOSE STATEMENT?

It is very popular among many churches today to develop a purpose statement. This is a list of things that we want our church to do. It's good to know what your purpose as a church is. You can't really follow God without what He wants from you. However, there are some dangers to having a purpose statement as well.

The biggest danger is when we think that we can pick or choose what we want our church to be like. Picking a purpose for your church is not like picking a new shirt at the store. We don't choose what our church should be or do. It is Jesus' church and He chooses. We must discover what God wants for us. We must know where He is working and how He is using us. We must look at our spiritual gifts and the spiritual gifts in the church to see where He wants us to function. You must see where God is working and join Him.

Some churches are very good at evangelism and church planting. Others have excellent teaching ministries. Some are strong in prayer, other in worship or helping those in need. The church I pastored was very good at helping Christians who were struggling to be able to grow as a Christian. A church near mine did a lot to support missions. Another had a strong children's

program. Not every church can do everything. We need to seek God to find His purpose for our church and then work on being the best we can be at it.

The danger comes when we think we can choose what we want for our church. Often that has to do with what other churches are doing and what seems successful to us. Usually we think of a large, growing church or ministry and want to be like that. But that's not what God wants for all churches. In fact, it's not what he wants for most churches. We don't know the size of any church in the New Testament because that's important. But we can tell which was a healthy church and which was not. We can see which were fulfilling their God-given purposes and which were struggling. The church in Philippi did a great job supporting and encouraging Paul. The church in Corinth was to be reaching their community but was struggling with sin and division within. The church in Antioch was reaching its community and sending out missionaries. Each had its own specific God-given purpose.

So, spend time seeking God's will and how He is leading you and your church. Your purpose is to fulfill the reason He has you exist, as a person and as a church. We do not tell Him what we want our purpose to be and then expect Him to bring that about. We look to Him for guidance and direction. Then we do our best to fulfill the reason He has us exist. That may change as time goes on and we grow. Always be alert to God's purpose for you and your church. It is His church and He will make it grow. (September 5, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

Matthew 16:18 And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.

What is the purpose God has your church exist? What is its unique contribution to the Body of Christ in your area? What are you doing to fulfill the reason your church exists?

BLOG 111: PEOPLE YOU NEED IN YOUR LIFE

We all know of people that we shouldn't have in our life. They can be a bad influence or a temptation. Are you also aware of the people you should have in your life? Proverbs 13:20 says "Walk with the wise and become wise, for a companion of fools suffers harm."

We can never be the person God wants us to be on our own. God did not create man to live life alone. We need others interacting in our life to help us reach the potential He has for us. Here are some of the types of people we all need in our lives.

Mentors. We all need someone to coach us at different times and in different stages of life. No one person can teach us everything we need to know. We need a godly pastor, Sunday school teacher, mature Christian friend and a favorite author or radio program. Paul had Barnabas and Silas to help him grow and mature. They could look into Paul's life and see where Paul needed help or advice and provide it. Paul did the same for Timothy, Titus and others.

Role models. We need examples of those who are living through circumstances that we are going through. Luke was a great role model for Paul. He was older and more mature and provided examples of what Paul needed to be and do. We can find role models in our church or among our Christian friends. Reading Christian biographies and listening to the testimonies of others also helps us grow in our spiritual lives.

Partners. No one goes through life alone. We need a mate, friend or others that are going through what we are going through as we are going through it and can share with us. We need someone that will understand when we share our burdens. Paul had Silas as a partner to share life with. We all need someone we can be our real, true selves with, someone with whom we can honestly share our joys and sorrows, victories and defeats.

Friends. Partners, role models and mentors can be friends. But others can be friends as well. A friend isn't necessarily someone to give advice or training. They are people who help us enjoy life. They provide companionship and fellowship as we navigate through life day to day. They are someone faithful and loyal who can always be there. Priscilla and Aquilla were friends to Paul. So was Mark. He enjoyed and needed their companionship.

Do you have these people in your life? Are you filling these roles in the lives of others? Look for people you can mentor, be an example for, partner with, or become friends with. We each need those people those people in our lives and we need to fill those roles and others wise. (September 12, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

Proverbs 27:17 As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.

Proverbs 27:6 Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses.

Who have been your mentors, role models, partners and friends through life? Thank God for them.

Who has He put into your life to mentor, be a role model to, partner with or be a friend to? Pray for them and reach out to them in the next day or two.

BLOG 112: EVALUATE YOURSELF

Every once in a while, it's good to take an assessment of where we are in life and where we are going. Often, we do that in January, but our promises and resolutions seldom last very long. We should be evaluating our lives and making adjustments throughout the year. Here are some questions for you to consider today.

1. What are you doing to grow spiritually? We must be intentional about our spiritual growth we can't ignore it and just live our busy life and expect to become a more mature Christian. You are intentional about taking care of your physical health, but what about your spiritual health? What are you doing to grow spiritually?

2. What can you do today to better serve your mate or a close friend? Marriages and relationships take work. They must be a top priority. We know what we want others to do for us, but what can you do today to improve your marriage or other relationships? Where do they need work?

3. How can you be a better steward of your body and your health? God gives us one body which He expects to last for a whole lifetime. We need to care for it. We need proper rest, a healthy diet and good exercise. Our body is the temple the Holy Spirit. Are you a good steward of what God has given you? What can you start doing now to take care of your physical health? Remember, it's the only body you will ever have!

4. What is the biggest single time waster in your life and what can you do about it? We do not have to be productive every minute, in fact we shouldn't be. It's important to live a balanced life, to have times of relaxation and enjoyment. But it's easy to allow something in our life that consumes much more time than it should. God gives us 24 hours in a day and 7 days in a week. Are you using your time as he would have you use it?

5. Who are you building into spiritually? Is there anyone that you are witnessing to or sharing the love of Jesus with? Who are the Christians in your life that you are encouraging and helping to grow? Who are you praying for on a regular basis? God brings many people into our lives. We must be sensitive as to why He put them there and what responsibility we have to them. (September 19, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

1 Corinthians 11:28 But a man must examine himself, and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup.

Psalm 139:23 Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts;

Psalm 26:2 Examine me, O Lord, and try me; Test my mind and my heart.

2 Corinthians 13:5 Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you—unless indeed you fail the test?

What did you learn about yourself in reading this blog? What is God telling you to do (or stop doing)? Make plans as to what you can do starting today.

LESSONS FROM PAUL (4)

BLOG 113: GOD CAN USE ANYONE (Lessons from Paul 1)

Sometimes God has a very strange way of doing things. When He needed someone to do more good for the church than anyone else ever had, He chose the very man who was doing more harm to the church than anyone else. He used the same man who had been bringing death to many Christians to bring life to many unbelievers. The greatest destroyer of the church became the greatest builder of the church.

Paul was zealous for his Jewish faith and went from synagogue to synagogue encouraging the punishment of Jews who had accepted Jesus as the Messiah. He was involved with Stephen's death and approved of it (Acts 7:54-8:1). Then God revealed Himself to Paul on the road to Damascus and his whole life changed (Acts 9:1-9). He went from being someone who was persecuting the church to someone who was willing to be persecuted for the church.

No one who knew Paul before he became a believer would have ever thought God would use him to build the church. Paul proves that no one is outside of God's reach. No one is too bad for Him to save and use. You may have given up on someone because of their evil desire to harm Christians, but God doesn't give up on anyone. You may think that your sinful past disqualifies you from serving Him, but God doesn't think so. God doesn't give up on anyone. In fact, He often chooses those who seem the most disqualified to serve Him because then He gets the glory, not the person. He is the God of second chances. Perhaps He has given you a second chance. Perhaps He has given you a second chance many times over! That's the kind of God He is! His grace really is sufficient (2 Corinthians 12:9).

No one is beyond grace. No one is useless. No one is beyond redemption and service. It's been said that every saint has a past and every sinner has a future. That's very true.

Do not give up on anyone you are witnessing to and praying for. Do not give up on yourself. If God can use a murderer like Paul or David, a coward like Peter (denying the Lord) or Gideon (hiding in a pit) or a sinner like Rahab or Samson He can and He will use you and me – IF we let Him. Are you willing to let Him use you? (September 26, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

Ephesians 2:8-9 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast.

Have you given up talking to or praying for someone who seems too far gone to be used by God? Pray for them now, and keep praying for them.

Do you use your own failures and sins as an excuse to keep from serving the Lord, thinking He can't use you? Confess that attitude as sin and commit to serve Him 100%

Do you know some Christians who have turned from the Lord? Have you given up on them? God hasn't. Ask Him to show you what you can do to win them back to Him.

BLOG 114: GOD LOVES US FOR WHO WE ARE (Lessons from Paul 2)

Most of those Jesus chose to follow Him were blue-collar workers, men and women who worked with their hands. But Paul was totally different. He could work with his hands making tents (Acts 18:1-4) but he was very well educated and trained, a high-ranking Jew who outdid others in keeping the law (Philippians 3:4-9). He was a natural leader. He was gifted, talented and very productive. Yet he doesn't see himself as special or better than others. In his letters he introduces himself as "a servant of Christ Jesus" (Romans 1:1).

Paul knows he still has room for growth (Philippians 3:12). If there was anyone who could boast about what he was before salvation, or what he did for God after salvation, it was Paul. But he never did so. He recognized that all he had was by God's grace (1 Corinthians 15:10). He admitted he still struggled with sin (Romans 7:15). He didn't want to fail in his service for Jesus (1 Corinthians 9:27). He didn't let his achievements make him think he was better than others or special.

Paul is a good example for us today. Too often we define ourselves by what we do, either by our job or our achievements. We evaluate others by what they do. Many feel that pastors and missionaries are the most spiritual, then come other church leaders and workers. Last are those who "just" attend church. That can make us feel proud of ourselves if we are active in church, or like second class citizens if we aren't. But when we make popularity equal to spirituality, we are missing all Jesus said about humbly serving God and others.

Do you think God loves you more when you do something special for Him, or loves you less when you fail or sin? Remember, there is nothing you can do to have God love you any more than He now does. And there is nothing you can do to have Him love you any less than He now does. Our worth is not based on what we do, but on who we are. Who we are is a blood-bought child of God, forgiven and destined for eternity in heaven with God. That's who we are. Nothing we do can add to that or take away from that. (October 3, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

Philippians 3:12 Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.

1 Corinthians 15:10 But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.

Are you guilty of evaluating others by what they do? Do you assign more worth to those who are 'successful' in life or busy in church activity?

Do you define yourself as a person or Christian by the things you do instead of by who you are as a person?

BLOG 115: THE IMPORTANCE OF CONTENTMENT (Lessons from Paul 3)

Imagine going from being well-off, highly respected, a community leader and a very popular leader to being flogged, beaten, stoned and imprisoned? How well would you accept that change in life? That's the adjustment Paul had to make. Being content when one has everything is easy, but it's much harder when one has nothing. Yet Paul had learned to be content in either situation. When he entered a town, he may have been invited to live in a rich person's mansion and share all they had, or instead lived with a very poor man in a hut. Either way he was content because he saw it as

coming from God. Knowing he didn't deserve anything from God made it much easier accept whatever living conditions he was provided.

Notice Paus says he "learned" to be content (Philippians 4:11-13). Contentment must be learned. It doesn't come naturally. Have you ever seen a baby that was content, patient and understanding when its needs weren't immediately met? We are all born self-centered and demanding, thinking only about ourselves and our needs and wants. When does a baby outgrow that? The answer is 'never.' Discontent is something we must fight our whole lives. Contentment must be learned and it isn't easy. It takes an attitude adjustment of trusting God's provision and accepting whatever we have as coming from Him. Paul knew that God would provide all his needs (Philippians 4:19) but not all his wants. Paul knew God would give Paul what was best for him because he knew God gave him the very best (Jesus) when he deserved absolutely nothing but eternal judgment.

When we say we want to live for God and serve Him, trusting He knows what is best for us, we must accept everything as coming from Him. When we want Him to use us for His glory, we give up our right to make demands of Him and expect Him to serve us. In the Lord's Prayer we pray "THY kingdom come; THY will be done" (Matthew 6:10). We don't pray "MY kingdom come; MY will be done." Yet that is often what we really mean inside. It's easy to be discontent when life becomes difficult, especially if we feel God owes us an easy life. Contentment means accepting whatever happens in life as God's perfect plan for us. It means trusting and serving Him when things are really bad just the same as when things are really good.

Enduring pain and trials is hard. Even more difficult is to face it with a good attitude. That's what contentment is all about. It means we accept whatever circumstances we face in life as coming from God, no matter if we like them or not. That's contentment. (October 10, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

Philippians 4:11-13 I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength.

On a scale of 1 to 10, how content would you say you are? What rating would God give you?

When do you have the most trouble being content? Why? What must you do to adjust your attitude?

BLOG 116: LIVE TO PLEASE GOD, NOT MAN (Lessons from Paul 4)

As Christians, we are facing more and more opposition to the Gospel. That can put on a lot of pressure to compromise so we aren't rejected for our faith. It can be hard for us to stand up and declare the truth of God's Word when we know what we say won't be received very well and we won't be popular for saying it. It was hard for Paul as well, but he did it (Galatians 1:10). He never sugar-coated the truth so it would be better received. He never worried about what others might think of him. He was only concerned with what God thought of him, not others. God was the only audience he cared about. He was very serious about the things of God and wasn't influenced by what others thought of him.

I'm sure he would have liked to have everyone think well of him, but he knew that wouldn't happen (Matthew 5:11-12). In fact, he knew that if everyone did agree with him then something was wrong and he wasn't standing up for God's truth (Luke 6:26).

It's tempting today to try to be a Christian but not say or do anything that will offend others because we don't want their criticism or rejection. It's easy to become too dependent on what others think and say about us. Fear of others can be a big problem. We can't fear both God and man, though. It's one or the other.

We can see the lives of many around us who do all they can to be popular and well-liked by everyone. We may even envy them. But would you really change places with them if you could? Would you give up Jesus and all you have from Him just to be popular? How much better it is to have Jesus' approval and smile than that of others around you. If you believe He is the Truth you have a responsibility to share His truth with others. Withholding the solution to their problems would be like a scientist withholding the cure for cancer from others because he thought they may mock him and not believe him. Yet we have something much more valuable and life-changing than even a cure for cancer. We have the answer to all man's needs. Don't keep it to yourself. Don't fear how others may react. Live to please God, not man. (October 17, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

Galatians 1:10 Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ.

Luke 6:26 Woe to you when everyone speaks well of you, for that is how their ancestors treated the false prophets.

Who are you living to please? Whose opinion of you are you most aware of, people's or God's?

When are you most tempted to avoid standing up for the truth of God's Word? Why? Ask God to give you courage when you need it.

BLOG 117: BEING A PASTOR IS HARD WORK

I love pastors. I've been one my whole life and have been involved in training and mentoring pastors for many years. Pastors aren't perfect people, but they do share a commitment to serve Jesus and others. I love their dedication, their hard work and their sacrifice. Pastors struggle with the same sins and difficulties others face. We are all still works in progress. People often see pastors as a step above others, closer to God and more spiritual. They think we have a wonderful life because others look up to us and admire us. But we face all that others face. Sometimes pastors have to deal with extra heartache because of their role with people.

It makes pastors sad to see people not follow Jesus and when Christians turn to sin instead of living for Jesus. It often bothers us more than it bothers them, because we know that not living for Jesus only brings misery.

As pastors, we mourn when marriages struggle and fail. Sometimes we are unable to help and that makes us feel like we have failed them. We see the pain the people go through and how it affects their children and grieve for them.

It is very sad to see young people grow up and make decisions that lead to sin and trouble. We try to tell them how important it is to follow Jesus but they think they know best and follow the world's ways instead. We feel bad for them and often think we should have been able to do more to lead them to follow Jesus.

When people sin and turn from Jesus, we need to carry out church discipline to warn them and others of the seriousness of their choices. If warning and talking with them doesn't change things, we must remove them from church membership. When I have had to do this, I felt like I failed as their pastor.

We think it is our fault if the church we are leading is struggling or not growing. When people leave our church, we blame ourselves. If we aren't bringing unbelievers to Jesus, we think we are doing something wrong or God isn't blessing us.

When people we know and love are sick, we pray for them, but if God doesn't heal them, we can think we let them down. If they die, we speak at their funerals, and our hearts are very heavy with grief. Doing a funeral for a person who isn't a Christian can be very hard because we don't have words of hope for the listeners and because we know they have gone to hell without Jesus.

Sometimes people gossip or complain about us. They criticize us to others. This is often inaccurate and unfair. Still, the talk hurts us and it is difficult to explain the truth. When the talk is about our wives or children it hurts even more.

As pastors, we have high expectations of ourselves so when we make a mistake, forget to do something, have a sermon or teach a lesson that doesn't go as well as we thought it would, we put the blame on ourselves. Even when things are going well and the people are pleased with us, we often think we could be doing better.

Many pastors struggle with loneliness for themselves and their families. It's sometimes hard to be a pastor or his family and have friendships like others have.

Pastors and their families also struggle with not having enough finances to meet their needs. This can be a great burden on pastors. We also feel we don't have enough time for everything that needs to be done and it is hard to not do everything we think needs doing.

In addition, we also struggle with sin in our own lives. We all have areas where we are weak, places where God is working to make us more like Jesus. Many times, we aren't satisfied with our prayer time and Bible study.

These are some of the burdens we carry as pastors. Know you aren't alone and that others struggle, too. Have fellowship with pastors near you so you can encourage and pray for each other. Remember that Jesus understands these things for He went through them Himself (Hebrews 2:17-18; 4:15-16). Share your burdens with Him. Claim His promises for He says He will always be with us (Joshua 1:9), won't give us anything too hard for us without His help (1 Corinthians 10:13) and that His grace is always sufficient for our needs (2 Corinthians 12:9). (October 24, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

Romans 10:15 (Isaiah 52:7) How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!

How do you handle the pain and difficulties of being a pastor?

Do you know any pastors who are struggling? What can you do to help them? Do it as soon as possible.

BLOG 118: CHURCH IN A POST-COVID WORLD

Covid-19 has changed our lives forever. Life will never be exactly the same as it was before it hit. That is true of the church as well. While many people have not returned to church, and might never do so, overall I think the church has been purified and matured by Covid. There may not be as many programs and activities, but the ones we now have are more focused on meeting basic spiritual needs. Perhaps not as many attend, but the ones who do have purer motives and reasons.

Most of the churches that have been strong through Covid are those that focus on preaching and teaching the Bible. Only God's Truth will get us through hard times. People want to hear from God during these changes in life, and pastors who preach the Word are helping them do so. God's

love and sovereignty are being focused on in a bigger way now. People are being assured that God has not abandoned them and that He is working for their good during these times.

In addition to feeding the sheep, faithful churches today are increasing their efforts to reach unbelievers with the gospel. Evangelism efforts seem stronger and more focused today. We are seeing more clearly the need of the gospel and are reminded that it is our only hope.

Churches that are most effective today are staying away from political involvement and arguing. The focus is kept on Jesus and His work as the only solution. They avoid taking sides but agree to disagree and not let differences about politics, vaccinations or other issues facing us causes division. They keep the main thing the main thing.

It's good to see churches working together for the common good, helping and cooperating with each other. Larger churches are helping smaller ministries. Similar size churches in local neighborhoods are coordinating their efforts and supporting each other. There is closer fellowship among pastors and Christians. Competition is replaced with a common need. And this is not just among Christians. Churches are working with other groups in their communities for the common good. This is a great opening for outreach into the community as well.

Small groups in healthy churches today are a large reason for their success. These provide fellowship, teaching and even outreach on a grass roots level. Prayer groups are also developing and providing an important connection with God. Prayer really does change things! (October 31, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

Matthew 16:18 "I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it."

How has Covid impacted your faith? How are you different spiritually than in February 2020? Think about this awhile before answering. Ask a mate or close friend.

How had Covid impacted your church? What good changes do you see happening?

What can you do to help your church grow at this time?

BLOG 119: HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE TO PREPARE A SERMON?

A questions young pastors often ask is "How much time should I spend on sermon preparation?" There is no one answer for everyone. Some pastors spend 25 or more hours a week preparing their sermon. Others need only 8 to 10 hours to develop a message that will edify and feed their people. The longer a person has been preaching and the better they know the Bible, the quicker the preparation will be.

Sermon preparation must always be a top priority and be given enough time to produce a good message. We must never wait until one or two days before preaching to start, nor must we ever use others' sermons instead of developing our own. Preaching is a sacred responsibility and privilege. We are speaking for the King of Kings and our words must be worthy of Him. There is no shortcut. It takes a lot of time to prepare a good sermon. It's well worth the investment. Here are some reasons why we should spend as much time as it takes to prepare our messages:

It shows respect for the people who listen. Time is valuable, and we don't want to waste the time of those who listen to us by giving them anything but our best. Every minute we have of their attention is valuable and potentially life-changing. When you add up all the minutes spent listening by all the people who come, it amounts to a large amount of time. We must be good stewards with others' time.

It shows respect for God's Word. We have the privilege of passing on the very words of God Himself and must make sure everything we say is true and accurate. It takes time studying to

make sure of this. As ambassadors of the King, we represent God and have the privilege of declaring His truth just as He said it. We can't add to it (Revelation 22:18). We can't leave out anything He says (Revelation 22:19). We have a sacred task and must take it very seriously. God says because we have the responsibility to learn and teach Scripture, we "will be judged more strictly" for how we handle and apply it (James 3:1).

It shows respect for the Holy Spirit. God's Spirit leads us as we study and prepare messages. He honors our time and effort by helping us understand His Word and how to apply it to our lives as well as to those whom we speak. We need to rely on God's Spirit to guide and direct us as we preach, but we also need to do that as we prepare. And that takes quality time studying, listening and preparing. It can't be rushed. To limit the time we give the Spirit to speak to us as we prepare is to limit what God will say to us and through us.

Much of what we do with our time will not count for eternity, but time spent studying God's Word and preparing sermons and lessons will impact our lives and our listeners forever. Bible knowledge is something we will take with us to heaven and use for all eternity. Our short time on earth is when we learn and teach His Word, so let's do our very best. Preaching is an awesome privilege but also a great responsibility. (November 7, 2022 Doylestown, Pa)

2 Timothy 2:15 Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.

Do you do your best to correctly handle the truth of the Bible in your messages?

Do you see studying and communicating God's Word as one of your greatest privileges and responsibilities?

Does God say, "Well done, Good and faithful servant," when He hears you preach and teach?

BLOG 120: WHY SO FEW GOOD BIBLE FATHERS?

Becoming a Dad is a simple but being a good Dad is difficult. Why are there so few good fathers mentioned in the Bible? The answer is simple. Because there aren't many good dads around. Fathers are human. They have a sin nature. They are far from perfect. Abraham had 2 sons from different women, and there was conflict in the household. Isaac had twins, Jacob and Esau. He played favorites with them (Genesis 26-27). Jacob had a large family which was full of deceit, rape, murder, regret, anger, adultery and mistrust (Genesis 30-31). David was a great king but a poor father. His family was dominated by death, murder, incest, rape, adultery, and rebellion (1 Samuel 13). David was a neglectful, permissive, absent father. Unfortunately, the list could go on.

Fortunately, there are some good fathers mentioned in the Bible. Job was involved with his children socially and prayed for their spiritual lives (Job 1:4-5). His heart broke when they suffered. He loved and cared for them in a hands-on way. The father of the Prodigal Son was loving and forgiving. Even after all the misery, selfishness, worry, and grief that the Prodigal Son caused had caused his father, he still responded with forgiveness, acceptance, and rejoicing (Luke 15:11-27). A man I greatly admire is Joseph, the earthly father of Jesus. He was a great father. Otherwise, God would have chosen someone else to raise His Son!

Joseph cared for Mary and protected baby Jesus when Herod called for the slaughter of all young boys. As Jesus was growing and maturing, Joseph saw to Jesus' education and to his spiritual, emotional, mental, and physical needs. Joseph taught Jesus the carpentry trade. The Bible calls Joseph a righteous man. Joseph was a father of quiet strength, honesty, and kindness (Matthew 1). Jesus and Joseph were very, very close.

We, like Joseph, need to build a solid spiritual foundation in the lives of our children starting from when they are born (2 Timothy 3:15). We must teach them Bible stories, verses and songs. These should become an important part of their life. We must pray for them and with them daily. We must set an example of Jesus in their life by how we treat them and their mother. We must raise our children “In the nurture and admonition of the Lord and on his precepts” (Ephesians 6:4). In other words, we need to take the time to read and study the Bible on our own and with our children. We have a great opportunity to influence them for Jesus starting when they are young. Nothing is more important. Make sure you spend time doing this.

Teach your children about God’s love and show it to them by loving them unconditionally, no matter what. Show that love by words, tender touches and cuddles, acts of service, appropriate gifts and spending lots of time with them. Learn their love language and how to speak it to them.

Freely share encouragement to help them grow. Be their cheerleader, not their critic. Comfort them when they need comfort. Show respect by how you treat them and their feelings. Keep them safe and protect them physically, emotionally and spiritually. Learn to understand your children, and your wife, so you can anticipate and meet their needs. Don’t be so busy with other things you ignore them.

Maybe you never had a father to do that for you in your own life. It can be harder to do something you’ve never seen done. Think of God as your Heavenly Father and treat your children as He treats you. The Parable of the Prodigal Son should be called the Parable of the Loving Father because that’s really what it teaches. God is our loving Father and we show our children what He is like by how we treat them. We are the sovereign authority in control of their life when young. The example we set is how they will see God when they grow up. They grow up quickly, so don’t put it off. (November 14, 2022 Doylestown, Pa)

Ephesians 6:4 Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

What are your children learning about God from how you treat them? Do they see you as too busy for them, impatient with them, critical of them or bothered by them? Or do they see you as someone who unconditionally loves, respects and helps them?

BLOG 121: SATAN’S GAME PLAN

It’s much easier to defeat an opponent if you know their game plan. That’s true in sports, business and warfare. Those following Jesus find themselves in a war with an enemy who is trying to destroy them. Unfortunately, many Christians live in sin and defeat, but they don’t have to. God has revealed Satan’s game plan to alert us. He also gives us His power to have victory. Let’s make sure we understand what that game plan is.

1 John 2:16 reveals weapons Satan uses to attack and defeat us: “the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life.” This is the same 3-pronged attack Satan used on Eve (Genesis 3:1-7) and Jesus (Matthew 4:1-11). He uses it on us today as well.

1. Cause a craving for physical gratification. People today are preoccupied with sex, drugs, alcohol, food or anything that brings physical pleasure. Eve was tempted to eat fruit which “was good for food” (Genesis 3:3b). Jesus was tempted with bread after fasting for 40 days (Matthew 4:3-4). God gives us good things to please us, but when we go outside God’s intended purpose for these things, they become sin. *What temptations for food, drink, sex, etc. are most effective against you?*

2. Cause a desire to accumulate money & possessions. Satan tempted Eve by showing her what was “pleasing to the eye” (Genesis 3:6c). He showed Jesus the kingdoms of the world and told Him

He could have them all (Matthew 4:8-10). He still flashes the newest, biggest, flashiest possessions the world has to offer before us. He wants us to think we have to have them; we can't be happy until they are ours. But they are like drinking salt water. They don't bring satisfaction, just a desire for more. *What 'things' most tempt you? What do you feel you must have to be happy?*

3. Causse boastful pride, focusing on themselves. The final weapon of Satan's used against Eve and Jesus, and us, is focus on status and significance. Satan tempted Eve by promising knowledge that would make her like God (Genesis 3:4-5). He tempted Jesus to avoid the cross by jumping off the highest point of the temple and having angels save Him in front of all the watching people so they see how great he was (Matthew 4:5-7). Satan tempts us to elevate ourselves over others as well. We want to be noticed and recognized, seen as successful and important and have others impressed with us. We don't want to yield, submit, serve, apologize or humble ourselves. That's all pride. *Where is your biggest battle with pride? Under what circumstances do you most often give in? What must you do to have victory?*

It's not a question of "if" Satan will tempt you, but "when" and "how." It will happen. Knowing his game plan for defeating you gives you an advantage in being able to block his attacks. (November 21, Doylestown, PA)

1 John 2:14-15 I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one. Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them.

Take a moment to write down the temptations to which you are most vulnerable. Under each write what you need to do to block the attack.

BLOG 122: DISCOURAGEMENT: TOOL OF SATAN

One of Satan's greatest tools against Christian leaders is discouragement. Each one must face it from time to time. Ministry can be very difficult and we often don't see the results we would like. People let us down. Satan knows just what will discourage us and he uses it against us as he did with Elijah (2 Kings 19). He did the same with Timothy, who tried to lead a church that didn't want to follow. Some people opposed and challenged Timothy and he was unable to bring them under control. That led to discouragement.

Discouragement can also come when we are physically or emotionally tired. When we are drained, we don't have the energy or resources to stay strong. It's important to get enough healthy food, rest, exercise and relaxation to stay strong and fight off discouragement. That was part of God's cure for Elijah's discouragement (1 Kings 19:5-8).

Pressure can also cause discouragement. When we feel we have more to do than we have time, ability or resources to do it, we may want to quit trying and give in. But remember, Jesus says it is His church and He will build it (Matthew 16:18). We are just to faithfully do our best, the rest is up to Him.

Another cause of discouragement is when we struggle with a sin that seems to defeat us. Timothy was often controlled by fear. When our focus is on ourself and our failures, we will be discouraged. When we allow sin in our lives, we block God's Spirit from filling us with the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23).

Be alert to when you are feeling discouraged. Discouragement doesn't come from God; it is a tool of Satan to defeat and destroy us. Remember, God doesn't look at what we produce, He looks at our faithfulness in following Him. The results are up to Him, not us. We are only responsible to

faithfully serve Him. We can't take credit when there is a great response to our ministry, nor can we take the blame when there is little or no response. That is up to God.

The best way to have victory over discouragement is to remember and rely on God's promises. He says He will always be with us (Joshua 1:1-9), never leave us (Hebrews 13:5), not give us more than we can handle with His help (1 Corinthians 10:13), His grace is always sufficient for whatever we are going through (2 Corinthians 12:9) and He will use whatever happens for our growth and His glory (Romans 8:28). (November 28, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

1 Corinthians 4:2 "Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful."

1 Samuel 17:47 *And that all this assembly may know that the Lord saves not with sword and spear. For the battle is the Lord's, and he will give you into our hand.*

When are you most apt to struggle against discouragement? What must you do to prevent or overcome it?

What promises in the Bible mean the most to you when you are discouraged?

Do you know anyone who is discouraged? Stop and pray for them right now. Reach out to them today with God's truth to encourage them.

BLOG 123: TIMOTHY: A TEACHABLE SPIRIT

It's been my privilege to mentor several men who were becoming pastors. They were a joy to train because they were very teachable. They were open and willing to learn. They didn't mind correction and learned from it. If they would have thought they knew all they needed to know and that what they did was always right, I would not have been able to build anything into them. Their pride would have kept them from being open to learning and growing. How sad.

Timothy was a joy for Paul to train because he was open and willing to learn new things. A close bond developed between them, a father-son love and respect (2 Timothy 2:1-2). First and Second Timothy are full of Paul's advice to Timothy. He corrected him where necessary, taught new things where needed and encouraged him in all he did. When you read these books, you can see how open Timothy must have been to learn and grow. If he wasn't, he wouldn't have been useful to Paul or God.

The Bible says that people who are unteachable are fools (Proverbs 26:12; 11:14). Unteachable people don't realize they are this way, they just think they are always right (Proverbs 16:12). They see correction or suggestions as personal criticism and are offended (Proverbs 12:1). Their insecurity and fear of being rejected make them unable to consider they may be wrong. It is their pride that won't allow them to think there may be a better or different way. People with this attitude may pretend to listen, but they have already rejected what is said. They stick with their way, even when it fails.

We all know people who feel they are always right and have to have everything their way. It is bad for them and those around them. It is terrible when God's leaders are like this. God tries to reach them and help them mature, but they don't take advice from others as coming from God. They aren't open to new things God is trying to show them through others. Thus, they even block themselves off from God.

If you honestly admit that sometimes you are not very teachable, then humble yourself before God. Pray and ask Him to forgive your pride. Yield to Him and accept His correction and teaching. Ask Him what you can learn from others who try to give you godly advice and suggestions. (December 5, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

Proverbs 26:12 *Do you see a man [who is unteachable and] wise in his own eyes and full of self-conceit?*

There is more hope for a fool than for him.

Proverbs 12:15 *tells us, "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but he who heeds counsel is wise."*

Proverbs 11:14 *Where there is no counsel, the people fall; But in the multitude of counsellors there is safety.*

What is your first response when you are criticized?

How do you react when someone tries to show you a better way of doing something?

How do you react when you are wrong?

Would your wife or children say you are not open to correction and new suggestions? Would God?

BLOG 124: TIMOTHY: STICKING IN THE TOUGH TIMES

Paul is recognized as the leader of the early church. We all know of his commitment and steadfastness despite much opposition and persecution. He pointed out sin wherever it was, even in Peter's life (Galatians 2:11-14). For him to admire Timothy for his commitment is a great complement, especially coming from Paul. He seems to have more confidence in Timothy than in any of the others who worked with him (1 Timothy 6:11-13).

Paul encouraged Timothy through rough times when leaders in the church in Ephesus were criticizing him and mocking his leadership. Timothy encouraged Paul through his long and difficult times in prison. They both served the church and each other in an unselfish manner. Too often today ministries revolve around the personality of the leader. When a church is built on and around one person, that is not good. Jesus is the only head of the church and shouldn't share His glory with anyone!

Timothy spent his whole life and ministry working behind the scenes. He was not interested in building Timothy's kingdom, just Jesus' kingdom. He invested his life in others and never regretted it. He wasn't interested in advancement, just in serving where needed. (December 12, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

2 Timothy 4:1-2 *In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction.*

Who do you know who is faithfully committed to serving Jesus like Timothy did? What can you learn from their life?

When others look at you, do they see the same kind of service, humility and Jesus-centered commitment as we see in Timothy?

BLOG 125: ENCOURAGEMENT FOR STRUGGLING PASTORS

Is there someone in your church who criticizes what you? Does someone say your sermons aren't good enough? Is somebody making it hard for you to minister? Does it make you wonder if you should be a pastor and sometimes feel about quitting? Welcome to the ministry.

Timothy isn't the only one who struggled as a young pastor, or even later in life. We all do. I faced some of the same difficulties Timothy did: fear of what people thought and said, dislike of

confrontation, being a victim of gossip and criticism and opposition from strong-willed Christians who thought they knew God's will better than I did. More than one person wanted me to leave the church, even quit the ministry. I struggled with some of those for my whole ministry. I didn't clearly see it at the time, but in hindsight I realize God was allowing it to cause me to face my weaknesses and grow in my faith. It was part of His plan to bring me closer to Him and help me become more like Jesus. I could have let it destroy my ministry and end my usefulness for God or I could have pushed on despite it and continued to do my best. Satan was trying to discourage me and make me ineffective, and sometimes it almost worked.

God never promised ministering would be easy or that he would silence all opposition (Matthew 10:16). He allows it for our growth (Psalm 119:71). Remember, God does not want us to get our affirmation from the people we lead but only from Him (Galatians 1:10). If we try to please others we won't be pleasing God, it's one or the other (Galatians 1:10). The way to succeed in this is to stay close to God in prayer (Luke 18:1). The only approval we want is His: ***"Well done, good and faithful servant"*** (Matthew 25:21, 23). If pastoring was easy and fun, everyone would want to be a pastor.

Jeremiah is a good example of this. He was called by God to minister. God told Jeremiah: ***"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations"*** (Jeremiah 1:5). Jeremiah responded that he was too young and didn't know how to do what God wanted (Jeremiah 1:6). God reassured Jeremiah He would be with him, but that he would be criticized and rejected because the people would not follow God (Jeremiah 1:14-16). He was told from the start that his ministry would be a failure in the eyes of the world. God then warned him to not fear people for He would be with Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1:17-19). His message was to be one of coming judgment and they would fight against him. Clearly this was not a popularity contest because Jeremiah would be rejected and hated by all.

Jeremiah was God's willing servant. He was serving the Lord; the Lord wasn't serving him. When we agree to minister for God, we are saying we will do whatever He wants no matter how hard or difficult it is. We can't look at the response of the people or how successful we think we are. We are just to stay faithful as Jeremiah did. He served for 40 years but had only 2 converts (Jeremiah 32:12; 36:1-4; 45:1-5; 38:7-13; 39:15-18). Isaiah ministered longer and had less converts (Isaiah 6). The people Jeremiah and Isaiah spoke to never did repent, in fact they martyred both Jeremiah and Isaiah. Yet in God's eyes both were faithful prophets. Remember them when you think you have it hard. Get your eyes off yourself and how hard you have it and keep your eyes on Jesus. After all, He was rejected, too, and if the world rejected Him, they will reject those who follow Him as well (John 13:16).

What Jeremiah did have was God's promise: ***"They will fight against you but will not overcome you, for I am with you and will rescue you," declares the Lord*** (Jeremiah 1:19). We have God's promises as well to rely on. God promises to meet our needs (Philippians 4:19) and give us His peace (Philippians 4:6-7). He promises to give us strength to do whatever He wants us to do (Philippians 4:13; Isaiah 40:31). He will never leave us or forsake us (Deuteronomy 31:5-6; Hebrews 13:5). He will guide you (Proverbs 3:5-6). His grace is sufficient for whatever you face (2 Corinthians 12:9). He won't give us more than we can handle with His help (1 Corinthians 10:13) and He will use all that happens for our growth and His glory (Romans 8:28). Therefore, we don't have to fear anyone or anything (Psalm 118:6; Hebrews 13:6).

Don't expect the ministry to be easy, not if you are following God 100% and serving Him alone. Don't let it bother you when others despise you (1 Timothy 4:12). Never give in to fear (2 Timothy 1:7) but be strong in God's grace (2 Timothy 2:1). (December 19, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

"I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves" (Matthew 10:16).

“It is good that I was afflicted,” the psalmist said. “That I might learn thy ways” (Ps. 119:71).

What is the hardest part of ministry for you?

How is God using that to help you grow more like Jesus?

What promises does He give that you need to rely on during those times?

BLOG 126: TITUS: IT’S NOT ALL ABOUT ME

Titus isn’t nearly as well-known as Timothy. He assisted Paul like Timothy did. He also worked behind the scenes. But he wasn’t Paul’s number one trouble shooter. He as wasn’t highly recommended and complemented by Paul. He didn’t have Paul’s love and father-son relationship like Timothy did. He only received one short letter, most of which Paul already wrote to Timothy. His gifts and skills aren’t recorded for us. He was just an average person doing his best to serve God any way he could.

We should be able to identify with him. Most of us will never be well known. We don’t have special skills or gifts given us by God. We won’t pastor large churches or do outstanding things that are recorded and remembered. After we are gone only a few people will remember us, and when they are gone that memory will also end. It may be hard for us to identify with Paul, sometimes even Timothy, but Titus is someone we all can look to as an example. He faithfully served God for his whole life.

How could he do that when there wasn’t earthly recognition or reward? What did he get for his life’s labor? He did it for God, out of love and devotion to Jesus. It wasn’t all about Titus, it was all about Jesus. His reward came when he went to heaven, and he is now enjoying it for all eternity. We are rewarded and blessed for all eternity because of our faithfulness, not because of what we produce (1 Corinthians 3:10-15). The world looks at the quantity of what we do but God looks at the quality of our heart in doing it (1 Corinthians 4:5). We tend to think that bigger is better so see those who have large ministries or who do great things as more successful in God’s sight. But God doesn’t look at things that way (Psalm 147:10; 44:21; 1 Kings 8:39; 1 Chronicles 28:9). He does not evaluate by outer appearances like we do (1 Samuel 16:7; Isaiah 55:8).

If we want to please Him, we must serve Him for His sake and not for what we get out of it. Our motive can only be love for Him. The church in Ephesus was doing many good, impressive works for God (Revelation 2:2-3, 6). But they weren’t doing it out of love for Jesus (Revelation 2:4). If they continued in that way God said He would end their ministry (Revelation 2:5) and that is what happened. Don’t let that happen to you and your ministry! (December 26, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

1 Corinthians 4:5 Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God.

1 Samuel 16:7 The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.”

What would Jesus say about what you are doing for Him? Is it really for Him, or do you have a lot of yourself in your service?

Ask God to show you any wrong motives or selfish desires you have in your service for Him (Psalm 139:23-24 “Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”).

BLOG 127: LESSONS FROM THE LIFE OF TIMOTHY

Timothy had his struggles with fear and discouragement, but he stayed faithful to the end. There are many lessons we can learn from in Timothy's life.

1. He had a servant's heart (Acts 19:22). He was willing to serve instead of being served. Church leaders today know they are to be servants, but some expect the people in their church to serve them instead. *How would you rate yourself as a servant? How would your wife and children rate you? How does God rate you? What can you do to become a servant like Jesus?* Ask Jesus every day to help you be a servant like Him.

2. He was available (Acts 20:4). When Paul needed Timothy to come help him, he did. When he needed someone to go take care of a problem in one of the churches, he went. He was available to go where needed and do whatever helped Paul and the church. He wasn't trying to advance himself or grow a bigger church. He was available to serve in whatever way he was needed. God can use a man like that in a great way! *Are you available for God to use you, or do you have your own ideas about what you want to accomplish? Do you ask God to show you what He wants you to do or do you tell Him what you want Him to do so you can achieve your goals?*

3. He was teachable (2 Timothy 3:10-11). He wanted to learn all he could from Paul. He was open to correction when needed. He didn't think he knew it all or was always right. *How do you respond when someone corrects you? How do you react when you are wrong? How willing are you to learn from others?*

4. He genuinely cared for others (Philippians 2:19-20). When Paul sent Timothy to the church at Philippi he said about Timothy: "I have no one else like him, who takes a genuine interest in your welfare" (Philippians 1:19-20). "Genuine" means he was sincere and sensitive. He really cared about others. *Do you really care about the people God has given you to influence, or do you get impatient and annoyed with them? Do you think about what they should do for you, or what you can do for them?* Timothy really cared about people, even the ones who were critical of him.

5. He was faithful (1 Corinthians 4:17) Timothy had a reputation for being faithful in all he did, and Paul recognized that in him. Timothy didn't just know the truth of God's Word, he put it into practice in his own life. *Do you always practice what you preach? Are there areas in your life where you know improvement must be made? Do you preach and teach things your listeners should do or not do, but don't carry them out in your own life?*

6. He trained others (2 Timothy 2:2; 1 Thessalonians 3:2). Timothy patterned his life after Paul, and he trained others to pattern their lives after his. He passed on what he knew and disciplined others. He mentored church leaders. *Who are you mentoring? Whose life are you building in to so they follow Jesus as you also follow Him?*

7. He learned to overcome his fear (2 Timothy 1:7; Philippians 4:6-7, 13) Timothy struggled with fear of people, fear of criticism and rejection, fear of failure and probably other fears as well. Paul encouraged him to face his fears instead of running from them and he did. He learned to gain victory over them. *What are your greatest fears in life? How do they impact your ministry? What are you doing to get victory over them?* Here are some promises to help you overcome fear: Proverbs 3:25; Isaiah 14:3; Psalm 34:4; Joshua 1:9; 10:8; 23:9-11; Leviticus 26:8; Exodus 14:13; 1 Samuel 17:45-47; 2 Samuel 22:33-35, 40-41; Philippians 4:6-7; 4:13; 2 Timothy 1:7; Proverbs 3:25; Isaiah 14:3; Psalm 34:4; Joshua 1:9; 10:8; 23:9-11; Leviticus 26:8; Exodus 14:13.

Timothy spent his whole ministry traveling from one problem situation to another. He represented Paul and faithfully served as Paul would have. There was nothing outstanding or dramatic about his service, as there was with Paul. But what he did was very necessary. What God

has you doing is just as necessary. Serve as faithfully as Timothy did. (January 2, 2022 Doylestown, PA)

BLOG 128: WHEN A PASTOR HAS DOUBTS

Pastors are no different than anyone else. We face the same struggles and doubts, the same challenges and concerns. In fact, we often face more for we deal with evil and the results of sin every day. We are Satan's main target, for if he can defeat a pastor, his whole family and church are negatively affected.

Sometimes even church leaders are tempted to wonder if God really cares, or if He exists at all. Is He really good and loving? Is He in control of the world and our lives or not? What makes these thoughts especially challenging for those in ministry is that we feel guilty and ashamed when our faith wavers. We don't want anyone to know, so we don't share our concerns with others. Don't be surprised if you have times you wonder about these things. Abraham, David, Habakkuk, Jeremiah and even Paul had times of questions and uncertainty. I have had them myself, and you probably have as well.

The Christian life is one of faith. "We walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Corinthians 5:7). God doesn't provide supernatural, overwhelming proof that forces us to believe. There is enough proof to trust in Him, but also there is room for those who choose to disbelieve to do so. That's what free will is all about. Working through doubts is a natural, normal part of spiritual growth.

When you struggle with your faith, don't feel guilty, but be honest with God about it. He knows anyway. Your prayer should be, "Lord I believe, help my unbelief" (Mark 9:24). Go to God with your questions. Share your struggle with mature, godly friends. You will probably find they have gone through some of the same struggles.

Look at the lives of those around you who have faithfully served God for years. They aren't misled, deluded fools. They have faced life's blackest moments and strongest challenges and have come through with their faith intact. You will find them to be intelligent, sincere, Bible-believing and God-trusting people whose faith you can anchor onto. If they believe, and their lives show the fruit of a life lived for God, then there must be some substance to their faith. When you can't trust your own feelings, trust theirs and lean on their insight and understanding until your own gets strong again. Compare their lives with the lives of those who don't believe and live in hopelessness and decide who you want to be like.

Perhaps you have worked through some of these waves of doubt that arise. Don't hesitate to share your down times and what you have learned with others who may be struggling. You can become someone else's anchor. Be alert to those struggling with doubts and share your experiences with them.

Remember, you don't have to know all the answers about God or what He is going. It's all right to not know and to admit it. Just because you don't know the answers doesn't mean there aren't answers. Instead of turning from God at those times, turn to God seeking His peace. We might not always get answers, but we can have His grace so we can live with the unanswered concerns and continue to trust in Him. Our trust is based on what He has done in the past and what He promises to do in the present and future. It isn't based on our understanding everything about Him or the way He works. It doesn't mean we have all our answers. But it does mean there are answers and He is faithful, even if our questions aren't answered.

Think of all the good in your life, the blessings and joys. If there were no God working in your life, what would you be like? What kind of a person would you be? Would there be peace and

meaning? When I look at myself and my life, I know I wouldn't be who I am just by my own efforts or some chance force in the universe. I know that Someone who cares for me and looks out for me must be working, even if I don't understand all about Him or about circumstances I am in.

Don't feel something is wrong with you if you struggle with doubts. Trust what God has already done in your life and in the lives of others. Search for answers. Ask God to make Himself real to you. Reach out for help. Email me and I'll gladly talk with you.

To help with the most common doubts, I have an article that answers the questions "Does God exist," "Is the Bible true?" and "Is Jesus really God?" I'll gladly share them with you if you write and ask for a copy. Or you can find them at <https://www.christiantrainingonline.org/our-ministries/india/articles/> I have also written a book, "Know Why You Believe," at <https://www.christiantrainingonline.org/our-ministries/india/books/> or by emailing me. It covers many areas of our faith where doubts and confusion arise. If you have any questions, I would be glad to answer them. Just write me at Jerry@Schmoyer.net. (January 9, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

2 Corinthians 5:7 "We walk by faith, not by sight."

Not everyone struggles with questions and doubts. If you don't, thank God for that and ask Him to put someone needing help in your path.

If you do struggle with doubts, what do you usually do to overcome them? What should you do next time they arise?

Are there doubts that are distracting and defeating you at the present time? What can you do to work through them?

BLOG 129: DIFFICULTIES FACED BY PASTOR'S WIVES

One of the most difficult positions in the church is that of the pastor's wife. It is a wonderful privilege and great opportunity to be a pastor's wife, but it is not easy. They face the same hardships and problems their pastor husbands face, but often have extra burdens placed on them. They don't always receive the same praise and encouragement as their husbands. They often have to do that which no one else in the church wants to do. Worse of all, they see others hurting and taking advantage of their husband and can't do anything to stop it.

Being a pastor's wife can be quite lonely because they have a hard time having friends like others in the church do. Their special role makes it difficult to just be themselves. Others expect more from them, not realizing they struggle like all other people. They are supposed to be able to always do everything right as a wife, mother, Christian and friend. Like other Christians, they fear failing as a wife or mother. In addition, they are afraid of failing as the wife of a church leader. They receive no training and often don't even have a godly example to follow, so they often don't really know what is expected of them.

Some people think the pastor's wife should be at every activity the church has. They feel she should always be available to do anything that is needed. Her privacy and her time are often not respected by the people in the church. Her husband doesn't always protect her and her time. Too few pastors take a day a week off to spend with their wife and family. Pastors can be called any time of the day or night, often during special family events. It is the wives who suffer when their husbands don't put them and their families before their church responsibilities, as the Bible commands (1 Timothy 3:4-5; 1 Peter 3:7).

People expect the pastor's wife to have a perfect Christian marriage and family. They watch her children and expect more of them than other children. It is often assumed she will always be available to do the work no one else wants to do. She is expected to have wisdom in all situations

and be able to give answers and advice whenever anyone needs it. When there are disagreements or problems with the pastor, often people will blame her or withdraw their friendship from her.

Yes, being a pastor or church leader's wife can be very difficult. But it is also a great blessing and wonderful privilege, for she gets to support and encourage the pastor. She is the recipient of love and blessings from the church. People pray for her and her family. God will greatly bless her in this life and reward her for her faithfulness for all eternity. Serving God brings her great reward in this life and the next. (January 16, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

1 Timothy 3:11 In the same way, the women (wives of leaders) are to be worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything.

If you are a church leader's wife, thank God for the privilege and honor. Ask Him to help you and your family in all you do.

If you know a church leader's wife, encourage and support her. Offer her help with her housework and children. Pray for her.

For more details about the future see my book, "Duties of Pastors," Chapter 7, "Duties of Pastor's Wives," at <https://www.christiantrainingonline.org/our-ministries/india/books/> or email me at Jerry@Schmoyer.net and I'll send a PDF copy. If you have any questions, I would be glad to answer them.

BLOG 130: HOW TO RUIN A GOOD SERMON

I love to preach and teach God's Word. Developing a message based on Scripture and communicating it to others is a great privilege and joy. I've done a lot of studying about what makes a good sermon. I've also learned what makes a bad sermon, one that doesn't convey God's truth as it could have or should have. I'd like to share some things to NOT do when preparing and presenting a message.

One of the easiest ways to ruin a sermon is to focus on yourself instead of Jesus. Talk about yourself, build up the good you have done, use yourself as a godly example and don't say much about Jesus and you will destroy what could have been a good message.

Jesus must be the hero of your sermon, the one who gets the glory, the one people remember after the sermon is over. The whole Bible focuses on Jesus, and our messages must as well. Only Jesus changes lives, not me or you. Leave yourself out of the message and focus only and totally on Jesus (2 Timothy 2:8).

Another way to ruin a good message is to tell stories but not relate them to Scripture. Stories that illustrate or explain Scripture are wonderful, but ones told just to entertain people or brag about yourself do not help people grow. Focus on the Word of God, not on stories or tales to make your message interesting. Our purpose is to teach the Word (2 Timothy 4:1-2), not entertain. We want our listeners impressed with the greatness of God, not with our speaking ability.

When a speaker preaches his opinion instead of God's truth, people are not being fed. My opinion does not matter, neither does yours. Only God's opinion is worth sharing, so make sure you thoroughly study His Word and proclaim it and nothing else (2 Timothy 2:15). You'll destroy a good lesson if it focuses on what you think instead of what God says.

Always give hope and encouragement, not guilt and condemnation (Romans 8:1). If you don't, your message will fall short no matter how good it may be. When you speak to people, remember they are hurting. They have come for hope, assurance God cares, encouragement to keep moving

on and strength to remain faithful. People are thirsty for God's love and care, and if we don't give it to them, they will leave empty and weak.

A final danger to mention here is when we leave out the gospel. Every sermon and Bible study must include the plan of salvation so anyone who hasn't come to Jesus can do so (1 Corinthians 2:2). Speak to the believers who are listening, but have something for unbelievers as well.

It is a great responsibility to speak for God and proclaim His truths to others. His Word is true and pure and its communication must be true and pure as well. Keep the focus on Jesus and the Word. The simple truth of the Bible is what people need. We don't need to add to it, fancy it up or do anything to make it more interesting. God's Holy Spirit will apply it to the hearts that are open. Like a quarterback throwing a good pass, we do our best to accurately communicate God's Word. We say the words, then it's up to God to apply and use them as He chooses. Don't do anything to mess up His message. (January 23, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

2 Timothy 4:1-2 In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction.”

Is your preaching based solely on the Word of God, or do you mix in your opinions and ideas from time to time?

Are you tempted to preach in such a way that people are impressed with you?

Do you include the gospel for unbelievers every time you speak?

Do those who listen to you peak who have pain, discouragement and difficulties leave with new hope and assurance from God's Word?

BLOG 134: PAUL'S DYING WORDS (2 Timothy – 1)

READ: 2 Timothy 1:1-5

The final words of a person are important because they reflect what means the most to the person. In 2 Timothy we have Paul's final words to the person closest to him on earth, his 'son' Timothy. Knowing this would be his last opportunity to give advice to Timothy, he made every word count. Paul was back in prison in Rome, 5 years after he had been released. He knew there would be no release this time. The date was approximately 64 AD. Paul took this final opportunity to encourage Timothy to remain faithful.

In addressing Timothy, Paul identified himself as an "apostle" (2 Timothy 1:1) – someone sent by God to minister for Him. God chose him and he followed. Paul always saw himself as a servant of God by God's grace, even at the end of his life. He was nothing, Jesus was everything.

He calls Timothy his "dear son," showing their close relationship. It must have been very hard for Paul to write to Timothy for the last time. Timothy was still in Ephesus. He followed Paul's commands and stayed, even though it was very hard for him. Receiving this letter must have been both encouraging for Timothy yet very sad knowing his end was near. Tradition says he did make it to Rome to see Paul shortly before Paul was martyred, but it must have been very dangerous for him to be associated with Paul.

Timothy was mentored by Paul, and Paul was encouraged by Timothy. Despite facing death in prison, Paul gives thanks to God for Timothy (2 Timothy 1:3). He assured Timothy he was faithfully praying for him. Do you have younger men you are mentoring and training to serve God?

Do you daily pray for them, including ones you trained in the past? Paul did. Thank God for those who are praying for you.

As he approached death, Paul could look back on his service to God with a clear conscience. Even though he had persecuted Christians, he knew he was forgiven and did his best to faithfully serve. What a joy it must be to come to the end of life having a clear conscience. Too many who claim to be church leaders get into sin and ruin their reputation and ministry. Live now so that your conscience will be clear.

Timothy's faithful life was an encouragement to Paul as he remembered Timothy's love for him (verse 4) and lifelong faithful service (verse 5). These things were foremost in Paul's mind when he wrote to Timothy for the last time.

When you come to the end of your life, who will you look to for encouragement? Whose faithful life will bring joy to you? Are you training and building into others now, as Paul did with Timothy? Or are you too busy with other things? (January 30, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

PAUL'S ADVICE: Find encouragement in the faithful lives of those you have helped grow as Christians.

Colossians 1:3-5 We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, 4 because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints — 5 the faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven and that you have already heard about in the word of truth,

Ephesians 1:10 15 For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, 16 I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.

Thank God for those who have helped you in your Christian growth.

Pray for the ones you have helped grow spiritually.

BLOG 135: PASTORS NEED ZEAL & COURAGE (2 Timothy – 2)

READ: 2 Timothy 1:6-12

In 2 Timothy, Paul is sending his final letter to a man he has loved and trained for many years. As he looks back on his life, Paul realizes there are certain qualities that are essential for those who serve God. He begins his letter reminding Timothy of the importance of zeal, courage and faithfulness.

ZEAL: Paul has seen numerous men who were on fire for God but over time faded and turned from the faith. That still happens today. It could happen to anyone. In 2 Timothy 1:6 Paul encouraged Timothy to **“fan into flame the gift of God.”** He told him to keep using the unique set of spiritual gifts God gave him (1 Peter 4:10). After years of battling the world, the flesh and Satan, a person can become weary and discouraged. Cowardice and fear are tools of Satan's we are to guard against. 2 Timothy 1:7 **“For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and of love and of self-discipline”** is a good verse to memorize and quote when facing fear. Timothy lacked confidence in himself (1 Corinthians 6:10-11; 1 Timothy 4:12) and needed to depend on God's power, love and self-control. So must we. This verse has helped me through my struggles with fear, and it can help you as well.

COURAGE: This is the first of 3 exhortations Paul gave Timothy (1:8-12; 1:13-14; 2:1). His command is **“do not be ashamed”** (2 Timothy 1:8). Timothy was criticized by unbelievers for his

faithfulness to Jesus and by false teachers for his faithfulness to Paul. Jesus said **“Woe to you when all men speak well of you”** (Luke 6:26). Following Jesus, and Paul, often means persecution and opposition. Paul stated that **“All who live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution”** (2 Timothy 3:12). Paul reminded Timothy that anything he achieved in ministry was not his own doing but God’s, he could not take credit for it himself (verse 9). That is a sobering and humbling thought for us as well. All we have comes from His unconditional love and grace. God chooses those who will come to Him for salvation, and out of them He chooses some to minister for Him. It is a great privilege and honor to be chosen. Charles Spurgeon once said, “If God has called you to be His servant, don’t stoop to be a king.” Serving the King of Kings is the greatest privilege one can have.

The older I get the more clearly I see the wonderful honor God has given me by choosing me to serve Him. My own unworthiness and failures become more visible yet His all-sufficient strength and grace overcomes them all. This should encourage us to have courage to stand despite the difficulties and opposition. It should embolden us and give us courage to press on no matter what we face.

In 2 Timothy 1:12 Paul shared his own testimony, despite facing death for his faith: **“Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day.”** This is true of us as well. We must keep our eyes on Jesus and trust He is able to sustain us as long as he wants us alive. That is where our courage comes from.

If you are a pastor or leader, you have to keep your zeal and courage because you will face opposition from unbelievers and believers alike. It didn’t stop Jesus, nor did it stop Paul or Timothy. Don’t ever let it stop you. (February 6, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

PAUL’S ADVICE: Don’t let your zeal and courage for ministry fade.

1 Peter 4:10 Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.

2 Timothy 1:7 For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.

How is your zeal? Has it grown cold over the years, or is it as fresh and strong as when you first came to the Lord?

What brings the most fear into your life? What can you do to have God’s courage to face those things?

BLOG 136: WE NEED FAITHFULNESS (2 Timothy – 3)

READ: 2 Timothy 1:13-18

Paul started off his final correspondence to his son Timothy reminding him of the importance of keeping his zeal and courage for ministry. He adds a third necessary quality next: faithfulness. First, he exhorts Timothy to have courage (2 Timothy 1:8-12) and now he exhorts him to faithfully guard the gospel (2 Timothy 1:13-18). **“Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you—guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us”** (2 Timothy 1:14).

“Guard” is a banking term. Much money was given to the goddess Artemis in Ephesus where Timothy ministered, and it was carefully guarded to keep it safe. That’s the picture Paul uses to remind Timothy of what he is to go with the good news of the Gospel of Jesus, which is even more precious than any amount of money.

Unfortunately, not everyone who once spread the truth continued to do so. Because of opposition and dangers, many had deserted their service to God and Paul, and Paul is alone, abandoned by others (verse 15). That's why it's so important for God's servants to stay faithful.

Many deserted Paul and the gospel, but a few could still be depended on by Paul and by God (verses 16-18). Onesiphorus was such a one. He had stayed faithful to the message and to Paul. How valuable a trustworthy friend is, a fellow laborer for Jesus who can be counted on no matter what! You need men like that in your life. And you need to be that kind of man to others around you. (February 13, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

PAUL'S ADVICE: Stay faithful to God and those who serve Him.

Proverbs 18:24 A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.

Romans 12:10 Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.

Who are those you can count on no matter what, who will support and help you whatever happens? Thank God for them.

Who in the ministry can count on your support when going through difficulties?

Is anyone you know facing hard times? Reach out to them today to encourage and support them.

BLOG 137: BE STRONG IN JESUS (2 Timothy – 4)

READ: 2 Timothy 2:1

Having reminded Timothy of some important qualities he needed (zeal, courage and faithfulness), Paul began a list of 11 duties Timothy must carry out to be a godly pastor and leader. The first duty is the third exhortation Paul gave Timothy: be strong. **“You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus”** (2 Timothy 2:1).

“Be strong” is a command, a must for all pastors. The Greek tense in which it is written says it is something we receive, not something we must provide ourselves. Strength doesn't come from within us, it is something God gives us when we trust Him. This command is in the present tense which means that we must always be letting God's strength work in us. I am naturally fearful and weak. I have always needed God's strength to stand for Him, correct those in error, keep going when criticized or travel to difficult locations. I have been involved in spiritual ministry for 40 years and I need God's strength to minister to people in bondage to demons. I have learned, along with Paul, that the weaker I am the more clearly God's power can be seen working through me (2 Corinthians 12:9-11).

Paul doesn't just say we are to be strong. And He doesn't say we are to be strong in power, words, actions or abilities. He says we are to **“be strong in grace.”** Grace is the source of our strength. As we grow spiritually, we become more aware of our need for grace and God's provision of it. When we walk in submission to His Spirit and follow His will, His grace (undeserved favor) fills us with all the wisdom, strength and guidance we need to do what He wants.

Growing in this is a life-long process. Pastors and leaders still need to keep growing. Some think that they have arrived at spiritual maturity because they are leaders, but that isn't true. Pastors are not exempt from the trials and temptations others face in life. In fact, often we face more because we serve Him. God uses the difficulties and problems of pastoring to cause us to trust Him more and lean on His grace more completely. God did not remove challenges and hardships I faced in ministry;

He has allowed them so I learn to trust Him more fully. He wants all of us, like Paul, to learn that **“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness”** (2 Corinthians 12:9).

God doesn't need us to do His work. He could get along very well without us. But we need Him 100% to accomplish what He wants. He allows us the privilege of having a front row seat as we watch Him work through us. It is His strength working in us that produces His results. What He wants from us is our submission and service, done out of love. He wants to have a personal, intimate relationship with us, not just a working relationship where we do things for Him. He wants us to spend time connecting to Him and loving Him and experiencing His love.

We grow in His grace by spending time in His Word, listening to Him talk to us and talking to Him, worshiping Him, meditating on Him and His truth and by living for Him. Are you doing that? Are you growing in Him as His grace grows in you? (February 20, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

PAUL'S ADVICE: Allow God to work in you and through you by His grace so you can minister in His strength, not your own.

2 Corinthians 12:7-10 7 To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. 8 Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. 9 But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. 10 That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Are you becoming more aware that all the good that happens in your life and ministry comes from God?

Spend some time thanking Him for all He does in you and through you, giving Him the credit for it all.

BLOG 138: SPREAD GOD'S TRUTH (2 Timothy – 5)

READ: 2 Timothy 2:2

I owe all I am and have to God's grace working in my life (see previous blog on 2 Timothy 2:1). One of the ways He did this was by bringing Godly men into my life to train and mentor me. They passed their knowledge and experience on to me and now I am passing it on to others. In the future they will share these truths with the next generation of pastors. It's like passing a baton from one runner to the next in a relay race. Each generation of pastors teaches those who will take over and replace them. Mentoring and training younger pastors is a duty God commands of all of us. Paul commanded it of Timothy as well: **“And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others”** (2 Timothy 2:2).

Notice Paul said Timothy is to pass what he has learned to “reliable” men. These are men who are faithful to learn and serve. God has chosen us because He sees us as trustworthy men. In my early years I was not always reliable, and I continue to fail many times even now. But He is merciful to forgive and restore me.

We are to “teach” these reliable men, as others have taught us. Paul taught Timothy who passed it on to “reliable men” who in turn trained “others.” This kept going for 2,000 years until it was passed to us. Now we must train younger men who can carry on His work. This is an important responsibility for all who are in Christian service. Jesus is our example. He trained the disciples so they could carry on the work when He left.

Many years ago, God gave me a strong desire to mentor younger pastors. It is not always easy, but it has been a joy and blessing to encourage and help these men. God has patiently taught me much about serving Him and His church. It's a privilege and an obligation to pass that knowledge on to others. Transmitting His truth is a serious but fulfilling responsibility.

The best way to do this is to follow Jesus' example. He spent time with the disciples, took them with Him in His daily ministry, trained them and gave them opportunities to use their newly-developed skills in service. Paul did the same with Timothy, Titus and others. He patiently passed on truth, encouraged, corrected when necessary and prayed for them regularly. We must do the same. (February 27, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

PAUL'S ADVICE: Pass on Bible truth and ministry skills to the next generation of pastors so they can continue the work when we are no longer able.

Ephesians 4:11-12 It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service

2 Timothy 2:1-2 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 men who will also be qualified to teach others.

Who has mentored you in your life? What did you learn from them? Thank them and thank God for them.

Who are you currently mentoring?

Who do you know that would benefit from your encouragement and training?

BLOG 139: ENDURE DIFFICULTIES (2 Timothy – 6)

READ: 2 Timothy 2:3-7

In this, his final letter to Timothy, Paul passed on important advice to help Timothy better carry out his ministry. He told him he needs to have zeal, courage and faithfulness (2 Timothy 1:6-18). Paul then started reminding him of some very important duties a pastor has. He said Timothy must let God strengthen him with His grace (2 Timothy 2:1) and he must pass on what he knows about pastoring to others who can benefit (2 Timothy 2:2). Now he is giving a third duty: endure the difficulties he faces (2 Timothy 2:3-7). He commanded Timothy to “**endure hardship**” and gave three examples to illustrate this.

First, he used soldiers as an example: “**Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No one serving as a soldier gets involved in civilian affairs — he wants to please his commanding officer**” (2 Timothy 2:3-4). When I was in the US Army I went where they sent me and did what they assigned me to do. I had to always be ready to serve. I didn't do what I wanted but what I was commanded to do. The same is true in ministering for Jesus. We are to serve Him first and foremost. A soldier must have right priorities, and serving God always comes first.

Next, Paul used an athlete as an illustration: “**Similarly, if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not receive the victor's crown unless he competes according to the rules**” (2 Timothy 2:5). An athlete must obey the rules if he wants to be victorious. Greek athletes had to prepare ahead of time for their contests. It took hard work and self-discipline. Nothing else could come first. The rules of competition had to be strictly followed if one was to win the prize. For us to receive God's reward for faithful service we, too, must exercise self-control in all things. We must serve as

He directs in His Word. We must lead His way and let nothing come before it. Only then will we receive the prize of God's approval for a job well done.

The final analogy Paul used is that of a farmer: **"The hardworking farmer should be the first to receive a share of the crops"** (2 Timothy 2:6). Farming is hard work. It isn't glamorous but is necessary so people can eat. It takes patience and perseverance. Results are not seen right away. All this is true of pastoring, too. It takes hard work and patience to lead God's people. We don't always see immediate results of our service, but in time we will.

Paul encourages Timothy to think about and meditate on these analogies as he applies them to his life because God will use them to help him learn (2 Timothy 2:7). There is much we can learn from them as well. Ask God to help you learn from them. (March 6, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

PAUL'S ADVICE: Endure hardship by serving God first in life (as a soldier), do things God's way (as an athlete) and work hard but be patient (as a farmer).

1 Timothy 6:12 Fight the good fight of the faith.

Which analogy speaks most to you: a soldier, athlete or farmer? Why?

What is God teaching you through this passage?

BLOG 140: JESUS OUR EXAMPLE OF ENDURANCE (2 Timothy – 7)

READ: 2 Timothy 2:8-13

In 2 Timothy 2, Paul has been reminding Timothy of his duty to endure hardships in his service for Jesus. He used the example of a soldier, athlete and farmer to illustrate hard work, self-control and perseverance (2 Timothy 2:8-13). He then gave two more illustrations of enduring hardship in God's service – himself (verses 9-10) and Jesus (verses 8, 11-13).

Paul uses himself in prison as an example of persevering for the sake of other believers (2 Timothy 2:9-10). He was an example of faithfulness despite persecution. He didn't just tell Timothy to "endure hardship" (verse 3), he did it himself (verses 9-10). As pastors, we preach that God can be trusted to keep His promises no matter what we face. There are times we need to apply that to our own lives and "practice what we preach." We are not immune from trials because we are pastors, in fact sometimes we have more than others. God allows them so we can learn from experience He is faithful so He can be glorified by our lives as we trust Him through hardship and pain.

The greatest illustration of enduring hardship is Jesus Himself (verses 8, 11-13). He is our greatest example of suffering for a good purpose. He was God ("Christ," "raised from the dead") and man ("Jesus," "descended from David"). Paul then quoted a common saying, perhaps even sung as a hymn, about us following Jesus' example of staying faithful no matter what (verses 11-13).

This early Christian poem starts off assuring us that since we died with Jesus in salvation, we will be with him for all eternity (verse 11). In addition to eternal life, we will be rewarded in eternity for our faithful endurance (verse 12a). We are assured of eternal life because we died with Jesus, but in addition we will also be rewarded if we stand firm against opposition or temptation. However, if we don't stay faithful then we won't be rewarded (verse 12b). We will still go to heaven when we die, salvation is not the issue. But special reward in heaven is at stake.

This poem is all about enduring hardship like Jesus did. Salvation cannot be lost, Paul made this clear many times (Romans 8:1, 28-30; Ephesians 1:4, 11-12; 2:8-9), so has Jesus (John 5:41; 6:37-40; 10:28-30), John (1 John 5:13; 3:15-16), Peter (1 Peter 1:4-5) and Jude (Jude 24-25). Our salvation isn't dependent on our faithfulness or endurance, but future reward is. The last stanza in this song reinforces that to make sure no one thinks it is referring to salvation. Even if we don't

always live by faith, God won't disown us (verse 13). We are His and He cannot disown Himself (2 Timothy 2:13).

Paul reminded Timothy of his duty to endure difficulties no matter what. He used himself and Jesus as examples. I'm sure you can think of others who have set a good example of faithfully serving Jesus during difficult times. Do you set that same example for others that are watching you? (March 13, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

PAUL'S ADVICE: Faithfully endure as Jesus did. If you do, you will be rewarded for all eternity.

1 Peter 4:2 *They do not live the rest of their earthly lives for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God.*

What difficulties are you facing right now? Are you faithfully trusting God to do what He knows is best?

BLOG 141: OPPOSE FALSE TEACHINGS (2 Timothy – 8)

READ: 2 Timothy 2:14, 16-19

Sometimes pastors get so busy doing all that needs to be done to lead a church that they stop doing the most important things. It can be easy to major on minors and neglect that which God sees as top priorities. To make sure that doesn't happen to Timothy, Paul wrote to him just before he died reminding him of his duty to God and others. One of Timothy's more important duties was to remind people to avoid quarreling about fine points of doctrine (2 Timothy 2:14, 16-19). That's an important duty for us today as well because too many Christians get in big arguments over little things.

Timothy's duty is to "keep reminding" them to keep from unbiblical teachings (verses 14, 16). We do that in our preaching, teaching and in personal conversations. He, and we, need to keep going over the basic truths of the faith and apply them to life. False teachers and Satan promote lies so we need to keep the truth first and foremost. "Quarreling about words" is wrong because 1) we aren't to quarrel, just have mature discussions and 2) there are many more important things to do with our time and energy than focus on minor, hair-splitting controversies. Doing that often brings division among believers and harms the testimony of Jesus. Pride enters when people want to be right and will do anything to 'win.'

Similarly, Paul tells Timothy to "avoid godless chatter" (verse 16). "Godless" is talk which doesn't glorify Him with the truth but instead is false and in error. "Chatter" describes empty, foolish talk which doesn't edify or build others up. It is fruitless discussion of things which aren't supported by Scripture. These false teachings distract people from important issues and cause divisions and arguments. They are not just senseless, like "How many angels can sit on the point of a needle?" They are poisonous and destructive, like gangrene (verse 17). They bring sickness and decay into the Body of Christ.

The example Paul used was the false teaching that the resurrection had already come (verse 18). Some today still say there is no real physical resurrection, it is just 'spiritual,' something that happens at salvation. You can imagine the confusion and loss of hope that would bring! It must have caused problems throughout the church in Ephesus. It was up to Timothy then, and us today, to correct false teachings as soon as they appear.

Still, God is in sovereign control. Paul reminded them of this by quoting the Old Testament: "The Lord knows those who are His" (2 Timothy 2:19; Numbers 16:5, 26). Those who are His people must turn from these false teachings and teachers (2 Timothy 2:19; Isaiah 52:11; Joel 3:5).

It's one thing when someone comes to your church and denies the truth of the Bible and the deity of Jesus. It is clear and obvious that they are wrong and must be opposed. It is more difficult if it is someone who claims to be a Christian following the Bible. Then the people respect and trust them and they gain a foothold in the church and start talking to people about things that aren't supported by the Bible. People can be deceived, like Adam and Eve. Some people look for something new to believe, perhaps an easier way to live the Christian life. They may fear they are missing something and the false teacher knows something they don't. It can be very difficult to challenge and correct people like these. I have faced this several times in my years as a pastor. It ended with people hurt and confused, and some leaving the church and even the faith. It almost always brought conflict and hard feelings. It is sad when it happens, but it is our duty to oppose false teachings no matter how hard or painful. They are like gangrene. The poison will spread and cause more destruction if we let it go on. Keep teaching your people the truth of God's Word. Make sure your sermons teach and explain Bible passages, and not just the same ones over and over. Cover the whole Bible and all its teachings. Pray for wisdom and courage, then stand for the truth. (March 20, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

PAUL'S ADVICE: Stand against any teaching that is not clearly supported by Scripture.

1 Timothy 6:3-5 If anyone teaches otherwise and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching, they are conceited and understand nothing. They have an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions and constant friction between people of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain.

Have you had to stand against anyone who brought false teachings into your church? What happened?

Are you tempted to compromise and avoid conflict when someone starts leading people astray? Ask for courage to stand for the truth.

BLOG 142: SEEK GOD'S APPROVAL (2 Timothy – 9)

READ: 2 Timothy 2:15

Good parents expect their children to do their best. They know the strengths and weaknesses of each child, their abilities and limits. If the child is trying his hardest then a good parent is satisfied. The same is true of our heavenly Father with His children. He knows our capabilities and difficulties. He doesn't compare us to others. He doesn't expect us to be perfect, He "knows we are dust" (Psalm 104:13), but He doesn't want us to be careless about sin, either. The parable of the talents teaches that God doesn't compare us with others but to use the gifts and resources He gives us the best we can (Matthew 25:14-30).

Paul expects the same from Timothy, as seen in 2 Timothy 2:15. **"Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth."** God is the only One whose approval we want and need. We aren't trying to please or impress others, although that is often a temptation for pastors. It's natural to want people to like us and think well of us. But we can't compromise the truth for popularity. In fact, if we are faithfully serving Jesus there always will be some who oppose us. Jesus Himself was not liked by many people. He warns us in Luke 6:26: **"Woe to you when everyone speaks well of you."** He also said in Matthew 5:11: **"Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me."** Being a pastor is not a popularity contest. God is the only one whose opinion we are to care about.

The example Paul gives is of someone working for someone else. He wants to please the one he is working for and do a job he is pleased with. If their work is not acceptable, the worker will be embarrassed of the work done. It doesn't matter if everyone else thinks he has done a great job, if the one employing them doesn't think so he will be ashamed. I want to hear God say **"Well done, good and faithful servant!"** (Matthew 25:23) and I'm sure you do as well. That means we must seek to please Him in all we do, if others agree or not.

The second illustration Paul uses is of a tentmaker who must cut his material correctly so the seams match perfectly. "Correctly handles" means "to cut a straight line." The word is also used of a builder laying blocks in a straight row and of a road maker constructing a straight road. It can also refer to a farmer plowing a straight furrow in his field. Paul is applying this same truth to a pastor who accurately and truthfully handles God's Word. We can't take shortcuts in our study and sermon preparation. Everything must be done thoroughly and carefully. We can't be in a hurry or look for shortcuts, for God will not approve our ministry if we are not true to His Word in all we do or say.

"The Word of truth" is our tool. All workmen have tools. Doctors, farmers, soldiers, all have tools of their trade. The Bible is the tool a pastor uses to change lives and bring glory to God. The better we know our tool the better we will be able to pastor for Him.

The Bible is called "the sword of the Spirit" (Ephesians 6:17). This refers to a sharp, double-edged sword, which is a very effective weapon in the hands of a skilled swordsman. But if a person doesn't know how to use it, he can cut himself. Pastors need to become skillful in the knowledge and use of the Bible. It is our only offensive weapon, our only means of victory. God expects us to be proficient in its use. If we are, we will receive His approval and won't have to be ashamed. Are you skilled with your Bible? Does He approve of your knowledge and use of His word? (March 27, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

PAUL'S ADVICE: Know and use God's Word accurately to receive His approval of your ministry, for only His approval matters.

Matthew 25:22-23 "The man with two bags of gold also came. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with two bags of gold; see, I have gained two more.' 'His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'

Are you growing in your knowledge and use of God's Word?

Are you living and ministering according to the Bible?

BLOG 143: PASTORS MUST BE PURE (2 Timothy – 10)

READ: 2 Timothy 2:20-26

Paul uses many analogies to help us understand the Christian life and ministry. In 2 Timothy he uses the example of a soldier (2:3-4), athlete (2:5), farmer (2:6), worker (2:15), vessel (2:20-21) and servant (2:24-26). Elsewhere he equates living for Jesus to being a steward (1 Corinthians 4:1-2) or ambassador (2 Corinthians 5:20). Peter says we are living stones (1 Peter 2:5), priests (1 Peter 2:5, 9-10) and strangers (1 Peter 2:11). Jesus Himself called us fishermen (Matthew 4:19), salt (Matthew 5:13), light (Matthew 5:14-16) and branches (John 15:5).

When Paul reminds Timothy of his sixth duty, being pure, he starts by comparing people to dishes and containers of wood or clay (2 Timothy 2:20-21). Some are clean and useful for many purposes; others have become polluted and unclean so are no longer useful. The same is true of the

Christians in Ephesus. We must be ready and useful for service, having kept ourselves clean inside and out. We must be available for whenever needed.

Then Paul gets specific about what can cause uncleanness and what must be avoided. He lists evil desires (verse 22), foolish and stupid talk (verse 23), quarreling (verse 24) and not being open to instruction (verses 25-26).

“Flee the evil desires of youth” (2 Timothy 2:22). Those who are young are often more susceptible to sexual sins and other sins like arguing, pride, opposing the established ways and thinking they know best. Instead, righteousness, faith, love and peace should be pursued.

“Don’t have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments” (2 Timothy 2:23). Avoid false teachings and false teachers. Not only are they wrong, but they cause arguments among believers. Those today who promote legalism (no grace, only works) or liberalism (no works, only grace) are to be corrected.

“The Lord’s servant must not quarrel” (2 Timothy 2:24). Stay away from false teachings and you’ll stay away from a lot of arguing. Instead, Paul says we are to be kind to everyone by showing grace and being gentle and loving. We are to always be ready to communicate God’s truth to others (1 Peter 3:15) and we are to not be resentful. We are to forgive those we have quarreled with.

“Opponents must be gently instructed” (2 Timothy 2:25-26) so they see the error of their wrong beliefs and turn to the truth. Those deluded by false teachings are trapped by Satan and need to escape his influence.

As pastors today, these words of Paul to Timothy apply to us as well. We need to be clean vessels so God can use us for whatever assignment or responsibility He wants to give us. That means we must avoid false teaching and only follow His Word. We must stop any lies from spreading in our church and reach out to those who are misled and lead them into the truth. Wrong teachings include teachings that claim God will give us everything we ask for, that we should never be sick or struggle with difficulties, that He will do whatever miracles we want to make our life easier and that tone down the seriousness of sin and disobedience. Know His Word and seek His guidance in all things. (April 3, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

PAUL’S ADVICE: Live a pure, holy life by turning from sin and opposing all false teaching.

Matthew 5:8 Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Psalms 51:10 Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.

Where is your greatest struggle with purity?

What must you do to have victory?

BLOG 144: BAD TIMES ARE COMING (2 Timothy – 11)

READ: 2 Timothy 3:1-9

Each generation thinks the world is getting worse. We think that today. Paul thought that as well. He not only thought it, he gave proof of it. The further we move into the last days, the greater is the growth of evil in the world. In his final letter (2 Timothy), Paul reminded Timothy of his duties as a pastor. He was to grow stronger in his faith (2:1), transmit truth (2:2), endure difficulties (2:3-13), oppose false teachings (2:14,16-19), seek only God’s approval (2:15), be pure (2:20-26) and now to be alert to the growing opposition from the world (3:1-9). Paul, who was in prison for his faith, knew times were bad but will get worse. We must know what is coming and know what to do about it.

“There will be terrible times in the last days” (2 Timothy 3:1-9). “The last days” refers to the final days before Jesus’ return, and no one knows when that will be. Therefore, Paul felt these days had already begun and Timothy was living in them. He explains what they will be like.

2 Timothy 3:2-5 **People will be lovers of themselves** (self-centered, narcissistic), **lovers of money** (greedy), **boastful** (bring attention to themselves), **proud** (continual arrogance), **abusive** (treat others cruelly, without respect), **disobedient to their parents** (rebellious, disrespectful), **ungrateful** (entitlement attitude, no appreciation for anything), **unholy** (nothing good, righteous, moral), **without love** (heartless, callous, hateful, hard, don’t care about anyone but themselves), **unforgiving** (from same root word as ‘devil,’ devilish actions like Satan who never forgives but is vengeful), **slanderous** (cruel, hurtful, untrue words to put others down), **without self-control** (gone wild, no self-restraint, do what they want when they want it), **brutal** (untamed, literally ‘uncivilized,’ cruel, animalistic), **not lovers of the good** (therefore hate what is good and love what is evil, destructive, hurtful), **treacherous** (betray those they should be loyal to), **rash** (reckless in thoughts and actions), **conceited** (literally ‘puffed up’ with own importance), **lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God** (hedonistic, no morals, devoted to making self feel good, own pleasure the only god they serve) — **having a form of godliness but denying its power** (hypocrites, pretend to be religious, aren’t even honest about what they are really like) and **always learning but never able to come to a knowledge of the truth** (they are believing lies, they do not see the Bible as God’s final, absolute authority for us today).

Have nothing to do with such people. This strong command by Paul sums up what Timothy’s reaction to them must be. He warns that they use good-sounding talk to slip into the lives of those who are vulnerable and gullible. They gain their trust and slowly but surely lead them into sin (verse 6). Jannes and Jambres, the two servants of Satan who opposed Moses in Pharaoh’s court, are prime examples of people like this who are depraved and under God’s judgment (verse 8).

These opponents of Moses back then, like the opponents of truth in Timothy’s day, knew God was greater than their demonic power but still didn’t repent (verse 9). One day everyone will see their sin for what it really is. This is what it will be like in the last days, and as we get closer to the return of Jesus we see more and more of these things. Hypocrisy, sin, self-centeredness, pride and all the rest are becoming more and more common around us. Follow Paul’s command to Timothy and have nothing to do with them.

Sometimes it is hard to tell who is a false teacher and who is honestly trying to find just what God’s Word means. You can tell the two apart by looking for their motive. What kind of reputation do they have? What is their attitude to pastors and to God’s Word? Do they use anger, power, fear or control to get their own way? Are they open to learn new things? Will they listen attentively to your Biblical explanations? That will help you decide. God’s Spirit within you will give you guidance and wisdom. (April 10, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

PAUL’S ADVICE: Stay away from prideful., self-centered, hateful people who oppose the things of God and try to lead others in the same way.

Who do you know that fits this description? (Remember, they often appear to be religious but really aren’t.)

Are you careful to protect yourself and your church from them?

BLOG 145: BE FAITHFUL IN PERSECUTION (2 Timothy – 12)

READ: 2 Timothy 3:10-13

Paul warned Timothy about those who will turn further and further from God as the return of Jesus draws near (2 Timothy 3:1-9). These people tear down and try to discredit the true servants of God so people will listen to them instead. The ones in Ephesus have been criticizing Paul. Since they can't discredit truth, they try to discredit the truth bearer. People who can't disprove your teachings about Jesus will attack you personally instead. They will find things they don't like about you or your personality and complain about them so others won't respect what you say. It happens to everyone who serves Jesus. It happened to Jesus, and to Paul as well (2 Timothy 3:10-13).

Paul reminded Timothy of the persecution he endured so Timothy wouldn't be surprised when he faced it. We can think opposition and difficulties are our fault, because we are doing something wrong. More often, though, they are because we are doing things right, just the way God wants. His enemies (the world, the flesh and Satan) rise in opposition to God and any who represent Him. This ties in with the third duty Paul reminded Timothy of, to endure difficulties (2 Timothy 2:3-13). Paul taught Timothy about these things by his words and well as his actions, setting an example of applying what he taught to his own life.

The sad truth is that much of the opposition and criticism Paul faced, and which we do as well, comes from within the church, not without. That was true of the early church, and is still true today. Yet God is still faithful to carry out His mission through us. It doesn't mean there won't be pain, rejection, hard times and loss, but God will be with us to help us endure them all (2 Timothy 3:10-11).

One of the reasons God allowed Paul to face so much was to be an example to Timothy and others, and to us today as well. Who are you a good example to? Who is watching you that you don't know about? God allows it and uses it for our growth and His glory.

Then Paul makes a striking statement, actually a promise although it isn't one we claim very often. **"Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted"** (2 Timothy 3:13). If you don't want to be opposed and persecuted, then stop living for Jesus and Satan will stop putting pressure on you. Don't be surprised or disappointed when facing hardships in life and ministry. "Everyone" includes you and me. Clearly the prosperity gospel is not supported by the Bible.

The second part of the promise in verse 12 states that evildoers and imposters will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. The truth will win, but we may not see it happen in our lifetime. When Jesus returns everything will be made perfect, but not until then. Don't be surprised when those who oppose God and His people seem to prosper while those who serve God struggle. That's the way it's always been and always will be. (April 17, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

PAUL'S ADVICE: Don't be surprised when the ministry is very hard, just stay faithful.

Matthew 5:11-12 "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

What is your first response when things don't go as you want or when people oppose you?

How did Jesus respond to rejection and opposition? That's how we must as well.

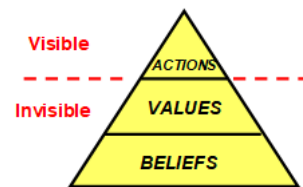
BLOG 146: PRACTICE WHAT YOU PREACH (2 Timothy – 13)

READ: 2 Timothy 3:14-17

In his final correspondence with his beloved son, Timothy, Paul gave advice that was true in his day as well as today. He encouraged Timothy to stay faithful (1:1-5) then listed three important

qualities of those who would serve God: zeal, courage and faithfulness (1:6-18). Next, he made a series of duties Timothy was to carry out, commands for all pastors and leaders (2:1-4:8). Having said most of what he wants to say, Paul now speaks directly to Timothy (3:14-4:5). Paul orders him to “continue in what you have learned” (2 Timothy 3:14).

Knowing the Bible doesn’t do any good unless we put it into practice in our lives. Timothy must faithfully persevere in the truth and not be distracted by those who oppose and criticize him or by those who teach falsehoods. God’s Word is our only absolute, the only protector from error, the only way to know truth. Our actions are determined by our values, and our values are built on our beliefs. Timothy believes God’s Word; thus, his values are the same as God’s values. That is seen in his actions. People’s actions show what they believe. How they treat people reveals their beliefs about the value of others. Timothy first learned these things as a child (verse 15) and Paul is reminding him they are still true.



It is very important to teach God’s Word to young children. Simple stories and games have their place, but children need to learn the truths of God as revealed in His Word. Too often pastors think children aren’t important and ignore them while focusing on ministering to adults. Children have their whole lives ahead of them to serve and are very important. I illustrate this by showing people two pencils. One is full size, the other half worn down and only half size. I ask them which pencil they would choose of the two and they always choose the larger one. When I ask why they say it is because it will last longer and more can be done with it. The large pencil pictures children who have their whole lives ahead of them. The short pencil pictures adults who have already lived much of their lives. When we invest in children we are making a long-term investment into the far future. Timothy was taught the Bible as a young child: “from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures” (2 Timothy 3:15). It alone can “make you wise for salvation” (verse 15).

To show the importance of Scripture in the life of a Christian, Paul writes one of the most-used verses about the Bible: **“All (every single word) Scripture is God-breathed (inspired, 100% true and accurate) and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work”** (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

“Teaching” refers to instruction in truth, conveying knowledge so people know what is right. **“Rebuking”** is necessary where the truth is replaced with lies, it focuses on revising what is not right. **“Correcting”** means restoring a person from error, showing what is wrong and what is right. **“Training in righteousness”** is literally “child-training,” teaching how to live in all areas of life, how to apply to life what God’s Word teaches.

The purpose of teaching and applying God’s Word, is **“so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work”** (2 Timothy 3:17). The Bible prepares and arms us to serve and live for Him. Knowing and following God’s Word is the only way to be a ‘man of God.’ What better desire can we have in life? What higher reputation can we ever have than being known as a “man of God.” That’s how I’d like to be remembered. What about you? (April 24, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

PAUL’S ADVICE: God’s Word contains His truth for us today. We must learn and follow it in all we say and do.

Who comes to mind when you think of a ‘man of God’?

Do the members of your family think of you as a ‘man of God’? What about the people in your church?

BLOG 147: PREACH THE WORD (2 Timothy – 14)

READ: 2 Timothy 4:1-2

The seminary where I studied has as its motto Paul's words to Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:2, "Preach the Word." It was written on the front wall of our chapel and placed where we would see it many times a day. Because of that it is engraved in my mind and heart. It summarizes our responsibility to God and others. It is God's privilege for us and His command to us. It is Paul's culminating assignment to Timothy, the duty to which all others have built.

In this final teaching session, 2 Timothy 4:1-5, Paul gives Timothy 11 commands, one after another, all built on preaching the word. Paul shows the seriousness of what he is about to say in how he introduces it. **"In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus** (we are accountable to Him, He watches all we do) **who will judge the living and the dead** (reward for faithful service), **and in view of His appearing and His kingdom** (Jesus could return at any time so always be ready), **I give you this charge** (Paul is using his Apostolic authority to give Timothy this responsibility, this goes far beyond their father-son relationship)" (2 Timothy 4:1-2). Timothy is to get and keep the church in Ephesus ready for the return of King Jesus. We are to do this as well.

Then comes the glorious command: **"Preach the Word."** "Preach" means to make a public proclamation of something, like an ambassador who is sent by the king to proclaim his message with authority. He is to relay the king's words loud and clear, as are we. It was a great honor and privilege to be chosen to represent the king. There is nothing better we can do with our lives than to spend them representing King Jesus. In fact, if God puts it in your heart to serve Him and you don't, there will be no real joy or peace in your life (1 Corinthians 9:16).

We publicly proclaim God's truth by preaching and teaching. We also do it when talking to individuals in counseling or in our daily conversation. We especially do it by our life as others watch how we live and act.

What Paul says we are to preach is "the Word." The ambassador doesn't give his own message, only what the king directs. He passes on the king's words. He doesn't add to them, change them or take from them. He makes them as clear and understandable as possible. He isn't to draw attention to himself or impress people, just accurately communicate the king's message. That's a great description of what we as pastors are to do as well. We don't pass on our personal opinions, tell fancy stories, take political sides or say things to entertain our listeners and be more popular. The content of our message is God's Word. That means we teach and explain a Bible passage, verse by verse, word by word, making sure our listeners understand what it was saying to the people it was originally written to. Then we apply it to their daily lives and circumstances.

We aren't to "preach *from* the Word" by taking a passage and then going off in a different direction, making it say what we want it to mean. Nor do we "preach *about* the Word" by giving our personal opinion of what it means. We must read and explain it's very words, word by word. That means we must study it and learn it ourselves (2 Timothy 2:15). (For more information on how to study the Bible see my book "How to Study God's Word." For help in sermon preparation see my book "Preaching and Teaching God's Word." They are available online in English, Telugu, Spanish and Hindi at <https://www.christiantrainingonline.org/our-ministries/india/books/>).

Remember, God didn't call you to build a church, that is His job (Matthew 16:18). Your job is to preach the Word! (May 1, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

PAUL'S ADVICE: Our great responsibility as a pastor is to communicate God's Word to people, like an ambassador would speak for his king.

2 Timothy 2:15 *Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.*

God listens when you preach. Would He say you are doing your best to know and communicate His Word? If not, where must you improve?

BLOG 148: ALWAYS BE READY (2 Timothy – 15)

READ: 2 Timothy 4:1-2

Paul has been giving Timothy good advice about pastoring. As he comes to the end of his letter, he gives him five very important commands, orders for pastors today as well as back then (2 Timothy 4:1-5). These imperatives are “preach,” “be prepared,” “correct,” “rebuke” and “encourage.” In the last blog we talked about the command “Preach the Word.” Now we want to look at the other commands.

“Be prepared” means pastors are always to be ready to “preach the Word.” That refers to explaining God’s truth in group sermons or personal conversations. Peter Hammond, a missionary to Sudan. Once said, “A missionary needs to be prepared to preach, pray or die at a moment’s notice.” That is very true for pastors as well. That’s just what Paul is telling Timothy. We must always be ready to apply the truth of God’s Word, when it is convenient or when it is very difficult (“in season and out of season”). **“Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have”** (1 Peter 3:15).

That means we must be ready intellectually to answer questions people may have about how we know God exists, the Bible is true and Jesus is God. We must be able to prove from the Bible that salvation is by grace. We must know the answers about living the Christian life and anything else people ask. (For more information about these subjects see my books, “Know Why You Believe” and “Topical Index of Bible Verses” available at <https://www.christiantrainingonline.org/our-ministries/india/books/>)

We must also always be prepared spiritually to share God’s truth. There can be no sin in or life or anything that will hinder God’s Holy Spirit from speaking through us (Ephesians 4:30; 1 Thessalonians 5:19). We must be growing spiritually and spending time in worship, prayer and meditation.

Finally, we must be ready socially to speak God’s truth to people when we have an opportunity. We must have a good reputation and have earned the respect of others so they will listen. We need to befriend those around us so they feel comfortable with us. We need to listen to others and be sensitive to their needs instead of just thinking of ourselves and doing all the talking. Learn to listen.

Always look for opportunities to speak to others about Jesus. Know the Bible well enough so you can answer their questions and objections about spiritual things. Be able to explain what you believe and to defend your beliefs when necessary. If you don’t know an answer, honestly tell the person you don’t know but will study to find the answer and get back to them. Never pretend you know when you don’t. That is all part of what Paul means when he commands us to “preach the Word.” He isn’t just talking about a Sunday morning sermon, he is talking about our being ready all day every day, no matter the circumstances or response. (May 8, , 2023 Doylestown, PA)

PAUL’S ADVICE: Doing a good job of preaching the Word means you must be prepared, and that takes time and work.

2 Timothy 2:24-26 *And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Opponents must be gently instructed, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.*

How well prepared are you to answer questions and objections about your faith?

Are you alert for opportunities to bring God's truth into a conversation?

Do you pray and look for times when you can share the Bible with others?

BLOG 149: CORRECT, REBUKE AND ENCOURAGE (2 Timothy – 16)

READ: 2 Timothy 4:1-2

Paul gave Timothy his great final command to “Preach the Word.” He told him to be ready to use any and every opportunity to speak for Jesus as His ambassador, using His words in the Bible. He must be alert for opportunities to teach in everyday life, like parents are with children. There are three other commands Paul gave him that also relate to his command to “Preach the Word.”

“Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction” (2 Timothy 4:2). Not only is Timothy, but we are to teach truth, we are to correct error. Paul has already said this several times because it is so necessary and important. We are to teach truth where it isn't known or followed. We are also to correct false beliefs whenever and wherever we find them. It takes a good, thorough knowledge of Scripture to find and correct error, for often it is hidden inside of truth and carefully concealed. When a person wants to counterfeit something, they make it as much like the original as possible, but it still is fake. That is true of false teachings and teachers as well. We must correct others with gentleness and love. We must correct others as we would like to be corrected (the Golden Rule). Those who can distinguish counterfeits can do so because they know the original so well, they can spot any deviation. That's how complete our knowledge of Scripture must be as well.

Unfortunately, not everyone will respond to correction. Many will insist on holding to the lies they believe and the sin that results in their lives. In that case our preaching takes the form of rebuking them – pointing out their rebellion and disobedience. They must be warned so they know they are wrong, and others must be alerted to their sin so they don't follow in it.

The Greek word that is translated “rebuke” is a very strong word that refers to a sharp, severe reprimand. It must be done in love, as a parent correcting a child who is doing something wrong and dangerous. But it must also be done with seriousness and no compromise, just like a parent. It's like seeing someone's house on fire, but they are inside and don't know it. You will rush to inform them so they can flee to safety. That's what it means to “rebuke” with the Word.

Finally, “preach the Word” also includes encouraging our listeners. We are to correct and rebuke, but also do all we can to build up and encourage, not discourage. A good parent is always looking for times and ways to build up their children. They don't just look for errors to correct. Positive encouragement goes a lot further to helping improve a person than negative criticism.

Everyone needs encouragement to continue in faithfulness. Sharing God's promises are the best way of comforting and reassuring others. We must know and use God's promises so we can share them with others.(May 15, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

PAUL'S ADVICE: Preaching God's Word includes correcting error, rebuking those who won't accept God's truth and encouraging those we speak to.

1 Thessalonians 5:11 Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

Who encourages you? Have you thanked them?

Who do you know who could use some encouragement? What can you do today to encourage them?

BLOG 150: HOW TO PREACH THE WORD (2 Timothy – 17)

READ: 2 Timothy 4:1-2

Paul commanded Timothy, and us, to preach the Word, always be ready to correct, rebuke and encourage others. That is *what* we are to do. Next Paul will tell Timothy *how* to do it.

“Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—**with great patience and careful instruction**” (2 Timothy 4:2). How are we to “preach the Word”? We are to communicate it with patience and accuracy.

First, we must use “great patience” in teaching and applying God's Word. The Greek word means “patience endurance.” It's like “run with patience” (Hebrews 12:1). It is a continuing, ongoing, active action but done with patient faithfulness. Often, we must teach and explain the same thing over and over and over. Parents must do that with children, and God must do it with His children, too. It takes great patience to be a good parent, and to be a good pastor. Patience doesn't come naturally or easily. It is a fruit of God's Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23), not something we can produce on our own. It's not something we can fake or pretend we have. It either is real or we don't have it. God's fruit is only produced in us when we live close to Him and have no sin in our life. We need patience to pastor. As Paul says, we need *great* patience.

The other way we are to share God's truth is by “careful instruction.” We must teach all the Bible, not just a few favorite parts. We must cover everything a passage or verse says, not just pick out what we want to talk about. We must go over it again and again until people really understand it. Then we must make sure it is accurately applied to their lives. The Bible must be taught in an organized, systematic way. My book, “Bible Overview,” will help you understand the Bible and organize your teaching of it (see <https://www.christiantrainingonline.org/our-ministries/india/books/>).

A good way to become a better Bible teacher is to teach children, your own children or grandchildren or those in your church. That will help you break Bible truths down to make them simpler and more understandable. Children will tell you when they don't understand. You will have to think and plan more carefully before talking and that is good.

There is much error in the world today. Only the Bible is God's absolute authority of truth. People, even pastors, can be easily misled if they don't totally and completely know the Bible. That's why it is so important for us to “preach the Word” and to do it with “great patience” and “careful instruction.”(May 22, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

PAUL'S ADVICE: Communicating God's Word must be done with great patience and careful instruction.

Hebrews 12:1-3 Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and

perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

Are you a patient person?

Would your family say you are patient?

What must you do to become more patient and therefore more Christlike?

BLOG 151: WHY PREACH? (2 Timothy – 18)

READ: 2 Timothy 4:3-5

Having explained the importance of patiently and thoroughly teaching the Bible, Paul then explained why this was so important. First, he said WHAT to do: preach, be prepared, correct, rebuke and encourage (1 Timothy 4:2a). Then he explained HOW to do it: with great patience and careful instruction (1 Timothy 4:2b). Then he told Timothy WHY he was to do this: people will turn from the truth and believe lies (1 Timothy 4:3-5).

We know the world rejects truth and believes lies, but Paul is speaking specifically about church people doing this. We certainly see that happening today as well. **“For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear” (1 Timothy 4:3).** Many who call themselves Christians will become bored with the truth and apathetic to it (“not put up with”).

Paul has much to say to Timothy about “truth.” He wrote about it 5 times in his first letter to Timothy (2:4,7; 3:15; 4:3; 6:5) and 6 times in this second letter (2:15,18,25; 3:7,8). Paul tells Timothy and us to know the truth, follow the truth and proclaim the truth. That’s a summary of what a good pastor is and does.

“They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths” (2 Timothy 4:4) such as atheism, humanism, evolution, liberalism, false religions, reincarnation and many others. Many so-called Christians will turn away from truth, but Timothy is commanded to remain faithful. **“But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry”** (2 Timothy 4:5). Paul here gives Timothy 4 final commands to help him face and overcome false teachings and teachers.

First, **“keep your head in all situations.”** Literally it means “be sober.” Be alert to what is not true. Be self-controlled and don’t react emotionally. Don’t give in to fear of criticism or pressure from others. False teachers are like wolves that come to destroy sheep (Acts 20:28-29). Satan is like a lion that has come to destroy us (1 Peter 5:8). If there were real wolves or lions near your children you would be very alert and careful. That’s how we are to be spiritually.

Next, Paul repeats his command to **“endure hardship.”** A pastor’s life is not easy, not if he is following Jesus and serving Him. Those who put themselves first and use the ministry for their own pride do not have to endure hardship, but those who serve as Jesus did will suffer criticism and rejection as He did (2 Timothy 3:12). We face loneliness, frustration, confusion, discouragement, financial problems, marriage and family issues, personal sins, health issues, not having enough time, demands of people, sorrow over people who don’t follow God’s Word and many others. God allows all this because He uses it to make us more like Jesus. No pastor who is following Jesus is exempt from the trials that stretch and strengthen our faith.

Third, Paul reminds Timothy to “**do the work of an evangelist.**” Evangelism was part of Timothy’s mix of spiritual gifts. We all have a unique combination of spiritual gifts that God equips us with so we can minister to other Christians. They include such things as pastoring, leadership, organization & administration, teaching, knowledge, wisdom evangelism, missionary work, service, mercy, helps, hospitality, encouraging, faith, prayer, giving, sacrificial living, discernment. (For more information about spiritual gifts, see “Duties of a Pastor,” Appendix 2 <https://www.christiantrainingonline.org/our-ministries/india/books/>).

Even if we don’t have the gift of evangelism, where talking to people about salvation comes naturally and easily, we are still responsible to share His good news. He is to be the focus of our lives. Each sermon, conversation, Bible study and counseling time must include lifting up Jesus.

The final command to Timothy is to “**discharge all the duties of your ministry.**” We are to use our spiritual gifts, but not neglect other areas of ministry. (See my book, “Duties of Pastors and Leaders” for more information <https://www.christiantrainingonline.org/our-ministries/india/books/>). “Discharge” means to bring to full measure.” We are to wholly follow Jesus in all a pastor must do.

Being a pastor is much more than a job. It is not like being a builder, farmer or doctor. People choose those jobs, but God chooses who will minister for Him. Other careers need ability, but to be chosen by God to pastor we need only to have availability. Other careers bring earthly honor to the person by a job well done. We are to serve so all the honor goes to Jesus. Our reward in heaven is eternal and will last forever. (May 29, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

PAUL’S ADVICE: We are to preach the Word because many people, even those claiming to be Christians, can turn from the truth.

How do you do in following Paul’s four commands to Timothy? Which is easiest for you to follow?

Which is hardest? Why? What can you do to improve in it?

BLOG 152: OUR DUTY TO OUR WIVES (2 Timothy – 19)

Paul has been writing to pastors in 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus. But what about their wives? What advice would Paul give to pastor’s wife today?

In prioritizing our duties, our families come before our ministries (1 Timothy 3:4-5; Titus 1-6). When Adam walked and talked with God in Eden, he realized something was missing from his life. God met that need by creating Eve, a wife for him to love and share his life (Genesis 2:18-24). He didn’t create children for him to raise, parents for him to support or a church for him to pastor. After our duty to God Himself, our next duty is to our wives and children, even before our ministries.

God has blessed me with a wonderful wife or I would not be the person I am today. The longer I am married to her the more I appreciate the fine person she is, and the more I thank God for such a special gift. Her behind-the-scenes work and faithfulness in my life and ministry is invaluable. I think her faithful, deep prayer life accomplishes more for the Kingdom than my frantic business. She is my greatest prayer supporter.

Through her I have learned about God’s unconditional love for me, because I have seen it demonstrated through her. I better understand how God can and will forgive me, for she has exemplified that time and time again. I can trust His faithfulness better because I see it lived out in her life.

Sometimes we think we could accomplish more in life if it were not for the needs of our mates and families. We can resent the time they take. Perhaps I could have spent more time in ministry

without my wife and family, but it would not have accomplished as much, and the quality would have been far less. I am sure I would have burned out or failed without her help.

God commands I serve her before myself or my church (Ephesians 5:25-33). In fact, He says if I cannot serve her first, I should not be a pastor (1 Timothy 3:2-5; Titus 2:6). Being a good husband is more important than being a good pastor (1 Peter 3:7). (For more information about Christian marriage see "Marriage and Ministry" by Jerry Schmoyer https://www.christiantrainingonline.org/download/india/Books/english_translations/Marriage-and-Ministry-book.pdf)

God expects me to love her as He loves me (Ephesians 5:25). I am to serve her, not just have her serve me. I must show her love, help her in any way I can and always be kind and gentle to her.

Meeting her needs before my own does not take away from my ministry, but rather enriches it by maturing me. Whatever time and love I put into her I get back many times over. Learning to put someone before myself has not been easy, but has been essential in marriage and ministry. It helps me become more like Jesus Who is characterized by putting others before Himself.

The main lessons I have learned in life and the greatest spiritual and emotional growth I have experienced in life have come through my marriage. Things have not always been easy for us. God uses our imperfections and our conflicts to teach about humility, service, apologizing, forgiving and accepting forgiveness. These things cannot be learned from a book, only from life.

The older I get and the further I go in life and ministry, the more I realize that a good wife IS worth far more than rubies (Ecclesiastes 31:10-12, 30-31). And so is a good husband for you wives reading this!

Sometimes it is God's will for a man or woman to not marry but live alone. This is no less God's will for them than getting married is for others. God Himself promises to meet needs when there is no mate to meet them. Never feel something is wrong because you aren't married! (June 5, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

PAUL'S ADVICE: Put your wife's needs before your ministry and love and serve your wife unconditionally, as Christ loves you.

Proverbs 19:22 22 He who finds a wife finds what is good and receives favor from the LORD.

Proverbs 31: 10, 31 A wife of noble character who can find? She is worth far more than rubies. ... 30 Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised.

Men, when you stand before God, will He say "Well done, good and faithful servant" for the way you loved and served His daughter, your wife?

Would your wife say she is more important than your ministry or work?

Can she give examples of when you put her before your own needs?

What can you do, starting today, to be a more Christlike to your wife?

BLOG 153: DUTIES TO OUR CHILDREN (2 Timothy – 20)

We know what advice Paul gave Timothy about being a godly pastor and husband, but what would he say about being a father? What advice would Paul give to pastors today? I'll share some things He has taught me about being a godly father.

As I look back on my life, I have a perspective that many of you who are younger do not have. My children are grown, married and raising children of their own. My impact on their life has largely been made. I thank God that He convicted me at the start of ministry of the importance of making my family my number one congregation. Others have come and gone in my life, but my family is still my family. There is no one I have had more influence on or ever will have more influence on than my wife and children.

Jesus' top priority while on earth was His 'family' of disciples, not the crowds, and not new programs and projects. He put them and their needs first, often withdrawing from the crowds or sending others away to spend time with the disciples (Matthew 8:18; 14:13-15; 15:39). His pattern is ours to follow today. There is no one you will reproduce yourself in more completely than your children. And you WILL reproduce yourself in them, for good or for bad. You cannot change the fact that you will totally influence their lives. The question is what the influence will be, not if you will have influence. Children are like soft clay which you are forming and molding into whatever image you choose (Proverbs 22:6). If you are too busy to be with them, that makes them feel rejected and unimportant. You represent God in their lives. How you treat them will lead them to or from Jesus. You are forming them and will form them more than anyone else in your ministry.

It is a shame that the children of those in ministry often have a reputation for rebellion and disobedience. Whose fault is that? God Himself says that if we cannot manage our families then we cannot manage His church (1 Timothy 3:4-5). Your children need you more than your church. Sometimes we get so wrapped up in our service for God and our 'success' in the eyes of others that we miss what is most important. God gave us our children to disciple for Him. Nothing is more important! He will never lead us to neglect our children for the sake of other things, even ministry. They are precious to Him and He entrusts them to us. He will never give us so much to do that we cannot have time for them. That comes from our wrong priorities.

One of my greatest joys in life is watching my children serve the Lord and follow Him. "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth." (3 John 4). Each one of them has chosen to stay faithful to God and serve Him wholeheartedly. Make sure you see your children as of top importance in your ministry. Only your wife is more important. (June 12, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

PAUL'S ADVICE: Put your children before your ministry but not your wife and raise them to be disciples of Jesus.

Deuteronomy 11:18-22 Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates, so that your days and the days of your children may be many in the land that the LORD swore to give your forefathers, as many as the days that the heavens are above the earth.

I am sure you would say your family is your number 1 priority, but would they agree?

What proof can you present that shows you put your wife and children before your work?

Would your children say that they know they are more important to you than your ministry?

PRAYER REQUEST: Christian Training Organization (CTO) is sending two men to India June 17-30 to lead pastor's conferences and speak in churches. PLEASE for these men as they travel and speak. Pray for Pastor Moses who organizes and leads the conferences. Pray for each one who comes to learn and grow in their faith and ministry. If you want to receive my India blog, pictures and prayer requests email me at jerry@schmoyer.net.

BLOG 154: DUTIES OF A PASTOR'S WIFE (2 Timothy – 21)

A pastor's wife is, first and foremost, a daughter of God. Her identity is in Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:17-18), not being married to a pastor. In order to be all God created her to be, she needs to take care of her health by eating healthy, getting proper rest and balancing home and ministry. Life in ministry has many demands. She has responsibilities to her husband and children, plus needs of the church. She is responsible to do her best to keep her herself and her husband healthy.

Her main responsibility as a wife is to support and help her husband (Ephesians 5:22-24, 33; Colossians 3:18; 1 Peter 3:1-6). God created the woman as a helper for her husband. (Genesis 2:18) Married men need a supportive, helpful wife. Her role is crucial. Abigail was a good example (1 Samuel 25:39-42). A wife helps by encouraging, praying, advising and protecting him from those who try to defeat and discourage him.

The husband and wife form a team in ministry. The wife does not function in the same work or authority in the church as her husband, but they are yoked together in ministry because of marriage (2 Corinthians 6:14). Sadly, some pastors' wives view pastoring as "his" ministry and do not participate with him. Also, some pastors relegate the jobs no one else wants to their wives. This is not loving or appropriate. She has her own gifts and talents and must be encouraged to use them.

After God and her husband, but before the church, a pastor's wife is to be a godly mother (Psalm 127:3-4). Her husband is required to "manage his own household well" in order to be a pastor (1 Timothy 3:4-5; Titus 1:6). This means leading his wife and children to live godly lives of love and respect for each other. A wife can make this easier or harder for him. She has great influence on the children and sets the emotional mood for the household. If she is happy, hopeful and joyful, the home will be also. If she is angry and critical, that will impact everyone else as well. She needs to work with her husband to create a loving, faithful family. She is his partner and his team mate, in family life as well as ministry.

As with all Christians; the pastor's wife has special gifts God gave her to serve the Body of Christ (Romans 12:6-8). She is God's gift to the church to fill those needs (Ephesians 4:10-12). God expects her to use those gifts (1 Peter 4:10-11). If she doesn't, then the whole church suffers. If she is busy doing other things, she won't have time or energy to do what God has equipped her to do. Anna in Luke 2:36-37, Dorcas in Acts 9:36, Lydia in Acts 16:15, Priscilla in Acts 18:26, Philip's daughters in Acts 21:9, Phoebe in Romans 16:1-2, and the widows in 1 Timothy 5:3-10 are all good examples. Prioritize your time in areas of giftedness first. Add other areas as God leads you.

It is an honor to have a pastor husband. You see firsthand lives transformed and God's hand work in ways others do not. Pray for him daily. Support him in love (gentle spirit) and without fear (peaceful inner spirit) (1 Peter 3:4). When problems arise, be a good listener, not critical and blaming him or the believers. Be a part of the solution, not adding to the problem by talking, gossip, criticizing or complaining. Take that to the Lord alone.

Do not discuss private family matters concerning your pastor husband to those in your fellowship. If you need advice or guidance, speak with a trusted, confidential, older and wise female believer. If deep concerns need attention such as physical or verbal abuse, direct your issues to a trusted elder.

Do not expect your pastor husband to always be right or respond in a godly manner. He, too, is "in process." Extend grace to him. He needs it as well as you do. Forgive quickly to prevent a root of bitterness. Complement him; ask him about what concerns him and what encourages him. Be actively engaged in listening to his response. Be a safe listener.

In an orchestra, the first violin carries the melody and gets all the attention. But the second violinist makes the harmony and creates the musical beauty. Pastors' wives are second violinists. They don't get much attention but they create beautiful harmony.

Enjoy. Be blessed. Get eternal rewards. Be the best Christian woman you can be and you will automatically be a good pastor's wife. (June 19, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

PAUL'S ADVICE: Love your husband unconditionally, submit to his leadership with respect and help him in any way you can.

1 Timothy 3:11 *In the same way, their wives are to be women worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything.*

What do you enjoy most about being married to a pastor?

What is the hardest thing for you as a pastor's wife?

BLOG 155: BE FAITHFUL TO THE END (2 Timothy – 22)

READ: 2 Timothy 4:6-8

In his final letter (2 Timothy), Paul reminded Timothy of his duties as a pastor. He was to grow stronger in his faith (2:1), transmit truth (2:2), endure difficulties (2:3-13), oppose false teachings (2:14,16-19), seek only God's approval (2:15), be pure (2:20-26), be alert to the growing opposition from the world (3:1-9), be faithful in persecution (3:10-13), live the Word (3:14-16) and preach the Word (4:1-5). Paul concludes his teaching remarks with a personal testimony of how he is doing in prison (4:6-8). He doesn't command or advise Timothy but there is clearly a challenge in it for him and all of us. **"For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day — and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing"** (2 Timothy 4:6-8).

What a great note of victory Paul concludes with. Despite being in prison and facing martyrdom very soon, he keeps his eyes on Jesus. That was a great encouragement to Timothy and to many since.

He is **"poured out like a drink offering."** This refers to a priest pouring a sacrifice of wine on the altar until it is all gone. That is how Paul feels. He admits he is facing tremendous trials and is enduring hardship himself. Have you ever felt that way? You have given all and there is no more physical or emotional energy left to give any more. There have been times I could identify with Paul's words. God was very real and close at those times, and I'm sure He was with Paul as well.

Paul knows his death (**"departure"**) is near and he is offering his life to God as a sacrificial offering. "Departure" is used of a traveler leaving their country, a soldier breaking camp to move on or a sailor leaving dock. What a perfect word picture for death. It isn't the end, just a major change. Life doesn't end, but it does move from this world to eternity. What a joy that will be! Paul was really looking forward to it, as should we all.

As he looks back on his life, Paul evaluates his performance with three phrases. The first is **"I have fought the good fight."** The Greek word used is literally "agony." It is used of a boxer or wrestler giving all he has in an extremely difficult battle. That's how Paul thought about his life in ministry. Serving Jesus is a battle, a hard battle. We fight temptation from sin, Satan and his forces and the opposition of the world around us, the same enemies Jesus fought. Why should we expect it to be any different for us who follow Him? Jesus doesn't remove our battle but helps us win it.

Parents who remove all obstacles from their children will have spoiled, self-centered, immature children. The same is true of God's children. Obstacles make us stronger.

Are you able to look back at your Christian life so far and say you have fought the good fight? Are you standing firm in the battles you have to fight today, or are you giving in and letting them defeat you?

The second way Paul summarizes his life is that he has **“finished the race.”** In his day, it was not just speed that counted in a race, it was finishing with your torch still burning. That speaks of Paul's faithfulness to God until the end of his life. He didn't turn from the faith or his God-given responsibility. He had struggles and difficulties, but he persevered through.

Do you continue to faithfully serve just as you did when you first started following Jesus? Are you committed to doing so for the rest of your life?

Finally, Paul says he **“kept the faith.”** This is a military term that refers to standing guard, protecting what was assigned to him. For Paul, this was the Christian faith, the body of truth conveyed in the Bible. He was a faithful steward, as the man in the parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14–30 Luke 19:11–27). Even during persecution and threats on his life, he never denied or turned from God's truth as revealed in His Word. (To be continued in next blog.) (June 26, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

When have you abandoned, turned from, compromised or neglected some part of God's commands and directions in His Word? Are there any you aren't following 100% today?

PAUL'S ADVICE: Live your life for Jesus now so at the end you can say you have fought the good fight, finished the race and kept the faith.

Who do you know who is an example of someone who is fighting the good fight, running the race and keeping the faith? What can you learn from them to help you as you live for Jesus?

BLOG 156: REWARDS FOR FAITHFULNESS (2 Timothy – 23)

READ: 2 Timothy 4:6-8

As he ended his final words of advice to Timothy, Paul shared how he viewed his life for Jesus. He said he has fought the good fight, finished the race and kept the faith (2 Timothy 4:6-8). This was an unspoken challenge to Timothy to live his life so he could say the same thing when he was facing death. It is the duty of all of us to be faithful to the end. We all want to be, but it can be hard.

Even if you haven't been as faithful as Paul was (and very few are), if you confess any sin or failure and turn from it, God will forgive you and restore you so you can start again with a clean record (1 John 1:9). Stay faithful from here on. And if you fail, He will forgive and restore you as often as you need it.

God will bless you in this life with peace, joy and close fellowship with Himself. He will also reward you in heaven for all eternity. That's why Paul next says: **“Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness...”** Crowns were given to victors in sporting events then like we give medals and trophies today. God's awards aren't given for beating others but for fulfilling your own course. They are rewards for all eternity. Not only will we live forever with Jesus, but we will have special blessings and privileges from Him for our faithful service. These are given by Jesus to all believers (1 Corinthians 9:4-27). Faithful pastors will receive a crown of glory (1 Peter 5:4). All Christians (2 Timothy 4:8), including pastors, can receive an imperishable crown for living a disciplined life (1 Corinthians 9:25), a crown of rejoicing for leading people to Jesus and helping them

grow (1 Thessalonians 2:19), a crown of righteousness for loving Jesus' return (2 Timothy 4:8) and a crown of life for enduring trials (James 1:12; Revelation 2:10).

Which of these crowns do you think you will receive? How will it make you feel to reach heaven and receive them from Jesus?

We won't be able to take anything from this life to heaven with us. All we have will be the crowns Jesus gives us there. When we worship Him on the throne and see His greatness and beauty, we'll want to show our love so we'll give Him the only thing we have – our crowns. We'll lay them at His feet in recognition that they belong to Him for we wouldn't have them without His mercy and power (Revelation 4:10). All we can produce on our own is wood, hay and stubble – nothing worthy of Him (1 Corinthians 3:12-15). How sad it would be to not have a crown to give Him!

Second Timothy is Paul's final writing to Timothy before he was martyred. Last words are significant and meaningful. One day you and I will be saying our final words. Will we be able to say, **"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith."** (2 Timothy 4:7-8)? Paul's time on earth is over but we are still here, we can still live for Him and serve Him.

Are you doing that now? Will you continue to do that for the rest of your life, no matter what you face?

Even more important than our last words on earth are Jesus' first words to us in heaven. I want to hear Him say, **"Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!"** (Matthew 25:23). Just being in heaven will be marvelous, but to meet Jesus and hear Him say that face to face will be beyond anything we can imagine. (July 3, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

PAUL'S ADVICE: Living for Jesus not only brings blessings in this life, but special crowns and rewards for all eternity.

Spend some time in prayer thanking Jesus for all He has done in your life in the past, what He is doing now and for all you will have with Him for eternity in heaven.

BLOG 157: FINAL YEARS OF PAUL & TIMOTHY (2 Timothy – 24)

READ: 2 Timothy 4:9-22

When writing a letter in Paul's day, it was common to sign your name at the start and add personal comments at the end, just the opposite of the way we write our letters today (read 2 Timothy 4:9-22). Having said what he wanted to Timothy; Paul now includes personal greetings to friends he will never see again (verses 19-21). He asked Mark, who he had refused to take on his second missionary journey because Mark abandoned him on the first, to come with Timothy and bring his coat and scrolls to him (verse 12-13). Evidently Mark had matured spiritually and was now a dependable servant. Only faithful Luke was with Paul in Rome (verse 11). He concludes with, **"The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you all"** (verse 22). Grace was the theme of Paul's whole life, and should be of ours as well.

No one knows the details of Paul's death, but it seems certain he was beheaded in Rome during a terrible persecution by Nero. Nero burned Rome in AD 64 and blamed the Christians, thus starting another wave of awful persecution and murder. Because he was a Roman citizen, Paul was spared crucifixion. Peter and his wife were crucified about this same time. Tradition says Peter wanted to be crucified upside down because he didn't deserve to die as His Master did.

As for Timothy, it seems he was able to join Paul in Rome about 66 AD when Timothy was about 31 years old. He spent the rest of his life ministering in Ephesus, the very place he wanted to

leave, until he was martyred. John and Mary also lived there. What a great help they must have been to him as well. He died under persecutions by Domitian or Nerva, about 97 AD, when he was 62 years old.

Timothy lived a long life of service to God. He learned from Paul and passed what he learned on to others who kept passing it on until it has come down to us today (2 Timothy 2:2; 1 Thessalonians 3:2). He reproduced what he knew in others, training them to ministry. Timothy also had a servant's heart and was willing to serve instead of being served (Acts 19:22). He was available to go where God wanted him to go and ministered as a trouble-shooter to churches with problems (Acts 20:4). The fact that he was teachable and willing to learn was important to keep him growing and staying in ministry (2 Timothy 3:10-11). He took the things he learned and passed them on to others.

Because he shared Paul's goals and motives, Timothy could faithfully represent Paul's (and God's) will and desire (Philippians 2:19-20). Some pastors are more interested in building a name and reputation for themselves than helping others and serving where needed. Despite the difficulties he faced, Timothy was faithful in all he did (1 Corinthians 4:17). He continues to be a great example for all pastors today. (July 10, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

PAUL'S ADVICE: Follow Paul and Timothy, not because they are perfect but because they followed Jesus.

1 Corinthians 4:17 I am sending to you Timothy, my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord. He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church.

Who are you more like, Paul or Timothy?

In what ways are you like Paul? What problems do you face that he faced?

In what ways are you like Timothy? What problems do you face that he faced?

What have you learned from Paul and Timothy that can help you be a better pastor?

BLOG 158: DUTIES OF CHRISTIANS TO THEIR PASTOR (2 Timothy – 25)

We have looked at the duties of shepherds to their sheep, let's talk about the responsibilities of Christians to their pastors. Sheep can make a shepherd's work easier or harder, depending on how they respond to his leadership. That is true of God's sheep as well. Christians are commanded to honor their leaders (1 Timothy 5:17-25). They can do this by recognizing them for their faithful service and showing them respect (1 Thessalonians 5:12). It is important to show them love, for leaders need it as much as anyone else (1 Thessalonians 5:13). People need to help their pastors any way they can. They must pray for them daily.

Never gossip or criticize a leader (1 Corinthians 4:3-4). If there are biblical concerns pray for the person. If it continues, go to an appropriate leader to express your concerns about this person and let them handle it. If it does not resolve and God leads you to leave the church, do so quietly without gossip or criticism (Proverbs 16:28; 11:9,13; 10:18; Psalm 15:2-3; Ephesians 4:29).

Christians must encourage their leaders by thanking them for their service, assisting them when facing difficulties and helping in any way they can. Regular attendance at church services encourages a pastor as well.

Believers are to pray regularly, specifically and lovingly for their leaders. The church I pastored for 35 years was excellent in their support of me and prayers for me. I know the difference their prayers made, but I could not have pastored without them.

Paul commanded early churches to have regular offerings (1 Corinthians 16:2). God told the Jews in the Old Testament to give 10% of their wealth to God's work (Genesis 14:20; 28:22) and Jesus approved of tithing (Luke 11:42). We are no longer under God's Old Testament Law, so those commands do not apply to us. Still, that can give us a guideline as to how much to give. Paul said we are to give as God has prospered us (1 Corinthians 16:2), which for most of us will be beyond 10%. Paul devotes two chapters, 2 Corinthians 8 and 9, to writing about the importance of financial giving.

Some of the money given to the church should go to providing a pastor with an adequate salary, for the workman is worthy of his pay (Deuteronomy 24:15). The picture in Deuteronomy 24:15 is of an ox working to produce food for the owner by pulling weights to thresh the grain. It's only right he be allowed to benefit from his work so he has energy to keep working. Paying a pastor enables him to have time to keep studying and pastoring.

If people don't have money to give, they can provide food or something useful for the pastor's family. When the church I pastored didn't have money to pay me, individuals in the church gave us food. It was greatly needed and much appreciated.

Paul states that a pastor is worthy of "double honor" (1 Timothy 5:17-18). Not only should he be respected and honored as God's representative, but he should receive financial support to help him have time to minister. Too many Christians and churches do not pay a pastor enough for him to support his family. A pastor doesn't need to make more money than the average person in his church, but he shouldn't make less, either.

The Bible forbids Christians to go into debt and a church should do it's very best to stay out of debt of any kind (Romans 13:8; Proverbs 22:7; Psalm 37:21; Luke 14:28; Hebrews 13:5). It may be necessary to buy a building, but cost should be as low as possible and paid off as quickly as possible.

Being a pastor is a difficult job. Do all you can to make it as easy as possible. (July 17, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

PAUL'S ADVICE: Show honor and respect for your pastor, help him and financially support him.

Jeremiah 3:15 Then I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will lead you with knowledge and understanding.

Do your people treat you with respect? Are you treating them with respect to set a good example?

Do you teach them about the importance of being good stewards and supporting the church financially?

Do you teach your people the importance of supporting you the best they can?

BLOG 159: DUTIES OF PASTORS TO OTHER PASTORS (2 Timothy – 26)

We have been looking at the duties and responsibilities of a pastor as seen in 2 Timothy. We have seen the obligations pastors have to their people and those which the people have to their pastors. One final area of consideration is the duties pastors have to other pastors.

We are on the same team, working for the same Great Shepherd. There can be no competition, jealousy or criticism of other pastors or churches (1 Corinthians 3:9). We are to evaluate and pass judgment on false teachers, but not fellow pastors and their ministries (1 Timothy 5:19-25; Romans 14:4). We must support each other, not compete with each other (1 Corinthians 3:8-9). We are one Body working together (1 Corinthians 12:12-27; Romans 12:4). When body parts work against each other the body becomes weak and unhealthy. That happens to the church as well when pastors and churches are jealous or compete with each other. Everyone suffers.

We need to pray for each other, help each other, encourage each other and together work against our common enemy. Fellowship and cooperation with other pastors are very important. We can share concerns, provide insight and wisdom, encourage during difficulties and hold each other accountable when necessary. We can share our gifts and strengths to help others when needed. We need each other. I think one of the reasons so many pastors struggle today is because they do not have other pastors who can encourage or help them when needed. Timothy had fellow pastors like Titus to share the work. He also had Paul as a mentor. Paul had Barnabas as a mentor and Luke as a friend who traveled and ministered with him. Jesus had His disciples, and especially James, John and Peter. You need other pastors and they need you. You should never be too busy to develop relationships with other pastors. They are very, very important. (July 24, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

PAUL'S ADVICE: Pastors must support and help each other in any way they can.

Hebrews 12:14 Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord.

Are there any pastors or church leaders with whom you are not getting along? What can you do to heal the relationship?

Which pastors are you jealous of? Why? Confess your jealousy and ask God to forgive you.

Who can you go to when in need? Who can you share struggles and difficulties with?

Who will seek you out if you struggle? Who holds you accountable if you slip?

Who is your mentor? Who are you mentoring?

What young pastors are you training and helping? What are you doing for them?

BLOG 160: WHAT MAKES A GREAT SERMON

Everyone who preaches or teaches the Bible wants to make sure their message is effective and well received. We want our sermons to be great. But how can we tell if they are or not? Some say a message is great when there is a lot of emotional appeal, loud speaking and deep feelings from the speaker. Others say there must be a great response from the listeners. Some think a message must be very long to be great, others say it must be very short. Then some speakers want to entertain and think a good message is one the people enjoy and are entertained. None of these things make a message great. They could be great, but not for these reasons. So, what does make a sermon powerful and special?

The message lifts Jesus up, even if it is an Old Testament passage. People need soul-feeding, heart-healing, mind-training, truth-telling, grace-dispensing, hope-directing, life-giving, Christ-exalting preaching. We need preaching that brings us to Jesus and his host of benefits and protections. What does this look like?

First, Jesus, not the speaker, gets the spotlight. Many times, after I am in a church service, my thoughts are on the dress, actions, emotions, personality or expressions of the pastor. He comes across so strong that Jesus takes second place in my heart and thoughts. Preaching is not about us but about Jesus. We are to lift Him up, not ourselves. It is human nature to want to be liked, to have people respond to us and to be popular - but that is not the purpose of preaching or teaching God's Word. People come to church to meet with Jesus, or at least that's why they should come. If they don't connect with Jesus, they go home empty. Our souls are striving for nourishment and Jesus alone is the one who provides it (John 6:55). Our spirits need fresh oxygen and Jesus alone is true life (John 14:6). We are weary and only Jesus brings hope and rest (Matthew 11:28-30). Only Jesus

can remove the sin, guilt, shame and burdens people carry. Only He can bring hope and peace to the struggling and broken. Only He can cleanse, mend, heal, direct, shepherd and protect us.

A sermon without Jesus is like an empty prescription bottle—it may appear helpful from the outside, but there's nothing inside that can actually heal us. Or, as Charles Spurgeon memorably said, "A sermon without Christ in it is like a loaf of bread without any flour in it. No Christ in your sermon, sir? Then go home, and never preach again until you have something worth preaching." Before you preach or teach, ask yourself, "Does this message clearly show who Jesus is and what He has done? Is the Gospel and the hope we have in Jesus clearly shown? Not every passage you speak on will be about Jesus, but He must be brought into every message for He is the heart and core of what we believe.

Ask yourself before speaking, "Does this message bring attention to me, or to Jesus? Will people leave knowing more about Him and hunger for more of Him?" Will the people leave thinking, "What a great preacher!" or "What a great Savior." As John said, He must increase and we must decrease (John 3:30). (July 31, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

John 3:30 He must become greater; I must become less."

Do your sermons and messages focus on Jesus, even if you are preaching from the Old Testament?

Do people leave your church thinking about the pastor or the Savior?

BLOG 161: PREACH GOD'S WORD, NOT YOUR WORDS

Suppose your wife is very sick and asked you to take her to the doctor so you did so. But before the doctor can check her, you tell the doctor what is wrong and what needs to be done. Each time the doctor tries to give advice you ignore him and instead say what you think. You never let the doctor say what he wants. Finally, he gets tired of wasting his time and goes to see another patient so you take your wife home in the same condition she was in when you came. That would be very foolish, wouldn't it? She was in the presence of a physician who could help her, but you never let him speak to her.

Yet that is what happens when pastors or teachers give their opinions and not what God says in His Word. People need to hear from God, not from us. Hurting people come to church for hope and help. God is present. All we need to do is open His Word and let Him speak to them through it. But when we just give our opinions, thoughts, ideas and suggestions we don't let God's Word minister to them. Some pastors speak about political issues; others talk about topics of interest to them. Other speakers talk about themselves and what they have done.

Our words are powerless, God's Words have His power behind them. That's why quoting Scripture to resist Satan and temptation is so important. Only the truth of the Bible counters lies with the truth. Praying Scripture is more effective than trying to think of our own words.

A good speaker may be able to entertain, to motivate, to bring guilt or to inspire others by their speaking ability or creativity, but true heart change only comes through the Holy Spirit applying the Word of God to the hearts and lives of those who are open to His truth. Change does not come from our skillful words but from the power of Scripture (1 Corinthians 2:4-5). Before you speak next time, ask yourself, "Do I clearly understand what the writer of the passage for today is saying?" "Does what I have to say help make the message of the passage clear or do I bring in other things not in the passage?" "Do I clearly apply the main points of my passage to the lives of the people listening?" (August 7, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

“Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage – with great patience and careful instruction” (1 Timothy 4:2).

Are you ever guilty of focusing more on what you thought than what God said?

Ask God to help you always lift up Jesus, not yourself.

BLOG 161: DELIVER THE MESSAGE (Titus 1)

READ: Titus 1:1-4

If you were asked to describe yourself in one word or phrase, what word would you choose? Paul used the word “**servant**” or “**slave**” to describe himself to Titus (Titus 1:1a). The Greek word for servant or slave referred to “one whose will is swallowed up in the will of another.” There were many slaves on the Island of Crete, where Titus was when Paul wrote to him. They were slaves of human masters and had to do what they were told, no matter what they thought or wanted to do. Paul said he was a slave of Jesus, not just in what he did but also in what he thought and felt. His will was to do the will of God.

Paul then used another word to describe what his specific servant role was: he was sent by God (“**apostle**”) to carry the good news of Jesus to those God has chosen for salvation (Titus 1:1b). He not only brought the message of salvation, but he then taught them God’s Word so that they grew in knowledge and godliness. He assured them of eternal life, which God promised them (Titus 1:2). Paul affirmed that God does not lie (verse 2), a clear reference to the god Zeus worshiped on Crete, who was known as a liar. It was Paul’s honor and privilege to carry this message wherever God led him (Titus 1:3).

Paul made it clear that his job was to **convey God’s Word** wherever he went. It was not his truth but God’s, he just delivered it. When you eat in a restaurant, a waiter brings you your food. He doesn’t cook it, someone else does. His job is just to deliver what someone else cooked. That’s what we do as pastors, teachers and leaders. We don’t create our message; we just deliver what God said. We don’t change it, add to it, compromise it or alter it in any way. We simply deliver it from God’s Word to the people to whom we speak. That’s what Paul did and we must do as well. That’s what he is encouraging Titus to do also.

Paul called Titus his “**true son**” showing the close relationship he had with him. Paul was approaching the end of his life and would be dead in a couple years. He wrote his first letter to Timothy in August 62 AD. Titus was written in the summer of 66 AD and 2 Timothy a year later, in the fall of 67 AD. Six months later Paul was martyred.

Titus was older and more stable than Timothy. The church on Crete, where Titus ministered, wasn’t nearly as problematic as in Ephesus where Timothy was. Paul didn’t know if he would see Titus again or not, so he wrote to encourage him to continue in ministry, as he did with Timothy. Titus, like us, was to deliver the message God has given.

Today we are the “sent ones” taking the message about Jesus to those around us. Paul, Timothy and Titus are no longer here to do it. It is our turn, theirs is over. They no longer can serve Jesus on earth – but we can. We still have an opportunity to be His slaves in all we think and do. We can tell others about Him and help them grow in their faith. This earthly life is the only chance we will have. We only live one time so let’s make it count for Jesus! (August 14, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

PAUL’S ADVICE: We are slaves for God, sent to spread His truth everywhere.

Matthew 28:18-20 “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and

of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

What one word or phrase would God use to describe you?

Would it include “good and faithful servant/slave?”

BLOG 162: PASTORS, BISHOPS, ELDERS & MINISTERS (Titus 2)

READ: Titus 1:5

God likes structure and organization. He made the universe to run very precisely. The laws of mathematics rule science and they never change. Everything has its place and interconnects with everything else. There is order, not chaos; planning, not chance; design, not accident. Since God created the universe to run that way, it should be no surprise He wants the church to run that way as well. We see that at the very start of Paul’s words to Titus.

After his opening introduction (Titus 1:1-4), Paul gets right to the reason he is writing: **“The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you”** (Titus 1:5). Titus was Paul’s representative to the house churches scattered throughout the island. Paul visited Crete many years earlier on his earliest missionary journeys but didn’t start any churches there. They had already been planted, probably by Jews who accepted Jesus as their Savior at Pentecost and returned home to Crete (Acts 2:11). The church was composed mainly of slaves who were owned by immoral, ungodly masters.

Titus is commanded to **“straighten out what was left unfinished”** (Titus 1:5). “Straighten out” is a medical term referring to setting a broken bone. The church there needed to be organized, structured, led by qualified, trained men who knew and followed the truth of God’s Word. The people on Crete had a reputation for being dishonest, lazy and corrupt (Titus 1:12). Becoming a Christian doesn’t automatically change all that. Each person still has a free will choice to make about how they live. Paul had a lot to say about living a holy life and doing good works, because that was needed there, and it was up to Titus to encourage it. Also, there was a lot of false teaching going on (Titus 1:10-11). It was up to Titus to get things organized and moving in the right direction.

One of the first things Titus needed to do to accomplish this was to **“appoint elders”** (Titus 1:5). Paul always emphasized the need for order and organization in churches. In 2 Timothy he focused on church leadership and in Titus on church organization. Structure is very important to church health. It is necessary for the gospel to spread and believers to grow. God put structure, order and organization into the universe. We see it in math and science. We need to see it in the church as well.

These elders were to be spiritually mature, godly men who would oversee the Christians in the various house churches. There were usually two or more doing the planning, teaching and guiding in each local gathering throughout the island. Gentiles in the church would be familiar with the term and concept of qualified men leading others. Jewish synagogues had such an office as well.

There are two groups of leaders in a church: Elders are spiritual leaders and oversee the spiritual needs of the people. We also call them pastors today. Deacons are the second group and they care for the physical needs of the building, people, finances and resources so the elders can focus on the more important spiritual needs.

	POIMEN	PRESBUTEROS	EPISCOPOS	DIACONOS
Transliteration		Presbytery	Episcopal	Deacon

Translation	Pastor	Elder	Overseer (bishop)	Minister (servant)
Literal	Shepherd	Commanding officer	Guardian	Wait on tables Servant
Main Idea	Gift, Duty Shepherd by leading, feeding	Office; Jewish title for head of synagogue – authority, personal dignity, maturity	Office; Gentile title for head of group of people, policy-maker	Attitude Servant, slave of God
FROM	God	Others	Others	Self
	Ephesians 4:11; 1 Peter 5:1-4	1 Peter 5:1-4; 1 Timothy 5:1,17,19; Titus 1:5-6	1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:7-9; 1 Peter 5:1-4	1 Timothy 4:6; 2 Timothy 4:5

Our job today as pastors is also to make sure things are going well in our church and the lives of our people. We must plan ahead, be organized and do things in a systematic order. We must set goals and make plans to reach them. We must keep the people in order with everyone working together like a big family. We can't put off things that need doing or let disorder or discord take over in the church. We are in charge; God wants us to keep things in control and oversee everyone as He oversees us. (August 21, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

PAUL'S ADVICE: Each church needs leaders to organize and oversee its function.

1 Peter 5:1-4 To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.

What are some of the problems you have had to straighten out in your church?

Where is there disorder and disorganization in your life right now?

What must you do about it to follow God's command to be organized?

BLOG 163: BEHAVIOR OF GODLY LEADERS (Titus 3)

READ: Titus 1:6-9

In his letter to Titus, Paul began by reminding him of the need to straighten out any problems or disorganization in the church. He needed to appoint spiritually mature, godly men with self-control and a good reputation to lead the house-churches scattered throughout Crete. These men, the pastors of the local house-churches, were the key to making sure God's Word was followed and people grew spiritually. Because this position was so important, certain requirements were required of them (Titus 1:6-9). Paul had already given Timothy these same qualifications (1 Timothy 1:6-9). (See)

It's important to note that the same high standards were expected of church leaders in the small Jewish churches in rural Crete that were expected of the Gentiles in the large and important city of Ephesus where Timothy ministered. They apply to all leaders in all churches at all times in all places for all time.

A godly leader must have godly qualities. He must be mature and experienced in working in a church. He must be dependable, humble and able to give godly advice. He must have a good

reputation with those inside and outside the church. He must listen when others talk, be patient and understanding, get along with others and make people feel comfortable when with him. He must treat others with respect and understanding.

He must know the Bible well and be able to communicate its truths to others. A godly life and close relationship with God must be evident. There can be no unconfessed sin in his life. He doesn't have to be perfect and sinless, but he needs to be growing in victory over sin and becoming more like Jesus all the time. This will be seen in how he treats his wife and children.

He cannot be greedy or materialistic. Instead, he needs to be generous in giving to others in need. He must keep himself under control at all times and set an example of Christlike living in his family, church and community.

It takes time to attain these, a lifetime of work. Even then we won't be anyway near perfect. Becoming like Jesus is a long, slow process – but there must be growth in the right direction for those who are pastors and leaders. These standards give us a goal to strive for, they motivate and inspire us to keep moving ahead in our own spiritual growth. Jesus is our example. Becoming like Him is our goal. Are you moving in that direction? (August 28, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

PAUL'S ADVICE: Church leaders must be spiritually mature, godly and Christ-like at home, church and in the community.

Titus 1:6-9 An elder must be blameless, the husband of but one wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. 7 Since an overseer is entrusted with God's work, he must be blameless—not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain. 8 Rather he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined. 9 He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.

Who do you know that exemplifies the qualities listed above?

Do others think you meet the standards?

Which do you have the hardest time meeting? What must you do to be more Christlike in that area?

BLOG 164: BEHAVIOR OF FALSE TEACHERS (Titus 4)

READ: Titus 1:10-14

Paul wrote final instructions to Titus telling him to straighten out problems in the church by appointing spiritually mature, godly men to lead the local home churches (Titus 1:1-5). He then explained in detail what kind of men they are to be (Titus 1:6-9). In contrast, though, there were false teachers who were causing problems in the church (Titus 1:10-16). They claimed to be Christians and were involved in the church but what they taught was not in line with what Paul taught. If they unbelievers who attacked from without the church, they could be easily recognized and ignored. But when popular, influential people who seemed sincere in their faith and accurate in their teaching mislead people, it can be very damaging.

Paul calls them “rebellious” (Titus 1:10 – against God's truth), “mere talkers” (teaching human opinion and not god's truth) and “deceivers” (convincing others they had the truth when they didn't. Most of them came from the “circumcision group,” referring to Jews who claimed to be Christians, and may have been. Jews were known for their arguing and legalism. As the joke goes, “Ask two Jews, get three opinions.”

These men “must be silenced” (Titus 1:11) Paul emphatically commands. He then gave the reason (“because”). First, “they are ruining whole households” by their false teachings. Whole families, even whole house churches, were disrupted, misled and in conflict. As if that wasn’t bad enough, the reason they did this was to make money. The people on Crete were known for their greed, and some had found a way to get money from the Christians. They said what would bring them the greatest financial reward. Perhaps they were selling their ‘hidden truths’ about God, or they may have been expecting the people they taught to contribute money to them. Unfortunately, there are pastors and leaders today who see the ministry as a career, a way to earn an income. They work to get larger and larger churches and more financial support.

To prove his point Paul quotes Epimenides who lived earlier and said “Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons” (Titus 1:12). Callimachus, who lived 300 years before Paul wrote, also said they were liars. Lying was not condemned on Crete but actually seen as a good way to get what one wanted. In their legends and traditions, the main god they worshiped, Zeus, lied to attract the women he wanted. They said Zeus was buried on Crete, which was also a lie.

Paul’s command to Titus was to “rebuke them sharply” (Titus 1:13). Be very clear and strong in your condemnation of them and their teachings. Don’t hold back but attack the lies (not the people) as hard as you can. Cretans were rough, harsh and uncultivated so a simple; polite rebuke wouldn’t make much difference. Paul told Timothy in cultivated Ephesus to be gentle and meek in his rebuke for that was all the people there needed. There is no right or wrong way to do this, it depends on the circumstances and God’s leading. However, it is done, false teaching must be challenged and stopped. If not, it shows the pastor either doesn’t respect the truth of God’s Word or he is afraid of what others may say about him. The reason they are to be strongly reprimanded for their error is so that they will return to the true faith (Titus 1:13).

False teaching can take many forms but on Crete it was about “Jewish myths” (Titus 1:14). The Jews had developed many stories and legends that were untrue but were passed on because people wanted to hear them. They had legends, music, oral history, proverbs, jokes, popular beliefs, fairy tales, stories, tall tales and customs that are the traditions of Judaism. These include stories of vampires and monsters, secret messages hidden in the names of people, supposed strange things God said or did in the past that aren’t in the Bible, stories and parables with odd lessons revealed only to special people. People were fascinated by these, even those that were extreme and often unbelievable. Perhaps some people feared they were true so wanted to know more about them. Others may have been looking for a short-cut to an easy, problem-free life. (To be continued in the next blog.) (September 4, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

PAUL’S ADVICE: False teachers must be confronted and corrected.

2 Peter 2:1-3 But there were also false prophets * among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. * They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord * who bought them *—bringing swift destruction on themselves. 2 Many will follow their shameful ways * and will bring the way of truth into disrepute. 3 In their greed * these teachers will exploit you * with stories they have made up. Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping.

Which false teachings do you have to deal with?

Why are they so appealing to people?

What is so dangerous about them?

What must you do to oppose them?

BLOG 165: FALSE TEACHINGS TODAY - 1 (Titus 5)

READ: Titus 1:15-16

In the previous blog we saw that false teachers are very dangerous liars and their false teachings must be corrected. Paul wasn't done speaking about them. He then explained why they caused so much trouble.

It became very dangerous when people started following "the commands of those who reject the truth" (Titus 1:14). Judaism turned into a legalistic system as it developed thousands of rules and laws which had to be followed to avoid negative consequences. Legalism is always motivated by fear: fear of what God will do to us and what others will say if we don't follow all the rules. The Jews had thousands of laws about food, working on the sabbath, how to treat others and how to serve God. When they became believers in Jesus, some of them kept these laws and regulations as Christians. They added Jesus to Judaism. The early church ruled against this at the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15, almost 20 years earlier. Paul was in conflict with these false teachers almost everywhere he went. His first letter, to the Galatians, was about this very principle.

Some who were pushing these lies were true believers but they replaced grace with works (Luke 8:13; 1 Timothy 4:1; Hebrews 3:12), others had never come to Jesus for salvation but attended church to spread their false ideas (Luke 13:27; 2 Thessalonians 2:11).

Whatever the status of their salvation, they promoted false teaching by saying Jesus wasn't enough – works were also necessary. In fact, Paul says they and their teachings are "corrupt" (Titus 1:15). While claiming others are ceremonially unclean because they don't keep kosher laws, they are the ones who are spiritually unclean in their beliefs.

Paul concluded by saying, **"They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny Him. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good"** (Titus 1:16). These are very strong words! "Unfit" means they are rejected as worthless when tested because they do not meet God's approval. Their words and works are off course.

When I was a young Christian, I was mentored by people who focused on a list of do's and don'ts – mostly don'ts. There were certain things I couldn't do, wear, read or eat. Everything was prescribed for me. The more closely I followed their dictates, the more I was accepted and praised. If I deviated, I was seen as carnal or backsliding. It took a while for me to learn I was under grace and could come to God for guidance about what He wanted for me. It's not that the things they had me do were all wrong, it's that I was doing them for the wrong reason. I was motivated by fear. If I didn't do what I was told I feared God and other Christians would reject me.

Grace is the free and unmerited favor of God as manifested in the salvation of sinners and the bestowal of blessings. It is the undeserved, unmerited, unearned favor of God. We are saved by grace (Ephesians 2:8-9) and live by grace (Hebrews 13:9).

Some false teachers try to put God's people under laws and regulations as the way to earn His love. Other false teachers say God loves us so much it doesn't matter how we live or what we do. We can do whatever we want and it's OK with Him. Both extremes are wrong. When we live by fear we lack love, joy and peace. We become critical of others and are a bad testimony to unbelievers. When we feel everything is OK, we sin and separate ourselves from God. That leads to more sin and thus we have no love, joy or peace either. Then we become a bad testimony to others as well. The Prodigal Son felt he could do whatever he wanted and ended up in misery, guilt and loss. His elder brother lived by legalism and also had no love, joy or peace. He was judgmental and critical. Both extremes are dangerous and wrong. Satan uses them to counterfeit the truth and make it seem like they are right when they are just traps to put us in bondage and defeat. (More about false teachings today in the next blog.) (September 11, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

PAUL'S ADVICE: False teachers are very dangerous and bring destruction.

Hebrews 13:9 *Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings. It is good for our hearts to be strengthened by grace, not by ceremonial foods, which are of no value to those who eat them.*

Which extreme are you more tempted to: feeling we have to do (or not do) things to earn God's love and approval or believing it's OK to do anything because God will forgive you and it will be OK?

BLOG 166: FALSE TEACHINGS TODAY - 2 (Titus 6)

READ: Titus 1:15-16

Be it money, paintings, or anything else, the most dangerous counterfeit is that which comes closest to resembling the original. The closer it is, the more deceptive it is. The same is true of God's teachings in the Bible. Satan is a liar and deceiver (John 8:44). He opposes God's truth by denying it, but he is often more successful at counterfeiting it. He makes his false doctrines seem right by having them contain some truth, but adds just enough error to make them dangerous. In the last blog we saw how he does this with legalism, laws and rules that are based on fear. They take away personal freedom and use guilt and rejection to manipulate behavior. God's Word clearly says we are under grace, not the law (Romans 6:14).

There are some who take grace to mean it is OK to sin or do whatever we want because God is a God of love and accepts everyone no matter what. It is true God is love, but that does not allow disobedience. Just because we have salvation doesn't mean we can do anything we want without suffering the consequences of that sin. That doesn't mean salvation can be lost, but fellowship with God is broken and we lose joy, peace and the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23).

Another very dangerous false teaching today is that our salvation is not secure in Jesus, that we can do something to lose it. That puts fear into a person's heart, so what they do for Jesus isn't done out of love of Him, but for themselves, to earn or keep their salvation. It's like a wife who serves her husband because she is afraid that he will reject her if she doesn't. A close, loving, trusting relationship cannot develop that way. Salvation is a free gift. There is nothing we do to get it and nothing to lose it (Ephesians 2:8-9; John 3:16-18, 36; 5:24; 6:37-40; 10:27-30; 20:30-31; Romans 4:6-8; 8:14-16, 28, 37-39; 14:8; 2 Corinthians 1:21-22; Ephesians 1:13-14; 3:12).

One of the most common lies today is that it is God's will for everyone to be healthy and wealthy when clearly very few of those who followed Jesus in the Bible were either of these. Jesus died to remove our sin, not to provide health or wealth. This lie focuses on our greed and self-centeredness. It leaves people feeling guilty and doubting their faith when they struggle with health or finances.

Similar to that deception is the one that says we can "claim" a blessing or "speak" a miracle into our lives. Only God can do that (Romans 4:17). We serve Him, we do not give Him orders. The Lord's prayer says "Your Kingdom come, Your will be done," not "My kingdom come, my will be done" (Matthew 6:10). He is the Master; we are the servant.

The misuse of speaking in tongues today is very damaging as well. Saying everyone must speak in tongues to show their salvation is contrary to Scripture (1 Corinthians 12:1-11, 30; 14). Spiritual gifts are chosen and given by God, we aren't to ask for or demand them. God gives everyone different gifts (1 Corinthians 12) and it is wrong to elevate one gift above another (1 Corinthians 12; 14). Making tongues a sign of salvation or spirituality plays into Satan's hands and causes fear, guilt and pride in people.

Many other false doctrines are prevalent today. Some deny the existence of hell or judgment. Others elevate Jesus' humanity above His deity, or His deity above His humanity when He was 100% each. A group claims we can do what Jesus did on earth through the Holy Spirit. Some people claim there are prophets today who speak on the same level as written Scripture. Others claim to know God's will for other people and tell them what God wants them to do.

A common lie today is that there are no absolutes. They reject the Bible as God's eternal standard and replace it with what they think is right or wrong. Man becomes the final determining factor, not God. Some who claim to be prophets speak as if they know what is right for everyone and they alone have God's truth.

There are many forms and variations of these errors. Everything must be evaluated by God's Word, no matter who says anything different or what reasoning they use to support it. Watch out for counterfeits – they can be very deceptive. Just because something seems close to the truth does not make it truth! (September 18, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

PAUL'S ADVICE: False teaching takes many forms but has one thing in common: it is not supported by the full truth of God's Word.

Revelation 22:18-19 I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.

Which of the false teachings mentioned above have you been exposed to?

Have any of them deceived you in the past? How did you get free?

What are you doing to protect the people in your church from being misled by these errors?

BLOG 167: CONSEQUENCES OF FALSE TEACHINGS (Titus 7)

READ: Titus 1:10-16

In the last blog we talked about some of the counterfeit teachings present today. They can seem very close to the truth but they have error in them that is dangerous and spiritually unhealthy. They can bring many terrible consequences. God's truth comes from God Himself as revealed in His Word. Anything not fully supported by God's Word is from man and not God. The Christian's responsibility is clear: We are to learn God's truth by searching God's Word. We must carefully evaluate every teaching according to God's unfailing standard. What passes the test is sound doctrine, and what fails the test is false teaching.

False doctrine mixes error with truth but true teaching shows error from truth. It takes time studying and learning God's Word to discern true from false (Hebrews 5:12-14). We must know God's truth and then hold to it and it alone. When we allow error in, even a little, the door is open for more to follow.

False doctrine keeps us from growing in holiness while true teaching leads to godliness. That which is false prevents righteousness because it focuses on what is new and different, not what is true and godly (1 Timothy 1:3-6).

False doctrine will lead to sin but Bible truth will prevent it. False doctrine allows sin to take root in our hearts and minds and work its way out in our lives. Sound doctrine confronts our sinfulness and motivates us to repent (2 Timothy 3:16-17). The doctrine contained in Scripture teaches and reproves, it corrects and trains, purges sin and motivates to righteousness.

False doctrine draws attention to leaders who teach error, while sound Bible teaching shows who is a true man of God. Church leaders must be men who know and teach truth while being able to refute what is false (Titus 1:9). If a person isn't teaching all the truth and only the truth, he can't be a pastor or leader.

False doctrine opens the door to more error but true teaching protects against falsehood. That which isn't fully God's truth weakens a church, divides people and allows openings for more false teaching to spread. That is what had happened in the church in Crete (Titus 1:9-10, 16).

False doctrine removes God's blessing but sound teaching brings more blessing. Revelation promises this (1:3; 22:7). There are strong warnings for those who fail to hold to God's truth (Revelation 2:14-16, 20-23). God blesses those who honor His word and curses those who misuse it.

False doctrine weakens the church while true teaching equips the church for times of difficulty. Learning God's Word is essential (2 Timothy 4:2), for a time is coming when churches will turn from the truth (2 Timothy 4:3-4). Paul told Timothy to "guard the deposit" that had been entrusted to him (1 Timothy 6:20, 2 Timothy 1:14). But it was not enough for Timothy to guard it personally. He was called by God to raise up the next generation of leaders who would hold to it and, in turn, entrust it to the generation after them (2 Timothy 2:2).

To summarize, false teaching is dangerous because it mixes error in with truth, keeps us from growing in holiness, leads to sin, draws attention to false teachers, opens the door to more error, removes God's blessing and weakens Christians and the church. On the other hand, true teaching shows error from truth, leads to godliness, prevents sin, shows who are true men of God, protects against falsehood, brings God's blessing and equips the church for times of difficulty.

False teaching is nothing to take lightly or ignore. It is a dangerous trick of Satan to deceive and destroy. It must be confronted and stopped as soon as possible. (September 25, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

PAUL'S ADVICE: Keep alert for any false teaching and immediately remove it.

2 Timothy 4:2-4 Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.

Are you able to discern false teaching from true? Who can you go to for help and advice?

When is it hardest for you to confront someone teaching something that is false?

BLOG 168: HOW TO SPOT FALSE TEACHING (Titus 8)

READ: Titus 1:10-16

We've been talking a lot about false teachings in these blogs. Paul kept coming back to the subject in 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus. It was a big problem then and is today as well. T.D. Jakes says that God eternally exists in three manifestations, not three persons. Greg Boyd says God knows some aspects of the future, but that other future events are outside of his knowledge. Creflo Dollar says because we are created in the image of God, we are little gods. Mormonism says God revealed new scripture to Joseph Smith that supersedes the Bible. Roman Catholicism says we are justified by faith, but not by faith alone. It seems that almost every day something new comes along trying to

counterfeit the truth. John tells us to “test the spirits” (1 John 4:1) and Paul says to “test everything” (1 Thessalonians 5:21). God holds us, as pastors and leaders, responsible to examine everything that is taught to our people and make sure it is true. But how can we distinguish sound doctrine from false? How can we distinguish teachers of truth from teachers of error?

1. The test of ORIGIN. Sound truth comes from God’s Word alone, false teaching is something man adds to God’s truth. It can be very deceptive, it may seem to make sense and the people teaching it may seem very sincere and godly, but unless it is clearly and completely taught in Scripture it is false. Truth comes from God alone (John 7:16; Galatians 1:11-12). True doctrine originates with the God who is true (Titus 1:2).

Paul warned the Colossian church to avoid doctrine that originates with man (Colossians 2:22) for it really has demons behind it (1 Timothy 4:1). God is the Father of truth and Satan is the father of lies (John 8:44). The test is this: “Does this teaching originate with God and His Word or has it been added by someone? Sometimes it’s easy to tell, but other times it can be difficult. When that happens, use the second test.

2. The test of AUTHORITY. Truth is clearly founded on and fully supported by God’s Word, but false doctrine is based on sources other than the Bible. It may be the authority of a strong leader or popular Bible teacher. It could be human reasoning and rational explanations are used to support it. Perhaps it is based on the experience of a person. Or it could come from strong emotion: it just feels so right that it must be true. We must be like the Bereans who “received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so” (Acts 17:11). They knew that all doctrines must be compared to God’s Word, His source of truth. Likewise, Paul praised the Thessalonians for their careful assessment and acceptance of his teaching because they understood its divine authority (1 Thessalonians 2:13). Sound doctrine originates in the mind of God and is recorded in His authoritative self-revelation, the Bible.

But what happens when two opposite teachings both claim the Bible teaches what they believe? How can we know which is true? Use test 3.

3. The test of CONSISTENCY. God’s truth is supported by all of Scripture, not just a few questionable passages. Scripture is consistent and does not contradict itself. There is a sameness or familiarity to true doctrine and a strangeness or unfamiliarity to false doctrine. The writer who wrote the letter to the Hebrews warned his congregation about “diverse and strange teachings,” while Paul warned Timothy about accepting “different doctrine” (Hebrews 13:9; 1 Timothy 1:3, 6:3). Both emphasize that doctrine must always be compared to the established, accepted body of truth. Those who are knowledgeable about that body of truth will be in the best position to immediately identify and refute what is false. There is no contradiction or confusion in the mind of God, therefore there can be none in the Bible either.

What the Bible teaches in one place cannot be refuted in another. Therefore, any true doctrine must be consistent with the whole of Scripture. Doctrine must never be treated in isolation, but always in the light of a correct understanding of the entire Bible. We must always let Scripture interpret Scripture. Too many false teachers isolate verses or ideas that cannot withstand the scrutiny of the whole Book.

Once we have tested doctrine and found it to be true, according to these three criteria, we can also see its soundness by its effects on us and those around us. That is test 4.

4. The test of SPIRITUAL GROWTH and GODLY LIVING. Sound doctrine brings spiritual growth (1 Timothy 4:6). Timothy is an example of this (1 Timothy 6:11, 2 Timothy 1:5). Sound doctrine produces spiritually healthy, mature, knowledgeable Christians. False doctrine leads to spiritually unhealthy, immature, ignorant Christians who may not be true Christians at all. What we believe

manifests itself in how we act. Truth is seen in holy living, falsehood and error are seen in pride, divisiveness, exclusiveness, self-righteousness and disobedience to the whole Word of God. The focus is on the false teaching and false teachers, not on Jesus.

A teaching is true when it is based on God's Word, comes from God Himself, is consistent with all of Scripture and results in holy, righteous living and spiritual growth. Anything else is to be avoided like poison – for that's what it is.

Jesus told the Christians in Thyatira to “hold fast what you have until I come” (Revelation 2:25). Paul said a church leader must stay faithful to the truth so he can teach it and rebuke those who are in error (Titus 1:9). We must do the same (1 Corinthians 5:9). (October 2 2023 Doylestown, PA)

PAUL'S ADVICE: Learn to distinguish true doctrine from false, and turn from anything false.

Titus 2:1 You must teach what is in accord with sound doctrine.

Do you understand the four tests above? Become very familiar with them so you can apply them when needed.

If there is any teaching going around which you aren't sure of, use these tests on it now.

BLOG 169: BEHAVIOR OF CHRISTIAN MEN (Titus 9)

READ: Titus 2:1-2

It's interesting that when Paul wrote his final letter to Titus he doesn't write about doctrine or beliefs. He didn't teach theology or even church order, as he did with Timothy. What he focused on was behavior: actions in daily life. We can talk about Bible truth all we want, but if it doesn't impact our lives for the better it is just that – talk. Paul started by talking about how godly leaders should live (Titus 1-9), then about how false teachers are living (Titus 1:10-16). The evidence is clear: the truth about Jesus changes lives for the better; lies containing false truths show corruption and greed within. What we believe is important, but how we put it into practice in our lives is even more important.

Next Paul wrote about how those who weren't leaders were to live. He was speaking of the Christians who made up the house churches on Crete (Titus 2:1-10). Titus was responsible to teach the people so they would know how to live godly lives. He broke it down by various groups: men, women, older and younger. Each have different roles and functions in life and in the church but they must work together as one in Christ.

Paul starts this section with a general command: **“You must teach what is in accord with sound doctrine”** (Titus 2:1). Truth is the best defense against falsehood. Paul has just warned about those teaching Jewish legalism and bringing confusion and disorder into the church. The way to keep error from taking over is to teach the truth. When people know God's Word there will be no fertile ground for lies to take hold. When people know and follow the truth, their behavior will be affected. Titus 2:1-10 explain how.

Men who are more mature (“older”) will display six signs of spiritual growth. They will be **temperate**. They will be balanced, clear-headed, vigilant and moderate in all things. Next, they will be **worthy of respect**. These men will be serious-minded, not foolish clowns whom others avoid. Third, they will be **self-controlled**, not impulsive or out of control. They will have discernment and good judgment. In addition, they will be **sound in faith** (they will trust God and His Word), **sound in love** (treat others in loving ways) and **sound in endurance** (perseverance, patience and faithfulness).

It takes God's power within to transform men. Only God's Spirit can produce that in others. Without Jesus, men will be controllers and manipulators, wanting to be in charge of everyone and

everything. Jezebel was an example of this kind of person. Others will become controlled by anger and use temper outbursts to control people. They will become very critical and unfriendly. Cain was one of these. Another sign of those without Jesus is arrogance. These people are proud, thinking about themselves, always believing they are right and others wrong. They put down others, especially those who are weak and vulnerable. An example of this kind of person is Herod. Some others become negative and critical of everything. They don't have anything positive to say but complain no matter what. They worry and whine about everything. Job's three friends showed some of these traits.

Only in Christ can we become Christlike. That's God's goal for us in our lives and in the lives of our people. It's our responsibility to teach and train our people to live in this way. (October 9 2023 Doylestown, PA)

PAUL'S ADVICE: Teach Christians to be temperate, worthy of respect, self-controlled and sound in faith, in love and in endurance.

Ephesians 4:31-32 Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

How do you do personally in these areas Paul talks about?

Do your people have these traits in their lives? What can you do to help them grow in these things?

BLOG 170: HOW CHRISTIAN WOMEN ARE TO ACT (Titus 10)

READ: Titus 2:3-8

The truth of Scripture is to be taught so people can apply it to their lives and become more like Christ. This will draw others to Him for their good and God's glory. Paul tells Titus to teach the older men to be temperate, worthy of respect, self-controlled and sound in faith, in love and in endurance (Titus 2:1-2). Paul also applies this to women.

The older, more spiritually mature women are also to be taught how to apply God's truth to their lives (Titus 2:3-5). They, too, are to show Jesus by their character and actions (Titus 2:3 "Likewise"). As examples, Paul states they are to be **"reverent in the way they live,"** meaning they are to live holy, godly lives. This means they are **"not to be slanderers"** by gossiping, criticizing and talking about others. Some people become preoccupied with others' lives and pass judgment on everything others do. Unfortunately there is no grace shown to others. This negative attitude comes from bitterness in their hearts. This is the way the Pharisees treated Jesus.

Additionally, a godly trait of mature women is that they are **"not addicted to much wine"** because it is a bad testimony and not good for their health. Proverbs has much to say against drunkenness (Proverbs 21:17; 23:20-21,31; 31:4,6). Today there are many more substances a person can become addicted to such as drugs and even caffeine in coffee, sodas and chocolate. Lot is a clear example of the dangers of becoming drunk (Genesis 19:30-38).

Instead of turning to gossip or alcohol, godly women should **"teach what is good"** (Titus 2:3). That means instructing other women in what is helpful for them. Mature women, when their children are grown and gone, should be occupied mentoring younger women, especially helping them to grow as wives and mothers (**"husbands and children"** Titus 2:4). Also they must help younger women grow in **"self-control"** (Titus 2:5) so they have sensible, good judgment. Other important traits for women to pass on to others include being **"pure"** (holy in thoughts and actions in a culture on Crete where immorality was common), **"busy at home"** (home and family their top priority, now going from

place-to-place gossiping and drinking alcohol), “**kind**” (not harsh or difficult) and “**subject to their husbands**” (not wild or a bad testimony to others).

Paul said all this is important not only for the women themselves, but for their Christian testimony to others: “**so that no one will malign the word of God.**” If the church in Crete is to help others find the peace and joy that only Jesus can bring, they need to show those traits in their everyday life to attract others to Jesus.

The young women are to do the things listed above that Paul as pointed out, and young men are also to be a good testimony for Jesus in how they live (Titus 2:6). The characteristic Paul emphasizes for younger men is “**self-control.**” This Greek word is used 4 times in this passage (verses 2,4,5,6) indicating the importance of self-restraint in all Christians, whatever their age. Many younger men hurt others and harm their own reputations and lives by impulsively doing whatever seems pleasurable at the moment. Titus was to keep warning his people about this, and by setting an example of self-control himself (Titus 1:7). As leaders, people watch us closely and learn more from what we do than what we say. When our actions don’t line up with what we say, others will see us as hypocrites and not pay attention to what we teach or preach.

We, like Titus, are to set an example that backs up our teaching so people will learn “**integrity,**” “**seriousness**” and “**sound speech**” so Christians will have a good testimony and unbelievers can’t mock Jesus (Titus 2:7-8). (October 16, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

PAUL’S ADVICE: Christian men and women must live in a godly way that brings glory to Jesus.

Deuteronomy 12:32 Everything that I command you, you shall be careful to do. You shall not add to it or take from it.

If you were teaching a new Christian how to live for Jesus, what advice would you give? List three specific characteristics that are most important.

How would you evaluate yourself on these three?

BLOG 171: BEHAVIOR OF EMPLOYERS & EMPLOYEES (Titus 11)

READ: Titus 2:9-10

It’s no surprise Paul would give instructions about how Christian men and women of various ages should live out their faith in their daily life. But his next subject might surprise us, for he tells Christian slaves to obey their masters (Titus 2:9-10). In the first century, the practice of slavery was still quite common, and often a bondservant, or slave, was seen to be less of a human being. God views someone who is a bondservant as equal to those who aren’t. His word often addresses their situation directly. Ephesians 6 has several verses talking to bondservants, the entire book of Philemon is about a bondservant, Onesimus. So we should not be surprised to find a couple of verses ending this section on the duties and responsibilities of leaders to discuss the duties of bondservants. Why? Because both older, mature believers as well as younger, maturing believers would certainly be included in this category.

Paul reminds slaves to obey their masters and try to please them, to not talk back or steal but to be trustworthy so as to be a good example of Jesus (Titus 2:9-10). In the early church, a very large percentage of the Christians were slaves. Around the world today that is still true: those who are the poorest are often the first to respond to the good news of the Gospel. Salvation sets them free from sin, but not from their responsibility to their masters. Perhaps some false teachers were saying they didn’t have to obey their masters if they were Christians, because they were equal in Christ. Can you imagine the disruption of society if every slave who became a Christian didn’t have

to obey their master? Every slave would claim to be a Christian just so they didn't have to submit to a master. Certainly slavery is wrong and must be abolished, but that wasn't the way to do it. That would bring chaos and an uproar against Christians.

The Old Testament Mosaic Law limited and regulated slavery and sought to correct its inhumane abuses (Exodus 20:10; 21:20-27). Slaves in Israel were recognized as full persons who possessed human dignity and basic rights (Deuteronomy 5:14; Job 31:13-15). Abusing one's slaves and servants was viewed as being both imprudent and immoral (Deuteronomy 23:15-16).

Still, we often wonder why Paul didn't clearly condemn slavery (Ephesians 6:5). He did, but not as directly as we would have liked. Understanding what was happening in Paul's day helps us better understand. Slavery was practiced by every ancient people of which we have any historical record: Egyptians, Sumerians, Babylonians, Assyrians, Phoenicians, Syrians, Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Greeks, Romans, and all the rest. Furthermore, during the first century A.D., approximately 85 to 90 percent of Rome's population consisted of slaves.

When we in America think of slavery, we think of three million black Africans brought across the Atlantic in chains and extreme cruelty. Roman slavery was very different. Most slaves were prisoners of war and had they not been enslaved on the battlefield they would almost certainly have been slaughtered instead. Black slaves in the USA tended to be slaves for life, but most Roman slaves could win their freedom within a decade. That doesn't mean it was right, but it does mean it is wrong for us to read these verses without being aware of our own cultural influence.

Paul's purpose was to bring spiritual freedom from sin. As important as physical freedom from slavery was, it wasn't as important as spreading the Gospel. He couldn't do both well, so he focused on salvation. When he wrote Ephesians 6:5 telling slaves to obey their masters there were about 250,000 free citizens and 400,000 slaves in Ephesus. Most of these slaves were very poor and would have starved if not fed by their masters. Freedom could bring them more problems and suffering than they already had.

The best way to do away with slavery is from the inside out, not just by-passing new laws. Masters who become Christians should treat their slaves well, and Christian slaves should set a good example in obeying their masters. When people saw the godly character of Christian slaves, they began to take Paul seriously when he argued that the slave trade was evil (1 Timothy 1:10), that slaves should gain their freedom if they could (1 Corinthians 7:21), that masters ought to view their slaves as equals (Ephesians 6:9; Galatians 3:28), and that they ought to set them free at the proper time (Philemon 16). Although governments resisted his teaching for many years, Paul's teaching eventually prevailed.

Of all the world's religions, including the three great monotheisms (Christianity, Judaism and Islam), only in Christianity did the idea develop that slavery was sinful and must be abolished. Antislavery teachings began to appear in Christian theology soon after the decline of Rome and were accompanied by the eventual disappearance of slavery in all but the fringes of Christian Europe. When Europeans subsequently instituted slavery in the New World, they did so over objection from Christians and the church. The abolition of New World slavery was initiated and achieved by Christian activists.

For us today, we may draw an application of the role and responsibilities of bondservants and masters to that of employee and employer (or boss). And notice how, just as with the first century bondservant, these last two verses will address both the older, mature believer who is an employee as well as the younger, maturing believer who is an employee. How are we, as representatives of God, to act during the work day, the work week? How do we make sure that

we are being the same people during the week that we are on Sunday? Be submissive to your master (your employer, your boss). (October 23, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

PAUL'S ADVICE: Be obedient to those you serve so you set a good testimony for Jesus.

John 15:12-13 "My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends."

How would Jesus act if He was working for your employer? Is that how you act?

How would Jesus treat your workers if they were working for Him? Is that how you treat them?

BLOG 172: MAKING GODLY CHOICES (Titus 12)

READ: Titus 2:11-15

Life is a series of choices. Every day we are making decisions about big or little things: what to wear, what to do first, how much to eat, how to respond to a question, what advice to give, how to respond to a difficulty or disappointment, etc., etc., etc. Without realizing it we are saying "yes" or "no" to options all day long. Life is made up these selections. Most may seem small, but they add up to big consequences. Living for Jesus or self is one of our main choices in life, but choices come with small decisions, not big ones. How do we react when a temptation arises to think something sinful or ungodly? When we have an opportunity to feed a lust, do we give in? Should we say or do something that feels right, but is against God's Word? What about a little gossip, or complaining or putting off something we should do? Before salvation we just do whatever we want, but when Jesus lives within us things change. Now we can, and should, **"say no to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age"** (Titus 2:12). Before salvation we couldn't resist sin but now that we have God's grace working in us, we can (Titus 2:11).

We must remember that this world is temporary and one day, maybe very soon, we will be with Jesus (Titus 2:13). The thought of being in His presence at any time can help us focus on living an obedient, holy life. Just remembering all He went through for us, to cleanse us from sin, should motivate us to live in a way that is pleasing to Him (Titus 2:14).

We are to teach our people these things as well. That's what Paul told Titus (Titus 2:15). He is to **"teach"** them. This means "to announce, reveal, disclose, make God's truth clear so listeners understand." That's God's first command to pastors and leaders: "feed my sheep" (John 21:15-17). This is to be done **"with all authority,"** meaning it is an official command to Titus. Jesus taught with authority which came from God (Matthew 7:28-30). We have that authority as well (Luke 9:1; Matthew 10:1). We have God's Word to teach and it contains God's authority as well (Hebrews 4:12). When we preach or teach, we are proclaiming what Jesus proclaimed, with His backing and authority. We have total authority to proclaim God's Word clearly and authoritatively, but not go one sentence beyond it, take anything from it, change anything in it or add anything to it. When we preach, teach, counsel or give advice we are speaking for God and conveying His truth to others.

Part of teaching is to **"encourage and rebuke."** We motivate people to keep doing right. Some Bible teachers scold and condemn, that doesn't help make people want to do better. Guilt and fear are not proper motivators. Life is hard, people are hurting and everyone needs a word of encouragement to keep doing what is right. But when someone is continually disobeying the Word we must point out their sin in a loving way, the way we would want to be corrected were we the one in the wrong. We do not do it to condemn or defeat them but to encourage them to correct their ways and move ahead in truth. All of that is part of teaching the Word.

Paul's final command to Titus in this section is **"don't let anyone despise you."** The word "despise" means to show disrespect or disregard. It's not about us personally, but it is about the One we represent and speak for. Live and speak in such a way you bring honor and glory to Jesus, then if you are rejected it is really Jesus they are rejecting. Don't ever do anything that would bring disrespect to Him!

Today you will be making many choices and decisions, small and large. Remember to make each one based on what Jesus would want because one day, maybe very soon, you'll be with Him, the One who paid for all your sins. (October 30, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

PAUL'S ADVICE: Say "no" to sin but "yes" to living a holy, godly life for Jesus. Teach others His Word so they will do the same.

Hebrews 4:12 For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

Which day by day choices do you have the hardest time with? Which tempt you to disobey?

What can you do to make the godly decision next time the opportunity arises?

BLOG 173: RESPECTING AUTHORITIES (Titus 13)

READ: Titus 3:1-7

It's been said that living the Christian life is like riding a bicycle. You are either moving forward or falling off. There is no standing still. Living for Jesus applies to all aspects of life, as Paul is reminding Titus and telling him to remind his people. That includes our relationship with the government and others in positions of leadership over us (Titus 3:1). Titus was commanded to remind the people **"to be subject to rulers and authorities"** (to obey with respect the government, employers, parents, husbands, pastors and all leaders), **"to be obedient"** (unless their command is against God's Word), and **"to be ready to do whatever is good"** (have a sincere, loving eagerness to serve others). Pastors are to teach this to the people, but first to exemplify it by their lives.

Paul continues reminding us in Titus 3:2 to teach our people **"to slander no one"** (not curse, treat with contempt or speak evil against even enemies of the church and Jesus, but to speak truth in Christian love), **"to be peaceable"** (friendly with all, not quarrelsome), **"considerate"** (gentle, moderate, fair, patient, **"and to show true humility toward all men"** (not fake but real heartfelt love for others, as Jesus does). In Titus 1, Paul used these same traits as qualifications for church leaders. Now he has applied them to everyone. Leaders are to train the people in these ways. But first, they must have these in their own lives (Titus 1:5-9).

Having spoken about humility in verse 2, Paul reminds them that all of us were unbelievers and lived as they do (Titus 3:3), so we have nothing to brag or boast about. It is only God's grace in our lives that makes us any different than unbelievers. Salvation isn't anything we can brag about or take credit for. It's only by His mercy that He reached out to us with forgiveness (Titus 3:4-6). It is only as His Spirit worked in us that we saw our guilt and need of forgiveness. Only because the Spirit revealed Jesus as the God-man, our Savior, did we turn to Him for salvation. We cannot take any of the credit. It is only His amazing grace that stood between us and eternity in hell. Instead, we will spend eternity in heaven with Him (Titus 3:7). We must show the same compassion to others that God showed to us.

Before we believed, there were thousands of steps between us and God. He took all the steps towards us except the final one. He gives us a free will and won't force anyone to believe. It's up to

us to take that final step. But we wouldn't even do that if it weren't for His Holy Spirit working in us to show us our need and His provision. All praise and glory to Him! How could we ever do anything but reach out in humility, with love and compassion, to those who are now just like we were? Perhaps God, in His mercy, will work through us to open their eyes to the good news of Jesus! (November 6, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

Ephesians 1:3-14 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For He chose us in Him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight. In love He predestined us to be adopted as His sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with His pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. In him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that He lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. ... In Him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of Him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of His will.

Take a few moments to quietly pray and think of what life would be like if God had not chosen to work in you to bring you to faith. Thank Him for it.

Apologize for any complaints against God or for taking any credit for what He has done in your life.

BLOG 174: AWAITING JESUS' RETURN (Titus 14)

READ: Titus 3:8-15

Those who preach or teach know that the conclusion to a message is very important. It is the last thought you leave with the people. It needs to summarize, conclude and motivate to action. Paul's conclusion to his letter to Titus does all those things (Titus 3:8-15).

Paul referred back to his words about doing what is good (Titus 3:1-7) to begin his final words to Titus. Again he repeated the importance of training his people **“to devote themselves to doing what is good”** (Titus 3:8). Just because one accepts Jesus' free gift of salvation and is going to heaven when they die, doesn't mean they can't or won't continue to sin in this life (1 John 1:7-10). Our old sin nature doesn't change with salvation. We receive a new nature, God's Spirit within us, so we no longer have to be controlled by sin (Romans 6:12-23). We still have a free will and can choose to sin just as we did before salvation. The pull of the flesh is still strong after salvation, sometimes stronger than before! We do not lose our salvation when we sin (1 Corinthians 3:1-23), but there are consequences. Sin blocks the working of God's Holy Spirit in us so we do not experience His peace, guidance, power and help (Ephesians 4:30; 1 Thessalonians 5:19). When God's Spirit fills (controls Romans 8:9) us, He produces His fruit in us (Galatians 5:22-23) which builds up believers and attracts unbelievers to Jesus (Titus 3:8).

Doing what is “good” means not getting into discussions and arguments about the details of what is OK for a Christian to do and what is not, especially as pertains to the Old Testament law (Titus 3:9). Paul is referring back to the legalism he talked about in Titus 1:10-16. Getting into these legalistic arguments about minor details of life is **“unprofitable and useless”** (Titus 3:9). Nothing good comes from it, but conflict, divisions, fear of doing what is wrong, pride in feeling more righteous than others and replacing grace with law result.

Try to correct these people, in fact try twice (Matthew 18:15-17). But if they continue in their error then have nothing to do with them (Titus 3:10). Don't waste your time on them nor give them the attention they crave. Warn others to not listen to them and don't give them an opportunity to speak in church. These people are **“warped and sinful”** and are **“self-condemned”** (Titus 3:11).

These are very strong words but true. Even though they may be popular and seem sincere, and people admire them and like to listen to them, we must protect our sheep by removing them from any place of influence. Suppose you were having a meal after church and everyone brought something to share, and one person brought some food with just a little bit of rat poison in it. Would you let them share it with everyone? Even if they were a nice, sincere person and you didn't want to offend the, you couldn't let others eat their poison. The same is true of false teachers. It takes only a small amount to do a lot of damage!

Paul then closed his letter with a few personal messages (Titus 3:12-15) and sent the letter on its way to Titus, and eventually to us today. We aren't able to sit with Paul and be trained by him, but by reading and following his letters to Timothy and Titus we can be recipients of his advice for us today. Do what is right and spiritually pure and teach others to do so. Those who teach anything else are to be warned, they will be rejected and removed. These are strong words but history has shown they are true. They are true for us today as well. (November 13, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

PAUL'S ADVICE: Do what is good and have nothing to do with those who teach falsehood.

Galatians 6:9-10 Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

Ephesians 2:10 For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

When others see you, do they give glory to God for the good you do?

How have you responded to false teachers who have tried to mislead people in your church?

What should you do next time someone teaches false doctrine?

BLOG 175: REASONS TO REST

We live in a time when everyone is very busy. Those who aren't always active are sometimes seen as lazy or unimportant. We assume that if someone is continually on the go they must be very important. We apply that to pastors and church leaders as well. However, this sends a wrong message to people. It says that pastors are more important than other people because they are busier, and that people shouldn't bother them with their needs because they already have more than they can do. Busy pastors may think that just because they are busy they are doing a good job. This can lead to pride. Being very busy doesn't mean a pastor is successful. It could mean they are failing in some important areas.

For one thing, God doesn't give us so much to do that we are always very busy. He gives us 7, 24-hour days and doesn't give us more than we can do in that time. He expects us to pace ourselves, have time to pray and study the Bible, take care of our health and relax and enjoy life. Jesus had the same number of hours in a day as we have and He was never rushed or busy. Neither should we be. When we are too busy, it means we are taking on work God never gave us to do. It also means we are neglecting some things He does want us to do. One of these is rest. Here are some important reasons we are to take time to rest.

God commands us to rest. Commandment #4 in Exodus 20:8-11 commands us to rest one day in seven, as God rested after creation. It is a principle in nature that animals, vegetation and all growing things grow in spurts with times of rest in between. We aren't under the law, but the principle to rest is still true today. God not only allows us to rest, He commands we do so.

We must pace ourselves. Life is a marathon, not a sprint, so we must set a sustainable pace for the long run. We are not competing with others, trying to accomplish more than them. We are not trying to impress others with all we accomplish. Too many Christians burn out from overwork. Poor health makes them ineffective in ministry and life. Pace yourself so you can keep serving God well into your later years.

Stewardship of our bodies is important. Our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). We are responsible for the care we take of them. Healthy food, daily exercise and enough sleep at night are essential for us to serve God faithfully for a lifetime. We must watch the quality and quantity of what we eat. Taking time to eat and exercise without rushing is very important.

Rest refreshes us mentally, emotionally and spiritually. All great men in church history took time to meditate, to mull over things, to think about what God was doing in their lives and to listen to His still, small voice. Our internal battery can't recharge when there is always a drain on it. Soon we will be running on empty and we won't make good choices, wise decisions or have victory over the 'little' temptations that defeat us. God's voice is best heard when we are quiet and restful. He will encourage you, give insight into the sermon you are preparing, help with that difficult leadership challenge you are facing and refresh you to move ahead in life.

Rest helps you deepen your relationship with your wife and children. Spend time enjoying your wife and building into your wife and children. They need uninterrupted, unhurried time and that can be best done when taking a break from the busy life of a pastor. After all our wife and children are our first priority and must come before our church.

So, make it your goal to have some good, refreshing, guilt-free rest this week. You may not get everything done you want to get done, but you'll get everything done that God wants you to get done – and that's a lot better! (November 20, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

Matthew 11:28-30 *“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”*

On a scale of 1 to 10, how would God grade you on your ability to follow His commands to REST?

What must you start doing this week, even today, to pace yourself better and rest more?

Ask God to show you what you are doing that doesn't have to be done and then stop doing it!

BLOG 176: THE PRIVILEGE OF PASTORING A SMALL CHURCH

I have been a pastor for well over 50 years. I pastored several different churches when I was starting out, but then spent 35 years as pastor of the last church I pastored. In America we often measure how successful a pastor is by the size of his church. If a lot of people attend his church, he is an important man. If not many come, he must not as significant. I had that idea but God taught me it wasn't true. The church I pastored was small when I started and still small 35 years later when I let another man take over for me. A lot of people had come and gone and God had done many great things through the church, but it was never large. Many times, we only had 20 or less people in our services. For a few years we had 70 people, but then many of them left.

God was teaching me that He isn't impressed with the size of a church but with the spiritual health of a church. A lot of churches are mentioned in the New Testament. We know if they were

faithfully serving Jesus or not, but we don't know the size of any of them. That isn't the most important thing to God and it shouldn't be to us, either.

Perhaps you think less of me because I didn't pastor a large church. What matters is that God doesn't think less of me because this is the church and the number of people He gave me. It was His will for it to be the size it was. In fact, there are many advantages of pastoring a small church.

For years I tried to do everything I could to make my church grow larger. Three new people would start coming, but then 4 others would leave. It just wasn't God's will for me to pastor a large church. Being large does not mean a church is spiritually healthy, and being small doesn't mean a church isn't doing all God wants it to do. Some large churches are not helping people mature and grow closer to Jesus while some smaller churches do a wonderful job of that. I used to think there was something wrong with me because my church didn't grow in numbers. Then I realized God had given me spiritual gifts in other areas and not church growth. I am not gifted at evangelism, but I am gifted in other areas. I love to teach and counsel people. I enjoy mentoring pastors.

No pastor has all the spiritual gifts, so we must focus on doing what God has given us to do. Not all doctors bring babies into the world. Some must help them grow and others take care of them when they are old. The same is true of pastors.

Jesus is not impressed with the size of our church or the amount of money in the offering. Remember the widow who brought 2 mites to Jesus? It was not the size of the gift that made Him glad but the love and dedication in her heart. God does not need our money or our skills. He can do fine without them for everything is His. What He does want from us is our love and service, wherever He has placed us. That is something we can give Him.

Pastoring a small church had many advantages for me. It allowed me to know everyone very well. I was part of their lives and they were part of mine. It allowed me time to be involved in other ministries outside my church, like spiritual warfare, discipling children and teens and training pastors in India. My family was involved in my ministry and I had more time with them. God used my small church to stretch my faith, to give me a closer view of Him working in people's lives, to give me time to minister to other pastors and Christians who weren't in my church, to build into the lives of my children and to continue the process of making me more like Jesus. It isn't a failure to pastor a small church. It's a privilege! (November 27, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

Matthew 16:18 And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.

1 Corinthians 4:2 Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful.

Do you evaluate other pastors by the size of their church? Do you think pastors of large churches are more important people than those of small churches?

Do you evaluate your own success in ministry by the size of the group you speak to? If so, confess your pride and submit yourself as a humble, unworthy servant of the Lord Jesus Christ.

BLOG 177: CONFLICT WILL HAPPEN (Conflict Resolution 1)

Conflict. We can't get away from it. From Cain and Abel until the present, nations, individuals, families, and churches have had conflict. They come from our sinful nature. James 4:1-2 says: ***"What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight."*** Only when the Prince of Peace returns will there be real peace

on earth between people. Until then, we must learn to manage our conflicts and control them so they don't control us.

Paul, Timothy and Titus faced many conflicts with other people. Most were with fellow Christians. One of the reasons Paul wrote 1 Timothy was to help him handle the problems and disagreements among people in the church at Ephesus. That's why Timothy was sent there, but he was having a hard time stopping the fights and struggles among the people. That is true of many pastors and churches today as well.

Conflict is inevitable, but it must be handled in a godly way. When those who aren't believers fight, the one who is the loudest, largest, strongest or richest usually gets their own way. There often is no satisfactory reconciliation, there is just a winner and a loser. But that isn't the way it is to be among Christians in church or in the home. It always made me sad when my children fought and didn't get along. I'm sure our Heavenly Father is sad, too, when He sees His children acting the same way.

Conflict is inevitable because we are all born naturally selfish and self-centered. We put self first. That's our sin nature. Satan stirs up our flesh and engineers' conflict wherever possible, especially among Christians in church and home.

The way of the world is to fight to win: might makes right. But the way of the cross is to look at our individual part in the conflict honestly and humbly. It's easier to blame others, much harder to overlook their faults and focus on our own. Yet God's Word says "**for ALL have sinned**" (Romans 3:23). Jesus Himself taught, "**Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye**" (Matthew 7:3-5).

It's very clear that, if we are going to follow Jesus, we must look for our own faults and part in the conflict before concerning ourselves with others. This first step is very important if there is to be true reconciliation and resolution, not just having a winner and loser. Either both parties win or no one really wins. That is especially true in marriage, but in church and individual relationships as well. (December 4, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

What might we have done, even unintentionally, to contribute to the conflict?

What could we have done to prevent or end the conflict?

Has our attitude to the other person been one of compassion and forgiveness, or is there revenge or bitterness inside?

BLOG 178: BE A PEACEMAKER (Conflict Resolution 2)

Teaching children how to get along with each other can be one of the hardest parts of being a parent. The same can be said of pastors with people who are in conflict. Even in our own marriages and relationships with others, it can be difficult to end an argument. Often, we just stop fighting but nothing is settled and hard feelings remain. The next time something comes up, all the past hurt rushes to the surface and we are back where we were.

Just ignoring problems and pretending they don't exist is no option. God says we are to "**be at peace with all men**" as far as it depends on us (Romans 12:18). That means we are responsible to bring any conflict to an end, no matter if we started it or not. Initiating resolution is our second step in conflict management, after honestly confronting our own part in the situation. Even if we are totally

innocent, we are still responsible to go to the offended person and bring healing: ***“If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone”*** (Matthew 18:15).

Jesus also said we must initiate reconciliation with someone who has something against us, even if we have done nothing to offend the person, before we can worship God. ***“So, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift”*** (Matthew 5:23-24). Jesus makes it clear that we can't be in right standing with God if there is someone not in right standing with us. Even if we haven't done anything to cause the problem, we are still responsible to do all we can to end it (Galatians 6:1). Once we know about it, we have a duty to seek out the person and resolve the issue. We can't avoid them, wait for them to come to us or expect them to apologize first. God calls us to initiate, to make the first move. That is true in marriage, in church and with everyone.

It takes humility and courage to seek to be reunited with someone who dislikes you. Apologizing is hard, especially when you aren't sure what you have done wrong. Treat them as you want them to treat you.

If you are offended by someone, and it is a minor issue or something they may not even be aware of, then the issue is between you and God. Forgive them and move on, just as you would want someone to overlooks something minor you might not even have meant.

Before going to speak to a person, pray for God's peace and guidance. It can be helpful to write out what you want to say so you know exactly how to word things. Speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15). Talk to them as you would want to be talked to were the roles reversed. ***“Don't let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen”*** (Colossians 3:13).

Listen carefully and closely to the other person's response. Don't think of what you will say next, focus on putting yourself in their place and understanding them. You should be able to accurately summarize what they say before responding. If they apologize, forgive them unconditionally and never bring it up again. Always go by the Golden Rule (Matthew 7:12). Speak to others as you would want them to speak to you. Speak the truth, but do it in love (Ephesians 4:15). When the issue is resolved, forgive and forget. Never bring it up again, even in your own mind.

If the other person is in known sin follow Matthew 18:15-17. Go to them privately and express your concern (verse 15). If they don't respond in a positive way, take one or two mature believers with you and speak to him again (verse 16). If there is still no repentance, make it known to the whole church so they can pray and encourage him to repent, and so they aren't wrongly influenced by the person in sin. If that doesn't bring repentance then treat him as an unbeliever so the Holy Spirit will bring conviction (verse 17). (December 11, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

Is there anyone who has anything against you? Have you done all you can to talk to him and bring about reconciliation?

Pray for the situation. Ask God to show you if there is anything more you can do to bring healing.

BLOG 179: WHEN PEACEMAKING FAILS (Conflict Resolution 3)

Why is it sometimes so hard to get Christians to stop fighting and get along with each other? As a person, and as a pastor, one of the things I most dislike is conflict between people, especially when I was involved. I want to do everything I can to resolve the issue and make everything smooth and good again. But I found not everyone is like that. There are some who seem to enjoy conflict. It seems there is always one or more broken relationships in their lives. Personally, I can't imagine

living like that. I have a hard time helping people like that, especially if they don't want to heal the hurts among themselves and others. Yet the Bible commands us to intervene and do all we can to restore things. What are we to do?

We have seen that conflict is inevitable and that we must initiate resolution, even if the problem isn't our fault. What are we to do if one or both of the offended parties is not willing to reconcile? It can't just be ignored, for it is like an infected wound that poisons the whole body. Disagreements between believers poison the whole Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:25-27). They must be resolved.

If you can't bring the situation to a healthy conclusion, then go to a pastor or mature church leader to help (Matthew 18:15-17; Philippians 4:2-3). Outside help can be a good way to keep emotions in check and help rational communication develop. Bring in someone who is neutral and objective and be receptive to advice they may give you about what you can do to help. God uses wise Biblical counsel so be open to God working through the mediator.

Believers should be able to resolve issues between them so they don't have to go to unbelievers for resolution for that would be a poor example and witness (1 Corinthians 6:1-8). If you are in the wrong do whatever you can to end the problem as quickly as possible (Matthew 5:25-26).

If nothing else works, both parties should agree to go to a neutral arbitrator and explain the situation clearly and honestly. Before entering the process, both parties must agree to abide by the conclusions of the mediator. That is better than paying lots of money to have unbelieving lawyers and judges decide the matter. Peace among brothers is more important than personal rights or revenge for hurts.

Sometimes, no matter what you do to resolve problems with those who have something against you, or those in your church who are in conflict, the problems continue. Sometimes one or both parties won't reconcile. What are we to do then? Romans 12:18 tells us. **"If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone."** We are commanded to live at peace with everyone, but it takes two for that to happen. If we have done everything possible and have done everything that is dependent on us to do, then we can do no more. We can only walk away from the issue. Pushing can just make things worse, and take away our peace from us. Jesus understands. He tried to reconcile with those who disliked Him, but they would have none of it so He walked away from them. Jesus did that and told His followers to do the same (Matthew 10:14; Luke 9:5). So did Paul (Acts 13:51). Pray for them and the situation, and watch that unforgiveness or resentment does not build in your heart. Love them, forgive them and move on. (December 18, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

2 Corinthians 13:11 "Finally, brothers and sisters, rejoice! Strive for full restoration, encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you."

Is there anyone you have had a long time conflict with? What can you do now to help resolve it?

Are there any broken relationships in your life that you have been unable to mend? Pray for that relationship and ask God to help you to love them and forgive them. Pray for them as well.

BLOG 180: LESSONS FROM CONFLICT IN PHILIPPI (Conflict Resolution 4)

Conflict among believers is nothing new. Paul faced it with two close friends and fellow workers in Philippi who weren't getting along. READ Philippians 4:2-9. ***Philippians 4:2-3 I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord. Yes, and I ask you, loyal yokefellow, help these women who have contended at my side in the cause of the***

gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life. This disagreement was so severe everyone knew about it. We don't know what happened to turn these two partners into enemies, but they couldn't resolve the issue so Paul asks a mature believer to step in and bring restoration.

Paul next writes about how Christians should live and act, but probably still has the conflict he mentioned in mind. Therefore, these next verses address the issue as well as all of life. We can find clear principles here about how to get along with others.

1. REJOICE IN THE LORD ALWAYS 4:4 *“Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!”* Even in difficult situations, like conflict with others, we are to rejoice in Jesus – not because of the problem but in spite of it. Paul repeats this command twice for emphasis. Despite being in pain, we can rejoice because our joy does not come from our circumstances but because of all Jesus has done for us (Philippians 2:1-11). Joy is a byproduct of faith that God allows difficult situations for a good purpose (Philippians 1:18-21).

2. LET YOUR GENTLENESS BE EVIDENT TO ALL 4:5a *“Let your gentleness be evident to all”.* Commit to having a very most open and teachable spirit. Look to your own part and what to do to improve, don't focus on the other (log & speck Matthew 7:3). Don't gossip to others, criticize, defend yourself or attack the other – let God work in you and him.

3. REMEMBER THE LORD IS NEAR 4:5b *“The Lord is near.”* You are not alone; God is with you. God will protect and defend you at the right time and in the right way.

4. DON'T BE ANXIOUS ABOUT THE CONFLICT BUT ASK GOD TO RESOLVE IT 4:6

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.” I fear conflict and confrontation – they bring me great stress and anxiety. I am learning to turn it over to God and let Him take care of it and me. Don't go to others to fix the problem, seek God's advice and help

5. GUARD YOUR HEART AND MIND WITH GOD'S PEACE 4:7 Even when it doesn't seem to make sense to do so. God promises *“And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”* Pray for the fruit of peace in your life, turn from thoughts that bring stress or pain. Turn them over to Jesus.

6. FIND SOMETHING PRAISEWORTHY IN OPPONENT 4:8 *“Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.”* Find something good and positive about other person and the problem. Don't just look for the negative and magnify it

7. FIND GOOD ROLE MODELS AND CONTINUE PRACTICING THESE THINGS 4:9 *“Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.”* Paul endured much opposition and criticism. He suffered conflict with many believers (Philippians 1:12-20). Knew what it was like, so he is a good example of how to respond during it. You can find other good examples in the Bible or in the lives of those you know. Learn from them. Respond as they would.

When our enemies are enemies of the cross (Philippians 3:18) and are spreading evil (Philippians 3:2), we must stand firm in the Lord against them (Philippians 4:1). When they are fellow believers, we must work together to bring reconciliation to the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:25-27). (December 25, 2023 Doylestown, PA)

Which of the principles above can help you in your current situation?

How can you apply these truths to your life and relationships?

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