

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Peter, 6 April 2020

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To God's elect, exiles scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance. 1 Peter 1:1-2 (NIV).

Let's walk with the Apostle Peter for awhile, shall we? Throughout the 10 years of this blog, we've visited Moses, David, Solomon, Mark, John, James, Paul, and (possibly) Barnabas (in Hebrews); nobody really knows who wrote the book of Ruth. So now, for the next few months, let's read some of the things Peter wrote.

You know Peter: Cephas; Simon Peter. The rock on whom Jesus would build the church. I like Peter (because I like fishermen, and Peter was a fisherman before Jesus came on the scene). He gives me hope: if Christ can use Peter for His work (as well as Peter's sometime-competitor, Paul), then Christ can use me. I like that Peter was a common man. Beyond learning what all Jewish boys did, he probably had little or no other formal education. He had a family, or at least a wife. As a fisherman, he probably worked very hard, usually all night (which is when fish bite). He was probably burly, brusque, and maybe even profane; see his rant while he was denying Christ after the arrest in Gethsemane.

In other words, Peter was probably a lot like you or me. After Jesus' resurrection, Peter did indeed help form the early church, and went on to be selected as the first pope. Tradition holds that he was crucified in Rome under Nero, and is buried under the high altar at St. Peter's Basilica in the Vatican (archaeology has largely confirmed this or something very much like it).

And he embraced change, first in Jesus' message, then in spreading the church far beyond where he, personally, ministered. Peter was the one to whom Christ revealed that all things – and all people – were made ceremonially clean. He erased Peter's hang-up's about traditions, and opened his mind to new possibilities. Where Peter and Paul were sometime-competitors for church leadership, it was Peter who embraced Paul's work and then found ways to encourage him to do it.

Peter is one of the people I most look forward to meeting in heaven. I want to hang out with him, maybe share a beer and ask him what it was like to go fishing with Jesus. Or to be whisked out of jail by an angel. Or what Pentecost felt like. Let's spend a few weeks journeying through the letters Peter left for us.

For further reading: Matthew 24:22, James 1:1, Acts 2:9, Romans 8:29, 1 Peter 1:3

Lord Jesus, thank You for the words of your friend, Peter.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Peter, 7 April 2020

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. 1 Peter 1:3 (NIV).

Have you noticed increased blessings during this time of quarantines? Here we are, as a nation and as a world, collectively locked up in our houses, and the blessings keep on coming. We're alive. Real treatments for this virus are emerging. Far fewer people have actually gotten sick (or died) than the "experts" predicted. And the powers-that-be are reported to be hard at work on solutions to ease the world out of lockdown.

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ for that. If that's too wordy for you, say it again and it won't seem so long. Then remind yourself that it was first said, enthusiastically, by Peter, who had forsworn Christ before Christ restored him.

And then remind yourself that God IS worthy of praise, especially now. Right now, there are more people in the world drawing closer to God for comfort and peace. Right now, we're finally recognizing our first responders, nurses, doctors, and military as the selfless heroes they are. Right now, God is preserving us for new things, great things. Right now, it's Holy Week, which came whether there are full church buildings or not.

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has been merciful and has given us a new birth into His living hope. Which is a promise. It isn't a wish: it's a guarantee.

During this shutdown, I'm thankful to have been busier than ever. My daughter's yard sign business is thriving and her calendar is full of bookings for the first time. My other daughter and her husband just bought their first house. My son and his wife are working together on his welding business which is drawing them together while earning them plenty of money. My wife has kept her dance company employer open by adapting to new technology, sending practice videos, delivering costumes, and scheduling around the constant changes. These

Praise be to God who has resurrected our souls and will resurrect our world here in His good time, as He sees fit. Because He knows best. Who knows what will happen in our world after this virus passes away (and it will). What we considered normal before this will change, but it can change for the better. The same God to Whom we're giving praise here is still here, active in whatever is happening around us. He is the same God who resurrected Peter's friend, Jesus, from that garden tomb. He's the same God who promised it to us. Praise God from Whom all blessings flow. Especially now.

For further reading: 2 Corinthians 1:3, Ephesians 1:3, Hebrews 3:6, 1 Peter 1:4

All praise all the time to You, Lord.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Peter, 8 April 2020

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. 1 Peter 1:3-5 (NIV).

Living hope. In 1 Samuel, Hannah (the mother of Samuel) sings that "(the Lord) will guard the feet of his saints." Even when misfortune, disease, and death attack us, the Lord is guarding what matters most about us. Our hearts and the faith that flows from them are guarded by God and protected by His Son for the guarantee – the living hope – of eternal life.

Last night, our Tuesday night Bible group was talking about how God's greatest gift to us is His peace, that His peace gives us reason to rejoice. Even in the worst moments, when we reach to God for help, He imparts His peace to us, and that makes things turn for the better. Sometimes, we even tell ourselves "well, I suppose that's better than nothing" and miss noting how true this really is.

That's because God's peace is the antidote to nothing. Nothingness is what's promised to those who reject His saving grace. In the life everlasting, those who reject Him here are promised nothing of Him, that He will remove His protection over the feet of saints who reject Him. That includes His love. Where He has always provided us with peace, love, and hope here, if we have rejected these things, He turns us over to the nothingness of life without Him. Life forever without Him. Oblivion would be welcome compared to living forever without any hope of God's love of even looking at us.

Imagine going through something like an epidemic without God's peace. Imagine facing the dread of every day without knowing there is a living hope, a living guarantee, of God Himself shielding us from the best attacks of the evil one. Imagine living a life so self-centered that we can only think of giving ourselves praise instead of God. Imagine the ultra-desolation of living without love.

There are people who live like that now. In times like these, they're even more desperate. Today, even in quarantine, let's find a way to reach out to someone to share a little living hope. Peter wanted us to know that, even in the worst of times, we get to shine because God has given us Himself as our true inheritance. He wanted us to know we're never alone, that we're bound for glory, and that our best is yet to come.

Because of living hope.

For further reading: 1 Samuel 2:9, John 10:28, Romans 8:18, 1 Peter 1:6

Lord Jesus, You are my living hope. Thank You today!

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Peter, 9 April 2020, Maundy Thursday

In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. 1 Peter 1:6 (NIV).

Consider these words from the Apostle Peter in light of today being Maundy Thursday. They were first written by a man who was THERE that first one. Consider things from his perspective.

You're Peter and it's Thursday morning in Jerusalem, somewhere around AD 33 (though nobody knows it's AD 33 because the calendar we use won't come into existence for another 1550 years). Maybe you and Jesus hung out yesterday; maybe you just had a day with your family; nobody knows what happened that Wednesday of Holy Week. Maybe you had a day of rest because you're going to need it. You don't know it but the most important few days of your life – of all history – are about to take place right in front of you.

Because now it's Thursday in AD 33 Jerusalem and it's been a strange week in the old city. There was a long, meandering walk the last few weeks and Jesus has been teaching some pretty hefty material, some moving but radical things about forgiveness and death and the end of the world. On Sunday, you arrived in the city and it seemed like the whole city was heralding the arrival of a new king. On Monday, you and Jesus were in the temple and he was TICKED OFF, turning over tables and cleaning out all the trash who had corrupted it. The other night, you were with Jesus at dinner when one of the women came in and broke an expensive jar of perfume over Jesus' head and He was talking about how she was preparing Him for burial. In fact, when you think about it, Jesus has been talking a LOT about dying. It's a lot to absorb.

Now it's Thursday and Jesus told you and John to go find a certain place and make preparations to eat the Passover meal there. Once again, you see how Jesus uses His God-given way to know exactly what is going to happen. He gives you instructions to go find a particular man who will have a room ready for you and the other eleven disciples and Jesus to have the meal. During that meal, Jesus takes the ancient rite and does something completely new with it. Afterwards, you all make your way out to a garden outside of the city...except Iscariot. Where did he go? What's going on?

All you know is that it's strange, and you feel you're on the verge of something big. That something bigger than you is happening around you. And that's all very true. And mysterious. Rejoice in it, because there has been and will be more suffering, yet the Lord has much bigger, better things in store.

For further reading: Romans 5:2, 1 Peter 1:7

Lord, let me contemplate today the beginnings of Your passion and all that happens next.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Peter, 13 April 2020

These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. 1 Peter 1:7 (NIV).

When is Jesus revealed?

It's the day after Easter; the first Monday of a new era, of a post-resurrection era. Yes, this Easter-thing does happen every year; it has happened for many hundreds of them. Yet every Easter Monday it feels somehow new, a real new year instead of just some arbitrary date in the equinox cycle. It feels new because we've spent time focusing on the central event in all human history: when Christ resurrected Himself from our curse of death. He revealed Himself to be exactly who He said He was: God Immanuel.

Jesus is also revealed in the moment when a new believer accepts Him as God and Savior. For some people, that's today. Especially during this COVID-lockdown, Jesus has revealed His heart to all kinds of new believers. People who had relied on Allah, or the Buddha, or themselves, or a thousand Hindu gods found those were just worthless idols. It's only Jesus who gives peace even in the worst times, and when a new believer accepts Him for who He is, He reveals Himself in miraculous ways: ways they want to share.

Jesus is revealed in the last days. Many people are looking for signs that these days are the time when the Ancient of Days will come back in the sky to usher in eternity. Maybe that is happening now; maybe not yet. Yet He promised He would reveal Himself then and, because His promises are always the promises of hope, this is one we can only hope for. When it happens, it will be the best – or worst – moment of our lives. What will it mean to you?

And Jesus is revealed when you notice how He has provided you with everything. When you realize your selfishness is so worthless but His selflessness means everything. Especially now, when we seem cut off from the rest of the world; when we're scared and hesitant and anxious instead of rejoicing. Even during these times, Jesus is the merciful God of grace who provides. We breeze through our lives without even giving notice to what He's doing. Because you and I have time on our hands, maybe we should stop to consider Him?

Today is the day after Easter and the resurrection is fresh on our minds. Church service or no, the holiday still came. Church service or no, Jesus still rose from death and is eagerly awaiting His time to return and make all things new. To reveal Himself once more. To you.

For further reading: Job 23:10, Psalm 66:10, Proverbs 17:3, Isaiah 48:10, James 1:3, 1 Peter 1:8

Lord Jesus, reveal Yourself again in these troubled days. Let these days of testing end to find me still holding fast to You.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Peter, 14 April 2020

Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy. 1 Peter 1:8 (NIV).

This is an underrated verse. Maybe it should be more widely discussed, more widely known. Peter was writing it to people he knew in and around the Mediterranean who had come to faith after Jesus had ascended to heaven. They never knew Jesus personally, as a man, as Peter had. Yet they believed in Jesus anyway, gave Him their faith and their love unconditionally. They believed in Jesus without seeing Him in person.

You and I: we can almost certainly identify with that.

Having said it, I know of people who claim to have met Jesus. It wasn't meeting Him as a human, yet He spoke to them all the same. I know people who know, deep inside of themselves, that they have met Jesus in their greatest moments of both need and peace. I know people in my close circle of family and friends who will tell you they have encountered Jesus and that He changed their lives, even saved them from certain death.

In a way, I'm jealous. It isn't covetous jealousy. Instead, it's the kind of longing that wishes I could have an experience like they did. They've had experiences I don't fully understand and I want to understand them. Perhaps, in God's good time while in this life, I will. Until then, this is good enough. I can love Jesus the same for times when it matters most.

Five years ago, I held my mother's hand when she died. Nothing momentous occurred to delineate her passing from this life to the next; there were no earthquakes or flashes of light or miraculous occurrences. On a typical Friday morning, one minute she was breathing and her heart was slowly beating; the next she wasn't. I was in shock that it was even happening, yet I was also at peace. In her last moments of lucidity, Mom said her goodbyes to all of us in the room, and understood that she was dying. And she was at peace with it. All her life she had believed in Jesus, even as she almost regularly intellectually questioned so much about Him. In that moment when she died, that belief mattered most because Jesus was there, on the other side of the heartbeat, waiting to return her love. She loved Him and believed in Him, and lived a life full of inexpressible joy. All her questions were answered simply in meeting Christ.

Just like they will be for us. I identify with not having yet met Christ man to man, but I know He's real, and that He is who He said He is, and that I believe in Him. Knowing all that, I'm content to simply follow Him.

For further reading: John 20:29, 1 Peter 1:9

Lord Jesus, I believe in You.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Peter, 15 April 2020, Tenth Anniversary

Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls. 1 Peter 1:8-9 (NIV).

Today is a milestone; it isn't a big milestone for the world, but it's a big one in my life. Today is the 10th anniversary of this blog. It started as a response to the worst time in my life, when I had wrecked my family. A friend told me I should read one verse from the Proverbs every day, then pray on it and write about what it meant. Ten years and sixteen books later, here we are. WordPress says that, counting today, there are 1754 posts under "Practical Proverbial." You're reading words shared with several thousand people regularly on five continents.

The words proclaim that Jesus is still the only salvation for our souls and we still want to learn more about Him. That's the only purpose of these writings; if they ever become something other than that, I encourage you to stop reading immediately. Then please contact me and call me out. Until then, if this helps reinforce your belief in Him, then AGTJ and let's keep at it.

Let's keep at it because the benefit we get from believing in Jesus is life everlasting. It's peace today and forever. It's tranquility in the face of trials; calm instead of chaos. There is real liberation in knowing Christ has forgiven everything that could ever drag you down or leave you feeling guilty. That He, who made everything and is over everything, has already done away with the pain over the things you don't want to admit are true. You and I would hold things against each other. Jesus doesn't. He did away with the guilt-motivation to do that.

That's why I write these and hope they find you in a place where they help you draw closer to Jesus, maybe understand the Scripture a little better. It isn't about me: it's about talking about what Jesus said through the Word in the context of things happening here and now, things to which we can relate. We still feel guilt over our sins just the same as the people of Peter's day. We still live with epidemics, wars, terror, and fear. I didn't understand much about the Scriptures until I was a grown man. I was late to the game. I do these to maybe help someone else get there sooner.

And I still have much to learn; perhaps we all do. As long as God gives the words and you read, we'll keep it up. So thanks for being here!

For further reading: Romans 6:22, 1 Peter 1:10

Lord Jesus, thank You for all these friends and words. And thank You for ways to share them across our world.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Peter, 20 April 2020

Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of the Messiah and the glories that would follow. 1 Peter 1:10-11 (NIV).

Nobody in the ancient world knew precisely when the Messiah would appear. Scriptures recorded hundreds of prophecies, and each one contained a small piece of the overall prediction. Yet none of those gave the exact date and time and precise location. It was known He would be born in Bethlehem, and that he would be born of a virgin, and there were dozens of details about His life that were disclosed ahead of time. But nobody could put them all together to tell exactly when and where and even how all this would happen.

Until it did. Until then, it didn't really matter.

Two thousand years later, most of the world still doesn't believe this. Of those who do believe, many search intently with the greatest care to know the hour and minute that the Messiah will return in the manner He said He would. There are many reasons for this; some of them are even valid. Boil away those reasons, however, and we're left with the best advice of all: be ready now.

Until it happens, it won't matter. When it happens, it will have mattered most of all. Be ready. Receive Him and believe now. Do it today. You'll find that everything you needed to do was already done by Him.

We can and should embrace salvation here and now because Jesus Christ gave us His Spirit to bring us salvation. He sent His Spirit at Pentecost and it has been at work worldwide ever since. We don't need to know the date and time of Christ's return to know that the salvation He gave can be ours right now. Predicting when Christ's return happens is a fun exercise but it doesn't matter much other than landing on "be ready." What matters so much more is sharing Jesus in any number of ways with our fellow women and men who don't believe in Him. Jesus died for them, too, and wants them to have His life everlasting the same as you or me. He gave us to them to share His invitation.

So do it now. Don't waste another day. As Peter said, "the glories that would follow" are both the peace of God here and now and life through Him forever. Share His word in how you talk and act. Live out the Galatians 5 fruits of the Spirit in what you do. Share it in some way today. The Messiah has come, and gone, and will return. Until that happens, be ready now.

For further reading: Matthew 26:24, Acts 16:7, Galatians 5:22-23, 2 Peter 1:21, 1 Peter 1:12

Lord Jesus, come quickly. I'm ready now.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Peter, 21 April 2020

It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things. 1 Peter 1:12(NIV).

Peter knew something that the angels didn't. He had seen things, felt things, received THE thing that angels praise Jesus for but had personally never encountered. The angels don't need redemption, don't need salvation. They're sinless beings who live with God the Trinity in heaven. When angels interact with us, they do so without being contaminated by our sins, so that they can stand blameless before God without needing a savior. Angels don't need saving like people do, because angels haven't committed the sins we have. Because angels aren't human.

But angels aren't made in the image of God Himself like humans are. Peter understood this; Peter was just a man. Peter had seen the ministry of Jesus up close and personal for over three years. He had laughed, cried, been angry, been joyous, been REAL with Jesus for that whole time. Peter had seen Jesus raise people from death, had walked on water to Jesus, had been with Jesus when Moses and Elijah appeared and he saw Jesus as He is seen in heaven. Peter had spoken with, touched, eaten with the risen Jesus on that first Easter. Peter was one of the twelve who had been personally touched by Holy Spirit when He arrived on the scene at Pentecost. And Peter was the man who raised the beggar from paralysis, who was beaten and imprisoned and freed by an angel; who confronted Saul after his conversion; who repeatedly confronted the Sanhedrin and refused to recant his faith or bow down.

And Peter still needed saving. Just like me. Just like you.

Peter was one of the people Jesus sent into the world – into our lives through their words and examples – to minister to strangers like us. Peter had met and seen angels, yet the angels weren't sent to minister to the world. It was Peter (and John, Matthew, James, Paul, and the rest) who took the message of salvation from Jerusalem to every corner of the known world...and then beyond that. As a boy, the (likely) illiterate fisherman probably never dreamed his life would move along this trajectory, but it did. It did by the grace of Jesus. Like yours and mine.

Peter knew something that the angels didn't. He knew, deep inside, the saving love and peace of his friend and savior, Jesus. He had experienced it in the presence of angels so he could share it in the presence of strangers. We know it too.

For further reading: Luke 24:49, 1 Peter 1:13

Lord Jesus, thank You for Your friend, Peter. Thank You, too, for the angels who ministered to him and to us, who do Your bidding then and now as You will.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Peter, 22 April 2020

Therefore, with minds that are alert and fully sober, set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming. 1 Peter 1:13 (NIV).

Jesus' returning wasn't some wild idea to Peter (or the other apostles). To them, the return of Christ was a certainty. They had seen Him alive after death. The miracle of returning was easy to believe in. They never lived to see it.

That must have been dismaying. After all, they had shared life with Jesus while He was here, and then they had shared Him again after He resurrected. All that Jesus had preached about the kingdom of heaven had been proven conclusively true. They knew it in their hearts. Then they saw Him rise into the sky and disappear. Weeks later, they had experienced the full rush of Holy Spirit as He flew through them to give them tools they needed to go out into the world and minister. For the rest of their lives, they felt Jesus' presence in their hearts when they told the stories of things He said and did, when they saw new believers come to faith in Christ.

Yet they waited for Jesus to come back the way He said He would and, through the rest of their lives, it didn't happen. Here in our lives, thousands of years later, it still hasn't happened. That could be dismaying for us as well.

Or, just maybe, it's a beautiful thing. Maybe it means that, like Peter, you and I are still sent into our world to share the Jesus we know to be true in our hearts as well. My friend, Mark, says he doesn't believe the end times are actually near yet because the Gospel still isn't being preached in every part of this world. Nearly 1/7 (or more) of the human race still doesn't have access to the Word of God. That is a LOT of people who Jesus wants us to reach.

So, it's a beautiful thing that the Lord of all creation would use imperfect people like us to do His handiwork. Jesus did promise to return and make all things new. He gave us signs to look for so that we might pay attention to what He's doing in the world and ready ourselves for His return. More importantly, He gave us fore-knowledge of those signs of His coming return so that we might help others know Him and be ready to live with Him forever, too.

The very last words of the Bible exhort God's grace to the reader of Revelation. John makes this blessing after immediately reminding us that Jesus told him "yes, I am coming soon." It has been two thousand years of "soon" but His promise is as imperative in our world as it was in John's and Peter's. Even so, come quickly, Lord Jesus.

For further reading: Revelation 22:20-21, 1 Peter 1:14

Lord, I am eager for Your return!

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Peter, 23 April 2020

As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. 1 Peter 1:14 (NIV).

Let's talk about ignorance. "Ignorance" means "not knowing." It isn't an insult to not know something. It isn't an attack when Peter insinuates that you may be ignorant of the love of Jesus, of the lessons of Jesus. It may very well be that nobody ever told you, or that you never took the initiative to learn. In our world, to not know something seems almost like a form of innocence. Ignorance is a factual state of existence.

In this part of Scripture, Peter is talking about people who did not understand that ignorance of Jesus Christ means subtly choosing death over life.

To paraphrase David Platt, if you don't know Jesus, you're damned. Yes, that's a harsh truth, but a truth it still is. In fact, it's so harsh that I hope I'm understanding it wrong. Our God is the God of love, justice, and mercy but He's always true to His word. My friend, Vern, says he wouldn't be surprised if God had found a way beyond our understanding to save everyone, even those who don't know Him. I agree with my friend's wish, his desire that God's mercy be so fantastic and beyond my comprehension that He has found a way to save even the people who are ignorant of Him. Maybe even the people who reject Him, too.

Yet if that isn't the case, if not knowing Jesus is a form of rejecting Him, then the ignorance of Christ may just be the worst of all possible evil desires. Peter is telling his friends that, as believers in Jesus, they have been given knowledge of right and wrong behavior, of right and wrong thought; of life over death. Peter is rejecting our interpretation of ignorance being an innocent thing but, instead, is calling it out as a willful thing. When our minds are fully alert and sober (as Peter advised in the verse previous to this one), we will be on the lookout to avoid thoughts and actions that render un-ready for Christ's imminent return.

That especially includes ignorance. When we're given the opportunity to learn about Jesus, to pursue Him, to embrace faith in Him, we need to jump at it. We need to not only learn about Jesus: we need to put all our faith in Him. All our trust, all our hope, all our thoughts, all our dreams and wishes and aspirations and everything. We need to put everything at His feet and follow.

To do anything less is to embrace faithless ignorance of Him. To do anything less is sin. And to embrace sin over Jesus is embracing damnation. Jesus either is the way, the truth, and the life, or He isn't. Are you ignorant?

For further reading: Romans 12:2, Ephesians 4:18, 1 Peter 1:15

Lord Jesus, YOU are the only truth, the only salvation, the only Way.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Peter, 27 April 2020

But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy." 1 Peter 1:15-16 (NIV).

My Concordia Bible references this verse to the Lord's Prayer. That makes sense when you consider that the first line of it says, "Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Your Name."

Because He is holy. To be holy is to be consecrated, sinless, clean, without error or blame. That's God; that's Jesus. Is it you?

Do you or I ever step back from our daily lives to consider that God sees us as holy? When God the Father looks at us, He looks at us through the lens of the perfect life of His Son, Jesus. He sees Dave Terry as His very good creation. Instead of seeing all the ways I've messed up His very good creation, He sees me covered in Jesus. The blood in my veins is His blood. The clothes I wear are His royal robes that are sparkling white. The look on my face is careworn but through love, not trials. When God the Father looks at me or you, He sees us through our faith in Jesus and doesn't even remember that we've ever done X, Y, or Z.

God sees us as holy.

So how are you doing with that, today? Have you messed up your holiness yet on this last Monday in April? I'm betting the correct answer is "yes." Maybe you've already messed up big today; maybe you've barely scratched an indiscretion. No matter what has happened, chances are that, because you're a human being, something has already happened, because of you, that put up a wall of sin between you and God. But then here comes Peter with his call for us to be holy. It's barely Monday here and already I've tanked that expectation for the week. How can this ever be?

You know the answer. You really do. You're a smart, discerning, Spirit-led person of faith. You're no longer ignorant of the saving faith of Jesus or the fact that He's coming back soon to make all things new. You know the Father, Son, and Spirit are holy, and you know deep inside that they see you as holy, too. And when we put a divide between ourselves and God, the ONLY way to bridge that divide is to go back to Jesus. Yet again; maybe again and again. To go back, confess our wrongs, and submit to Him again (and again and again). He sees us only in love and forgiveness. It's we who see ourselves as something else.

Pray that Lord's prayer again today and give it another go. And be holy because He has made us holy.

For further reading: Leviticus 11:44, Isaiah 35:8, Matthew 6:9, Revelation 21:5, 1 Peter 1:17

Lord Jesus, YOU make me holy. Lead me to think and act holy in Your service today.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Peter, 28 April 2020

Since you call on a Father who judges each person's work impartially, live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear. 1 Peter 1:17 (NIV).

Let's talk about fear. It probably isn't what your first reaction says it is. Fear definitely isn't what our current culture teaches it should be.

Peter isn't talking here about trepidation or dread. He isn't talking about God intimidating us into supplication or compliance. He isn't talking about being afraid. The apostle is talking about respect, the kind of fear that you have for an authority figure who you trust means well for you but is still more powerful than you.

Peter had lived most of his adult life intimately knowing and serving the God of whom he had great reverent fear. Peter had seen, touched, and loved his friend, Jesus, as a fellow man before he recognized Jesus as the Christ. In fact, Peter had been the first of the disciples to state this fact. He was also the one who most publicly denied even knowing Jesus on the day He was murdered. Later, it was Peter who Jesus personally restored to leadership, demonstrating the difference between living in regret and letting it go. And still later than that, it was Peter to whom Jesus revealed that all foods were clean and, consequently, all Jewish customs had been rendered mere tradition, which opened men to teach the Gospel for all the world to believe.

If you were Peter, you'd trust that power, too. You or I would hopefully trust it in wonder and awe; Peter did.

Remember that the people to whom Peter addressed his two letters had (mostly) come to know Jesus as we did: through faith. Perhaps some had seen or met Jesus during His time on the Third Rock, but most probably hadn't. They believed in Jesus because the Spirit had touched their hearts to grasp Peter's testimony as the truth. It's natural, then, that Peter would advise his friends to be mindful of the fact that the brutality of this world isn't what we're meant for. We're meant to live in God's peace, both now and forever. We're meant to be part of heaven now until the time when we're physically part of it later. We're meant to carry the message of forgiveness of sins, resurrection of the body, and life everlasting to a world skeptical of and hostile to that message. And we're meant to be instruments playing our part in the orchestra of an awesome God who creates and manages all things yet still loves us enough to come to us and teach us His music individually, one note at a time.

That's a good reason to have awesome fear. That's a good kind of fear to know. Peter understood it. So should we.

For further reading: Matthew 16:27, Acts 10:34, Hebrews 11:13, 1 Peter 1:18

Lord Jesus, You're my God and I'm in awesome fear of You. You are splendor, glory, love, purpose, hope, and eternity.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Peter, 29 April 2020

For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. 1 Peter 1:18-19 (NIV).

Today is my wedding anniversary. 31 years ago today, the most wonderful lady on Earth said the words to become Mrs. Terry. Through so many up's and down's, rights and wrongs, and changes, and family, and all the world has thrown at us, we've made it this far. We're half way to 62, which is a good place to start.

Through these 31 years, we've come together because of being believers in Jesus. We've known sin; we've known blessings. Faith in Him is our foundation. In our marriage, that has become a real thing, an enduring bond, what keeps us as one as a couple, as Kim and Dave, as Mom and Dad, and as Mimi and Pops. She and I were both raised in Christian homes but Christian homes with varying see-saw degrees of Christianity. That's probably true for most people. Our faith ebbs and flows over time, but it, like a river, it generally flows towards its ultimate destination.

But together we've come to understand that the precious blood of Christ that purchased us from the emptiness of life without Him is the blood that both washes us clean and holds us together. Without Him, there's no protection for us. Without Jesus, there is no reason to be married, or have a family, or even to try to live happily here on the Third Rock. Without Jesus, we're just unsaved sinners, lost souls in a hopeless world from which the only escape is oblivion. Without Jesus, none of this makes any sense.

Especially during hard times. Our world is going through some now. Mankind 2020 doesn't know how to handle this, at least not in progressive America. It doesn't really matter how we all got here. We're here now. What are we going to do about it?

If you don't know what to do, come join Hunnie and me in devotions. First go to the cross and get rid of your sins there. Embrace them, confess them, then really let them go. Jesus died to atone for them so they won't matter anymore. Then come with us to the empty tomb. Peek in, gaze, then walk out of it. Jesus isn't there. He's alive; He's risen; He's doing things now more than ever. Come join us as we join in with Him. Great things are in progress. Come be a part of them.

We've learned these things in 31 years of being blessed together. Happy anniversary, Hunnie. Our best is yet to come.

For further reading: 1 Peter 1:20

Lord Jesus, thank You for blessing my marriage and my life with this wonderful lady. Keep us close to you as we venture again into this world of Yours, together.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Peter, 30 April 2020

He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. 1 Peter 1:20 (NIV).

Have you ever considered what it would be like to live in a world without Christianity?

Peter did. He lived a large chunk of his life without knowing Jesus. Judaism's special bond as God's chosen people had tarnished long before. It wasn't God's fault: it was humanity's. God still revered the Jews, all people in fact, and so He put into motion the plan He had designed since before He spoke it all into existence.

So, have you ever considered what our world would be like if God hadn't done that, hadn't sent His Son, Jesus, to live, die, and live again for our sake? It's a historical fact that Christian monks preserved the ancient knowledge from Egypt, Greece, and Rome through the Dark and Middle Ages. Almost definitely, what we know as western traditions, respect and reverence for children, universal human rights, women's rights, the abolition of slavery, and representative republican democracy wouldn't exist (at least not as they do). Most likely, there would be more tyranny because, before Jesus, that was the norm. Quite possibly, our world would be far more carnal and violent and more attuned to our most base human instincts. It's even very possible that methods of western hygiene and medicine would not have developed as they have.

This faith called "Christianity" is responsible for preserving most of the things that we hold as good and true in our twenty-first century world. It's true there are many who think the world would be much better without religion, stating that religion is responsible for so many of the world's woes and wars. They miss the point: people are responsible for that, not faith in God. Indeed, live in a place where Christianity is banned, say in Iran or North Korea or Communist China, and you'll find the human spirit to be crushed and debilitated.

It wasn't supposed to be this way. Before this world was even created, God knew what we would eventually do and that we would need a Savior. Before you or I were even born, God knew we would be both His very good creation and that we would reject Him time and again. In what may be the last epoch of our world, God revealed Himself to us personally, through His Son and through His Spirit so that we might not live apart from Him.

If He hadn't done that, imagine the world as a North Korean gulag.

Pretty dire prediction? Maybe. None of us knows what the world would be like without Jesus. All we can know is that we wouldn't be saved from our own self-produced damnation.

For further reading: Matthew 25:34, Ephesians 1:4, Hebrews 9:26, 1 Peter 1:21

Lord Jesus, thank You for looking ahead to see we would desperately need You, then for dying and living again to save us from ourselves.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Peter, 4 May 2020

Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God. 1 Peter 1:21 (NIV).

Last time we talked about what the world would be like without Jesus. All we can assume is that it would be bleak, much different from what we know today (even on our world's worst day, which is yet to come). A world without Jesus – a world without love, hope, justice, honor and so much more – would be a terrible nightmare in which to exist.

One thing we can know, however (because Peter's words remind us): we wouldn't be able to believe in God. There would be nothing to believe in because He is God. And it is only through Jesus that we have come to believe in God for it was only through Jesus that God sent the part of Himself who is His Holy Spirit. When we know Jesus, we do so because His Spirit first touched us. Yes, we choose to ultimately follow Jesus but that choice comes only after He, first, reached out to touch us in some way. When we grow in faith it's because He started and is causing the growth. Think of us as good soil and Him as seed, light, air, and water. The growth happens because of Him, not us.

If you put your faith in other men, you aren't putting your faith and hope in God. If you put your faith in Allah through Mohammed you aren't putting your faith and hope in God. If you put your faith in your abilities, in chance, in your fortune (or what a fortune teller says), or in anything other than God, you aren't putting your faith and hope in God.

Neither Allah nor a thousand Hindu gods raised themselves from death. No other man has ever done this. Our money, our possessions, our history all pass to others when we assume room temperature. Go check the tomb: Jesus isn't there, because He rose from death then ascended into heaven later. Somewhere on this planet you will find the mortal remains of Mohammed, the Buddha, your ancestors, and eventually us. But Jesus isn't here. He isn't here because He said He wouldn't be bound by death, and He wasn't.

You and I can't know this to be true if God Himself, through His Spirit-inspired Word, had not reached us in both spiritual and intellectual knowledge. He made it happen so He could inspire it into our hearts and minds. You and I put our faith in the reliability and honesty of His Words. It's true because He said it and made it so. It's simply the truth.

For further reading: Romans 4:24, Philippians 2:7-9, Hebrews 2:9, 1 Peter 1:22

Lord Jesus, You and Your Word are the ultimate truth in our world. In this fallen place, they're really the only reliable word. Thank You for inspiring them into my faith.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Peter, 5 May 2020

Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart. 1 Peter 1:22 (NIV).

Did you realize that Jesus uses Godly behaviors to purify? It's true. When we demonstrate the kinds of behavior that God wants us to live out to be made holy, we are being purified. Self-control, patience, empathy, understanding, obedience, submission to God: living in the ways Jesus lived His life separates us from the impurities that corrupt our earthly lives. It's not just that we are demonstrating that we believe in Jesus. Instead, we are showing others how believing in Jesus can make our world a more peaceful place.

We do that through love.

I grew up in the 1970s, after the tumultuous 60s when the pop culture espoused peace and love without understanding what those two things really were. Peace isn't just the absence of conflict, and love isn't just what happens when hormones are active. The only real peace and love in this world are to be found in Jesus. We don't get them with long hair, beads and Roman sandals (or even Merle Haggard), free marijuana, "free love," or free expression.

Peace and love can only come through believing in Jesus, submitting to Him, then letting His word re-direct our lives to serving. We serve best by sharing His peace and love with others by being self-controlled, patient, understanding, and obedient to Him. We flee from destructive behaviors. We give up past sins. We spend more time in His word so as to learn ways to be led by Him in how we deal with others. We repent.

And repenting means turning in a new direction. We move in that new direction by loving from the heart. By giving up selfishness and putting others before ourselves. By finding ways to meet others' needs while trusting God that He'll meet ours. By modeling the behaviors that Jesus lived when He walked among us. By following His Spirit when He talks to our consciences or moves us to act.

That's when we begin to live through love. That's when real peace begins to spread through the world. That's the time when our God is purifying us to shine as His gold in a world hard-crustured with impurities. He melts them off us with His mighty but gentle hand, then we get to go share these new/old ways with others so that they might also live in His love and peace.

Our world without Jesus knows no peace. There is no love or peace apart from Him, and apart from Jesus there's no way we can ever really share meaningful love or peace. How about we move in His direction today?

For further reading: John 13:34, Romans 12:10, James 4:8, 1 Peter 1:23

Lord Jesus, share Your love and peace through my words and actions today. Let my life be a means through which You reach others today.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Peter, 6 May 2020

For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. 1 Peter 1:23 (NIV).

My friend, Mark (who is also my pastor), is always saying that “we’re part of heaven now.” Not just when we die, but here and now, in this temporal life, living on the Third Rock. We’re not just guaranteed to have a place in heaven because of Jesus’ atoning sacrifice: we’re reaping the benefits of that promise right now. All that happens because Jesus made it so that we’re part of heaven – God’s adopted children of His Spirit – here where we live now. We’ve been born twice, once of a physical parent and once of our Spirit-parent. The life our parents gave us in conception and then birth will perish. But the life God gives us through faith in His Son allows us to live forever. Our death from this life is the entrance to the next phase of eternal life.

Yet we’re part of that eternal life right now. It happened because He who could not be bound by death shared His resurrection with His people who are.

It’s a beautiful thing, you know. It’s the circle of life as it really is, not just a cool song from the Lion King. The perishable seeds of our lives give way to the imperishable life of forever. What’s more, the body that dies on earth will one day be reunited with the spirit that never died but was freed from it for awhile. Until then, as we live, we produce for God’s community and His Earth. When we die, the soul is freed to be in paradise with Christ while the body decays here. And in His good time, the two will be reunited in a life imperishable, living on an earth remade as Eden where sin and pain won’t be present.

We get to live with the knowledge of that now. What’s better, we get to share that knowledge and especially Jesus’ love with others, helping them to know Him better as well. He who was and is and is to come, who is God and was with God before all time, guaranteed this for us. We’re part of heaven now. It’s how God designed things. He uses things in this life to refine and, to teach us how to live holy so that we might give love to others and glory to Him in doing so. We’re part of heaven right here, right now. Let’s live out today knowing it.

For further reading: John 1:13, Hebrews 4:12, 1 Peter 1:24

Lord Jesus, You gave us life for here and for later. You make us part of heaven now so that we might share You with our brothers and sisters. Teach us the best ways to do this today, then open up opportunities to do it.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Peter, 7 May 2020

For, "All people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord endures forever." And this is the word that was preached to you. 1 Peter 1:24-25 (NIV).

Peter is quoting Isaiah here when he mentions "grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord endures forever." That's a quote that was (in Peter's time) already several hundred years old. It would be as if you or I quoted someone from the early 1600s today to make our point. It's a quote that, most likely, Peter would have heard throughout his life.

It's poetic imagery. The blades of grass growing in a field seem innumerable, so many that only God can know their true number. That's sort of like the population of mankind. And grass grows but eventually is cut, or it browns and withers. Sort of like men and women, you see. Peter uses Isaiah's poetic allegory to make the point that we are like blades of grass growing in a field, living our lives under the sun (or the Son) until the time when we wither and die.

And we're like the wildflowers that grow there as well. The older I get, the more I enjoy driving down the road and looking at the beautiful wildflowers growing there; thank you Lady Bird Johnson for beautifying our highways. Here in Texas, springtime brings blankets of bluebonnets, Indian paintbrush, primroses, and brown eyed Susan's. You can drive down almost any highway and see thousands of them. Set against our blue skies, they're God's artwork on a scale no human artist could match. That's not just here in America, however. Drive anywhere in the spring and summer and you'll see the same thing. They're splashes of color and life in what could otherwise be vast fields of green.

They're an allegory, too. Their beauty, like ours, doesn't last long but it's wonderful while it does, and it lives forever in our hearts. The flowers are a sight to behold, something to brighten our lives and give splendor to what could be average or dull. Bluebonnets are only in bloom for a few weeks, then the flowers fall and the plant goes to seed. We're only here for a short time to give our beauty to God and to each other, yet we're here to produce seeds of beauty so that our kind – followers of Christ – may live on beyond us. The body – the plant – may wither and die, but the beauty – His Word – lives forever.

I wonder if the fields in heaven are full of wildflowers. One day I'll see. Perhaps you and I will stand there admiring them, right beside Peter and Isaiah.

For further reading: Isaiah 40:6-8, James 1:10-11, 1 Peter 2:1

Lord, thank You for the beauty You give us here in simple fields and flowers. Thank You for the images You inspire in us using them.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Peter, 11 May 2020

Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. 1 Peter 2:1 (NIV).

We don't have to hold onto the things that hurt us in the past. And we don't have to keep doing the things that feed our bad memories, or create new bad memories in addition. We have the right, the choice, to rid ourselves of destructive feelings, grudges, memories, and most of all behaviors, that draw us deeper into the darkness. We can choose to cling to the light. In fact, Jesus tells us through His word that we must not cling to anything but His light, that we are to rid ourselves of things that aren't of the light.

In fact (again), that's the basic choice of every follower of Jesus: light or darkness? Which will it be? Yes, most things in life do indeed come down to this binary choice. Do we draw ourselves towards the one candle shining in the pitch-black hall, or do we choose to remain alone and shrouded in that darkness? He's the light; He's the shining and the power and the warmth while we're in the darkness. Will we walk towards His light and be warmed by it or will we choose to remain in the cold darkness?

In our social media-dominated world, that isn't an easy task to undertake. Yes, I'm as guilty as anyone else of sharing in the darkness, or just outright sharing it online. Please forgive me if my doing so has hurt you, or drawn you into the darkness further. The older I get, the more I think that the world could do without social media. I don't want some of the things I said or did in my yesterdays to haunt me, or those I love, or really even just to haunt. I want them to just stay gone.

But, you see, a wonderful thing about every new day is that it's a chance to try again. To do differently what we did poorly the day before. The things of the past, the things we want gone? They actually are, even when we still are affected by their consequences. Jesus paid for them once for all. As far as the east is from the west, so our sins are removed from us. Way, way over there, they can't harm us. Way, way over there, those sins are cast into darkness and the past, never to return to us to pull us away from God. Our lives here only last a few decades. Jesus doesn't want us to spend them cowering in darkness. He asks us to let go and let Him. To put off the misbehaviors of our past and let Him re-tool our present for His good purposes.

In His light today, let's begin.

For further reading: Psalm 103:12, Ephesians 4:22, 1 Peter 2:2

Lord Jesus, I follow You in Your light. Please shine it into me and then through me today.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Peter, 12 May 2020

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. 1 Peter 2:2-3 (NIV).

If you're like me, sometimes a glass of milk simply hits the spot.

People who are new to faith in Christ are, according to Peter, like newborn babies needing milk. They need the Spirit of Jesus to feed them, to keep them alive, to help them grow, to nourish them on things that matter most. When we get older – when our faith begins to mature – we supposedly crave less milk. It's not that we don't still need His nourishment. Instead, we can dig deeper into a heartier meal. We can begin to explore His Word for deeper understanding, for more solid food, for different tastes and different meanings.

Yet every now and then, we should get back to basics. Every now and then, we need a cleanse, a detox from the world. The richer food of faith still nourishes us but sometimes our systems need simpler food. Maybe the ways of the world have made us sick; maybe we need to re-focus on the foundations of believing. Following Jesus. Simply listening to Him as He communicates to us. Simply doing what He asks without searching for more depth. Just being in the faith.

When that happens, open the fridge (or wherever you keep your Bible), and just focus on the words of Jesus. Pour yourself a glass of milk and just accept at face value what He's telling you. Even the most learned scholars still need to hear, "Jesus loves me this I know. For the Bible tells me so." Drink up and enjoy. It's good for your bones; it's good for your soul. It's what you need.

Granted: there are some people who can't handle milk. Some people are intolerant of it. That's ok: He'll meet you where you are, with whatever you need. He is the point; the Word is the point, not so much how it gets into you. If it takes soy milk, then so much the better. Or almond. Or even just a glass of water. Didn't you know that He told us He's the living water, too? In Him are streams of living water that permanently refresh us. In Africa, they say "water is life," and how true that is. Without water, we cannot survive. Without Jesus, we cannot survive.

Without milk, a young baby cannot survive. It's how they are nourished, how they build up muscle, strength, and immunity. Not much about that changes as we age. Without the spiritual milk of Jesus, we cannot survive. With it, what matters most will never die.

For further reading: Psalm 34:8, John 4:10, 1 Peter 2:4

Lord Jesus, I need Your spiritual nourishment and Your living water. Fill me today so that I may share with so many others.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Peter, 13 May 2020

As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him— you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. 1 Peter 2:4-5 (NIV).

It's possible that you got more than you bargained for with Jesus. Maybe you just wanted His peace. Maybe you just craved being loved for who you are. Maybe you simply accepted the truth. Maybe you just wanted to be truly free. You still got more than you bargained for. You accepted Him and He made you a priest, a saint, an apostle. He made you into a rock on which He'd build His church. Just like Peter, who wrote these words.

You see, Jesus wants ALL of you. Not just your Sundays; not just your Sunday best. He doesn't simply want you to just try hard, to do better, to make amends. All those are great things, Godly things even, but they aren't what God is after. Jesus doesn't just want you to submit to Him, to repent for Him, to do anything in isolation or alone. Again, those may be good things, even things that you want to do for Jesus (and good things He wants for and of you), but that's not why He put His life into you.

Jesus wants all of you. Every bit. The good and the bad; the heartwood and the bark off it. Jesus wants you to submit everything about yourself to Him because He sees you and me as His priests, as the building blocks of His family here. We're not just brothers and sisters, moms and dads, friends and lovers: we're His church, His children, His family, His brothers and sisters. He looks at us as vital, living embodiment of His purpose. He lived, died, and lives for us, and He asks us to give everything about us over to Him in sacrifice and commitment.

Oh, and stones? Stones can be broken, crushed. He was. He may want that for us. I bet you didn't think that was part of the deal when you said, "I believe."

Jesus wants all of you just like He wanted all of Peter, John, and the others. He wants it all because He gave all. Only by doing that could He ready us to build His church of followers in the world. And only by our giving over to Him could we truly commit ourselves to Him as those living sacrifices He asks for. He made it possible on the cross, but we live it out because of the empty tomb. All of Him. All of us. We're who He wants.

For further reading: Exodus 19:6, Proverbs 9:1, Isaiah 42:1, 1 Corinthians 3:9, Philipians 4:18, Hebrews 13:15, 1 Peter 2:56

Lord Jesus, I didn't fully understand You when I accepted You, but I'm learning. I give myself over to You for Your good purposes.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Peter, 14 May 2020

For in Scripture it says: "See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame." Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, "The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone," and, "A stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall." They stumble because they disobey the message—which is also what they were destined for. 1 Peter 2:6-8 (NIV).

Remember that part from yesterday about me and you being stones, and how stones can be broken or crushed? Yeah, it's true. And it may be why Christ selected you, specifically, to follow Him.

We aren't supposed to be jerks about our faith. Sharing it with someone should be a bold thing but NOT bold to the point of hurting someone else. Share boldly but temper boldness in sensitivity. And if confronted, be ready to answer why you believe what you do. Yet when someone complains you're infringing on them, yes, respectfully consider your options. We must not be ashamed of what we believe, or lie about it, or let ourselves be silenced without standing. We also must practice our faith in healing, understanding and grace to others. We must not weaponize faith lightly.

Because...

...Because this is life or death. Because what we believe actually may crush someone. It may be a stumbling block they can't get around. It may be an obstacle they can't overcome without confronting it. Our faith may so convict other people that it may change everything about them. Jesus loves and wants them, too. We may be where we are for His reasons.

Or our faith may crush us. There are those who work to silence or persecute the faithful and will use any opportunity to do so; you know this. You may have even been subject to it. As with those who would be confronted by us, so it is that, before time, Jesus also willed it to be so that we would suffer for Him in faith. It's not that He wants us to hurt: it's that He wants us to be purified, refined in Him so that we may stand stronger. He wants this knowing that our praise of Him during our afflictions will spread His glory and Name far and wide. That more will know His love and believe. This has always been so. Where man persecutes the body of Christ, the body of Christ grows.

Sometimes the cost of that is paid in blood. It was paid in His blood first; mankind may also require ours. But glory is why Jesus selected you and me. Let there be more of it no matter what it takes.

For further reading: Deuteronomy 10:15, 1 Samuel 12:22 Psalm 118:22, Isaiah 28:16, Isaiah 62:12, Romans 9:22-23, 2 Corinthians 2:16, 1 Peter 2:9

All praise and glory to You, Lord Jesus, no matter my circumstances.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Peter, 18 May 2020

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. 1 Peter 2:9(NIV).

In this very next verse, Peter contrasts being stones and obstacles to faith to being God's special, called people. Others may trip and fall; some may be crushed. These people may even be us. Yet those who follow Jesus are also set apart to share light in darkness, to serve as His servants in the crushed and broken world.

That's you. That's me. Personally, I think you look great in your priestly garb, whether it's robes, jeans, or flip flops. Me, I'm feeling pretty dapper as well, though perhaps a little chubby around the midsection. Whatever you're wearing, wear it proudly, then make your ministry about doing something for Jesus in your own way. Be authentic; be yourself. Use the gifts God has given you and only you to share something about Jesus with someone else. That may mean you become a called servant, that you find a seminary and do what's necessary to earn the title of "pastor." Good for you!

Or it may mean you live kindly towards others, rarely quoting Scripture, maybe even rarely saying the name Jesus to other people but being His true sister or brother anyway. Or it could mean you do that same thing and, when asked why (because eventually someone will ask) you tell them about Jesus and how He saved you, then you felt compelled to live your life in such a way to serve as His royal priest or priestess.

Maybe you're a fire & brimstone evangelist; maybe you're a nurse or blogger or firefighter or policeman. Maybe you're a work from home parent, or a student in college; a hairdresser, a welder, a teacher, a manager, a trucker driving over the open road. From time to time, you and I actually are the stone God lays in Zion for others to trip over. From time to time, we're that capstone that crushes someone whose words and actions have earned that. Occasionally, we trip and we are the ones crushed.

Yet we are here to live our lives as followers of Jesus as the people He has chosen to take His message of salvation, peace, and true freedom to a scared, locked-down world that needs to know that more than ever. We do it by living our lives genuinely, where we are, using the talents He gave us, being ready at any time to tell why we live in peace and love. He saved us so that we could use our lives and priestly words to praise Him so that others might see us and say, "there's something about them and I want to know more."

For further reading: Deuteronomy 10:15, 1 Samuel 12:22, Isaiah 62:12, Acts 26:18, Titus 2:14, 1 Peter 2:10

Lord Jesus, make me worthy to be Your priest here today.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Peter, 19 May 2020

Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. 1 Peter 2:10 (NIV).

Today's verse paraphrases Hosea. Peter paraphrases Hosea's words, where God told that prophet to name his third child (by his prostitute wife, Gomer), Lo-Ammi: a name that translated as "you are not my people." If you don't know the story of Hosea, in a nutshell, it's a poetic prophecy account of God's mercy for us (as His people). God tells the virtuous and upright Hosea to marry the habitually unfaithful Gomer, who neither repents of her ways nor shows much inclination to. She becomes pregnant by Hosea, but then flees and returns to prostitution. God then tells Hosea to find her, bring her home, and forgive her, which he does. At one point, she may have even sold herself into slavery. All this is a metaphor for how God viewed His people, Israel, and how Israel had treated God.

And on the third day...

...and on the third day the Son, who had taken on the sins of a people who were not His people, permanently gave us His mercy and called us His people once more.

Do you ever feel like Gomer? I do. Whether it's my short fuse, my wandering thoughts, my poor use of God's time, my sins of disobedience: sometimes I feel like the dirty, cheap hooker who flees the comfort of a safe home to try my hand on the streets where there is danger, disease, and death. I'm rebellious. I know better, you see; I know more than God. This is my life. I can do as I please. You get the drift. Do you ever feel like Gomer?

The good news is that, no matter how you and I feel, when we have soiled ourselves with the ways of the world, Jesus is standing right where He has always been: right beside us, holding out His hand to pick us up again. If your conscience still bothers you, thank God for that, because perhaps it's Him talking to you, beckoning you to give up your old Gomer. He died and rose to make her deceptions unnecessary. He made us His new people through His sacrifice and His renewing life. He saw us as we are, in the middle of our sins, and loved us anyway. When we feel unforgiveable, when we've done so wrong that we feel nothing can ever wash us clean, when we feel alone and abused and used, Jesus is still Jesus, still holding open His arms to hold us up and dry our tears.

Peter paraphrases Hosea in this verse, and thank God for that. It's a story we can all relate to.

For further reading: Hosea 1:9-10, Romans 9:25-26, 1 Peter 2:11

Lord Jesus, forgive me. I've dishonored You, sinned against You, dirtied the mercy You give me. Forgive me, and teach me again Your better ways.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Peter, 20 May 2020

Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul. 1 Peter 2:11 (NIV).

You know we can say “no,” right? We get to say “no” to things that can harm us because the Spirit of Jesus has made us free to do so.

Tempted to mouth off to the guy in the next lane? You don’t have to. Surfing to the porn sites? You don’t have to do that. Wanting something bad to happen to the woman who got “your” promotion? You don’t have to do that either. Flirting to arrange a tryst? Nope, you don’t have to do that.

Jesus gave us “no.” We have been blessed with the privilege of saying no, of walking away, of changing our minds, of re-training our thoughts and habits. The Spirit that Jesus promised us, then gave at Pentecost, has taken up residence in our lives. Through Him, we don’t have to live by the rules of this world anymore. The lust, greed, avarice that come with living through our sinful nature can be effectively defeated with that little word, no.

And then the hard work begins. You know that’s true as well. It’s tough to work up the courage to say no, but it’s even tougher to stand by it, to let our no’s mean no. Even when we instinctively know that our sinful desires are harmful to us; that no good comes from our foul language, that affair, my evil thoughts or yours. Even when we know deep inside that these things can hurt, and even when we also know Jesus lives and breathes through us, it’s still so tough to say no and mean it. To not backslide. To not stick a toe back in the pool of sin because, after all, a little touch can’t hurt, can it?

Yes, actually it can.

It can hurt because living in the filth of our sins isn’t what Christ has in store for His people. He paid for our reservations in a new land, our mansions on a new estate. We aren’t citizens of this world any longer. His resurrection paid for us to be resident aliens of Heaven living here on the earth below. We’re part of it now; we’re citizens now; we belong to Jesus and His Paradise now, and eventually we’ll be there with Him.

Until then, we get to say “no” when our pet sins come calling. You know they do; you know they will. When that happens, remember He gave us the freedom to resist, then He stands with us as we make our stand. Make yours now. Say “no” today.

For further reading: Romans 13:14, 1 Corinthians 10:14, Galatians 5:16, Hebrews 11:13, James 5:11 Peter 2:12

Savior Lord Jesus, strengthen me when I say “no,” and stand with me to resist the temptations when the sins of my life try to lure me back.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Peter, 21 May 2020

Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us. 1 Peter 2:12 (NIV).

This is harsh but I'm going to say it anyway: some people need to be quiet about Jesus. Those who reject Jesus Christ for who He says He is need to be rendered silent regarding their thoughts about Him. The way to do that isn't really to rhetorically defeat them, or by being a jerk about faith. In truth, sometimes we do need to use our words to defeat someone else's argument but we have to do so in a way that doesn't destroy them. You know this is because OUR purpose must be to show them Jesus so they may believe, too; that they may change. That change isn't up to us; lovingly defending our Savior is. When we don't have constructive words to say, it's best to not say anything at all; I'm a work in progress with this: how about you?

The best way to defeat those who oppose Jesus is to "kill 'em with kindness." Me and you: we need to conduct our lives in ways that show we believe in Him, that He remade us in ways that are good for the world, that demonstrate His love. Jesus wants all people to be saved, especially those who reject Him. The best way for us to help that along is to live out our faith. Suppress our anger, show kindness and compassion, seek understanding; live out those Galatians 5 fruits of the Spirit. This is ground we've covered here before, so let this simply be a reminder.

A reminder like the story of the Roman centurion who crucified Jesus. We can assume the soldier who oversaw Jesus' crucifixion had seen many men agonize, curse, and die this way. Maybe he knew about Jesus before this; maybe not; we don't know. What we do know is that Jesus' dying, and seeing John, Mary, and others at the cross spoke to him. It made him – an unbeliever and Roman pagan – conclude, "this was a righteous man."

Let our conduct inspire the same.

Peter may not have realized he was talking about every day, not just Judgement Day. His words in this verse almost certainly were referring to the last days, yet isn't it also true that Jesus comes to us EVERY DAY? God visits us through His Spirit every day so that He may work through us. Knowing that, it becomes even more imperative that we live in ways that demonstrate Him so that even those hostile to Him might say, "that's God at work." In this way, the concrete that traps their own hearts might begin to crumble.

For further reading: Matthew 9:8, Luke 23:47, Galatians 5:22-23, Philippians 2:15, Titus 2:8 & 14, Peter 2:13

Lord, speak through Me and let my words and actions show my faith in You.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Peter, 26 May 2020

Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human authority: whether to the emperor, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. 1 Peter 2:13-14 (NIV).

This one is difficult for me to write. We're still in lockdown in many places thanks to the outbreak of COVID-19: a disease that hasn't been nearly as deadly as most trusted experts predicted. It has been awful, and has killed almost 350000 people worldwide. Cases in most countries are declining, yet with over 5 million cases across the globe, many places are still locked down, especially in the US. That doesn't give someone great reason to trust government.

Not only, but our politics here in the US have been divided for decades. This isn't anything new to people reading this overseas; government corruption is as old as Eden. Yet not since the 1960s has this nation been so politically divided, perhaps not since the Civil War. Right against left; Democrat against Republican; one side against another. And yet government grows, government interference, especially in conduct of the church, grows. That, too, doesn't give someone great reason to trust government.

This year is the 75th anniversary of the end of World War II, when tyranny and murder were temporarily defeated. The most destructive war in human history came about as the result of the world's response when government based in death and hatred attacked nations at peace. During this Memorial Day week, thank God that He gave us men and women willing to fight, and die, to free others. If only they had stayed free, for the fallen world soon launched other wars, new tyranny, more death. And the band played on.

Yet here, still, God requires that we submit ourselves to all authorities. Parents, bosses, governors, presidents: they are God's instruments for maintaining His will in the world. Upright or not, no political or professional leader has their position without God allowing it or deeming it so. Governments are instituted among men to secure rights given to us by God; to do things for society that individuals cannot. Through this, God works to reach all his people, even through dictatorship in places such as China, North Korea, Cuba, or dozens of lesser dictatorships all across Africa, South America, and even in some US state governments. Nothing, even evil, happens that is not under God's dominion.

This doesn't mean God causes evil. We do. God allows us the consequences of choice, all of which involve some degree of embracing evil. Yet for our own good and for the growth of believers in Him, God requires that we submit to all authorities so that we might trust Him to do as He will.

For further reading: Romans 13:1-4, Titus 3:1, Peter 2:15

Lord Jesus, help me to submit to authority, to recognize You will do Your work through this and through them.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Peter, 27 May 2020

Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human authority: whether to the emperor, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people. 1 Peter 2:13-15 (NIV).

Peter knew the score. He may not have known he would, like Jesus, die by crucifixion, but he knew it was possible. All his life he had seen Rome crucify those it wanted to punish...or silence. Ever since the resurrection, Peter and his closest friends had been under surveillance, in prison, been tortured, been persecuted for simply stating, "I believe in Jesus." Peter and the other disciples understood that both their homeland Jewish church and the occupying Roman government were deadly set against them. They understood what could, what probably would, happen to them for following The Way.

And they did it anyway. The Spirit of Christ crucified compelled them to lovingly, boldly, unabashedly proclaim that Jesus is Lord. In doing so, they proclaimed His word to submit to those authorities who they knew were set against them. Knowing what we know now, it was an act of love.

Jesus Himself had said "give to Caesar what is Caesar's and give to God what is God's." That's more than just advice about tithing. It is His advice for applying common sense in a non-sensical world. Money? Pay what you're required to pay to the government and what your heart moves you to give to God. Employment? Devote yourselves to your work for your employer but give your service to him as an act of worshipping God. Time? Use it wisely because the world is watching, but whatever you do, use it as a testament of God's love for you.

We do that for God. We do that for us. We do that so that others, who don't believe in Jesus, will look at us and, like that pagan centurion, give unwitting glory to Him and say, "this was a righteous man or woman."

We do it because this is God's truth and that truth sets us free. God wants all His people – and that's all 7 billion of us – to know, love, worship, and share Him. He wants all of us to live in His peace, yet most of us don't. Most people on this planet don't know Jesus or outright reject Him. They are the ignorant, foolish people of whom Peter speaks, yet God loves and provides for them, too. Jesus died for them, too. And He wants us to live our lives as a faithful testimony to Him so that others may see this and let nascent questions become roots of faith.

We do life for Him. That's the real score for us to make and watch.

For further reading: John 8:32, Galatians 5:13, Peter 2:16

Lord Jesus, let my thoughts and actions testify about You today.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Peter, 28 May 2020

Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as God's slaves. 1 Peter 2:16 (NIV).

In the Lord, freedom is slavery. Huh?

We've seen rioters on in our country this week; riots over the death of a man at the hands of a policeman. Rioting isn't freedom and living under police isn't slavery. Yet those police can't be free to kill people and we of society can't tolerate it when they do. To do so would be to be enslaved by the police.

I've also been watching a documentary on U.S. Grant. Grant was the most successful general in the Civil War, and one of the more upright, moral, and effective presidents in spite of the corruption by officials in his administration. He opposed actual slavery, fought against the government instituted specifically to preserve it, and fought to end the persecution of former slaves.

In Peter's time, slavery was still a real and accepted norm. Peter's people, the Jews, had been slaves in Egypt a thousand years before, and they were enslaved to the Romans in Judea "now." Then as now, slavery was seen as a moral evil. Yet it was accepted that those who were conquered were enslaved. Their rights were taken away. They became forced labor, property, unequal.

And yet Peter tells us to live as God's slaves; to openly, enthusiastically live as free people because the truth of Jesus' salvation has set us free. Indeed, there is no freedom, secular or not, without the saving grace of Christ. Yet in the very same sentence, Christ's right-hand-man implores us to live as slaves to Jesus.

Huh?

In the verses immediately prior to this one, Peter tells us to submit ourselves to all authorities, even the police, even the corrupt government that wants to physically enslave us. Even slave owners. Peter isn't telling us to live in favor of slavery, but he's telling us that God is at work through slavery. It is we people who tolerate slavery, but it is God who works His will through even our toleration of this and other evils.

So, Peter tells us to take the example of being enslaved to an evil concept – human chattel – and use it as our example for following Christ. To be owned by Christ. To submit everything, body and soul, to Christ. To give up all freedom, even the freedom He gives us, to Him. To understand that even when we are abused, we allow this to happen out of submission to Him.

May God today move our hearts to remember this as we try to respond to things happening in our world. Men like Grant fought against slavery. And there are those in our world today who are still being wronged, even killed. We need to stand for them, but peacefully, in slavery to Christ, as He would. As He does.

For further reading: Romans 6:22, Peter 2:17

Lord Jesus, I'm Your slave. Work peace in us today.

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Practical Proverbial, from 1 Peter, 1 June 2020

Show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, honor the emperor. 1 Peter 2:17 (NIV).

Why should we honor the emperor?

You may not like my saying this but here goes: the rioting happening in the US right now affirms that the rioters are rejecting God. Yes, there are valid reasons that started the protests, but rioting isn't protesting. Yes, real racism still exists, in some places, in some police (and rioters) even, but racism is evil that we must reject. Yes, it's all awful, and yes some in our communities have languished while so many others have prospered and that affects all of us as the family of man.

But the fact is that rioting consciously rejects respect for everyone, and it rejects fearing (respecting) both God and government. God allows our governments as His instruments for maintaining order. Rioting rejects our earthly government. It is war in the streets against the authority that God, through our votes, allows to maintain order here. To riot is to reject God, to embrace evil. If the riots continue, things will get worse. There is no good way out of a riot, out of looting and pillaging. Nobody wins.

Especially not the Lord, whose ultimate authority is challenged and rejected by willful, sinful people.

Who is "the emperor" and why should we honor him? Answer: he is God's civil authority over people. He carries power to terrorize you. We honor him because God said so. Remember this always.

And then remember that we can't really show respect for others, love for believers, or respect for God without honoring the civil authorities God allows in place in our world. We can't accept that God works through human government to do His perfect will without accepting those in government governing on God's behalf, even those we oppose.

Even when they do wrong (like those cops in Minneapolis and their feckless city and state governments). Don't be quick to forget that God used tyrannical, imperial Rome to play out the story of Christ. Or Egypt for Abraham's descendants, and Babylon for the Israelites. Since Eden, God has always used what man contrives for God's own higher purposes. Where man institutes government to impose human controls, God uses the same to further His Kingdom's goals. To reach out, to show compassion, to build community, to seek justice.

Left to our own devices, we can't do those things. Jesus said it differently: "apart from Me, you can do nothing." Right on, right on.

Especially when that means submitting ourselves to a government that doesn't always have our best interests at heart. If you want to protest real injustice, call me: I protest with you. Yet if you want to stir things up, to incite a riot, I urge you to do a gut check, then honor the emperor.

For further reading: Proverbs 24:21, John 15:5, Romans 12:3:10, Peter 2:18

Lord Jesus, let our motivations only be for You. Calm, forgive our sinful hearts.

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Practical Proverbial, from 1 Peter, 2 June 2020

Slaves, in reverent fear of God submit yourselves to your masters, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh. 1 Peter 2:18 (NIV).

Here's another bitter pill to swallow. Don't just submit to the government: like it. More than that, if you're enslaved, submit fully. Pray for your slave masters. Do it as if you're praying for the person you love most. Seriously?

Seriously.

Who are we enslaved to now? Are the rioters enslaving innocent business owners? Is the government enslaving the rioters? Are you or I enslaved by our employers? Are children enslaved to their parents? Here in the West, who enslaves us?

Fact is, there actually are people who enslave us. Real slavery is still occurring, even in America, when people are trafficked. It happens in every major city and hundreds of smaller ones. Be on the lookout because it may even be happening in your neighborhood. What's worse, in many places, legal authorities are in on the trafficking. The victims who are trafficked sexually, even vocationally, aren't free. They are used and abused, and when their captor master is finished with them, most often they're killed. We who learn of these things must dedicate ourselves to combatting this evil where we can, ending it where we can, freeing the enslaved.

Until this happens, are these modern slaves supposed to submit? The hard but true answer is "yes." Yet even in this, submission is also submission to God, trusting that He will provide what they need, including an exit. Pray for endurance; pray for peace and healing; pray for your captors that they might be changed or disposed to help you; pray for help; be ready when it comes.

Yet don't forget, too, that Peter reminds us to be slaves to God, and that Paul encourages us (in Romans) to be slaves to righteousness. We should fully, willingly submit ourselves to God and all He asks for. Our lives should be lived honor-bound to Him who redeemed us. We must look at ourselves as having only the freedom that God gives us through His love because, when we do, we find we are truly free indeed.

I suppose that I live in a Pollyanna-type of life here in the north Dallas suburbs. Bad things happen in the world and I seem sheltered from them, blithely sailing along from one bland moment to another. Yet all around me are people who live their lives as slaves to God, and they're leading lives of rich meaning. And all around me are others who suffer, people who are mistreated. What can I do to help them? Whatever it is, it starts with submitting to God. Seriously.

For further reading: Romans 6:18, Peter 2:19

Lord Jesus, I'm Your slave. Use me for Your work today. And, Lord, help those who are victims of real earthly slavery. Protect them, heal them, and show me ways I can help stop this evil.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Peter, 3 June 2020

For it is commendable if someone bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because they are conscious of God. 1 Peter 2:19 (NIV).

Are you familiar with Dietrich Bonhoeffer? The ten second biography of him is that he was a Lutheran pastor in Nazi Germany who consistently, publicly denounced the Nazis. From the early 1930s on, Bonhoeffer widely denounced the party and Hitler as idolatrous and murderous. He joined an underground organization dedicated to opposing the Nazis. He used his pulpit to denounce Hitler. Bonhoeffer was arrested in 1943 and interrogated/tortured by the Gestapo for a year and a half. During that time, his name was falsely attached to the July Plot to assassinate Hitler. In 1945, just days before Nazi Germany collapsed, Hitler personally ordered Bonhoeffer and other 'conspirators' hanged.

Bonhoeffer's most strident, enthusiastic denunciations of the hard-left Nazis came as he called them out for their policies of euthanizing the infirm and mentally disabled, and eventually for arresting and murdering Jews. He did this because he was conscious of God. He was more concerned about his relationship with God and how God would judge him than he was about his opposition to the most powerful dictator in Europe. Bonhoeffer understood that being conscious of God (and what, through His Word, God asked of people) meant he couldn't go along with what his government was saying and doing. He understood that this would cause him persecution, maybe cost him his life. Bonhoeffer did it anyway, and became a modern-day martyr for Christ.

75 years later, we look at what Dietrich Bonhoeffer did as heroic. He did what we all think we could or would do under similar oppression. Bonhoeffer was always conscious of Christ in his life. When the Nazis executed him, they stripped him completely naked; a personal humiliation and insult designed to send a cruel message. It didn't faze him at all. It is said Dietrich Bonhoeffer walked calmly, nakedly, boldly to the gallows and didn't complain at all. He knew a moment of unfamiliar fear would usher him into the arms of Jesus forever. And it did.

I'm familiar with Bonhoeffer's story but I'll confess this: I don't know if I could hold up as long as he did. I don't believe I'd renounce my faith; I just couldn't. But I don't know if I could be as bold as he was, especially against the hard-left systemic murder that was the Nazi Party. I'd only know how much I could bear when it all actually happened; I'll hope it never does. Yet Bonhoeffer channeled the Apostle Peter, who first wrote today's verse. Peter was persecuted; Peter was eventually martyred (and painfully so). Yet he, too, was always conscious of Jesus abiding with him, strengthening him.

In this 75th year since his martyrdom, consider reading one of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's books and learning more about this courageous man's life.

For further reading: 1 Peter 2:20

Lord Jesus, thank You for those who died as martyrs for You.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Peter, 4 June 2020

But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. 1 Peter 2:20 (NIV).

How timely this is right now, when race protests are happening all over America!

Our nation has writhed under racial crises since the end of the Civil War...that's 155 years. Race was the underlying cause that triggered that Civil War, when our forefathers gave up on political compromise to protect their rights as individuals who were enslaving other humans. Since that was defeated, we have dealt with the aftermath of a sin that we mistakenly assume is ingrained in our American DNA.

What are we going to do about setting things right in America? How can we overcome attitudes about race and get to the point where we treat each other as full equals even though we have different skin colors and different backgrounds? What can we do to change? I have yet to hear any media culture, protest leaders, or politicians offer anything constructive to address these questions.

The ONLY way to heal our divisions is by embracing Christ. The ONLY way to implement real change, seek true justice, is to start by following Jesus. My politics, my views, my defenses of things I believe must all but put under the cross of Christ. He commends those who are willing to suffer by doing this. He works through those who are working in His name to spread God's peace, love, and salvation. He strengthens people who are weary of standing with the strength to persevere, then overcome. Only through Jesus shall we overcome some day.

It isn't an honorable, laudable thing to applaud people who do wrong. Riots, looting, killing, violence: anyone who applauds, or even justifies, these things is going against the love of Jesus. This must be defeated.

But it IS an honorable, praiseworthy thing to stand up for one's rights, even more to stand up for the rights of people who are persecuted, especially when it isn't you. It is Godly, Jesus-like behavior to sympathize with the oppressed and use your life in ways to help them. You and I can't change what has happened in the past, but we can make sure the future doesn't repeat it.

The only way for that to work is for the love of Jesus to be our starting and ending point. We can't do it based on politics, or for revenge, or "social justice," or any other human reason. If we try anything but going to God first, we will fail and the past will repeat itself. By truly seeing each other as Jesus sees us – as His brothers and sisters – we will surely succeed. And then, through Christ, we shall overcome.

For further reading: Romans 5:3-5, 1 Peter 2:21

Lord Jesus, I've sinned against You. Forgive me, heal me, and teach me again how to truly love my fellow man.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Peter, 8 June 2020

To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." 1 Peter 2:21-22 (NIV).

Peter quotes the prophet Isaiah to tell us the best way for us to model our faith in Jesus. Jesus suffered no sins in His life but, through His death suffered for all our sins. Yet Jesus was also born to die for this purpose but, in the beginning, was truly come to live for us so that we might live forever once our time here is done.

Admit it: it's hard to not take a position in all the loud arguments being thrown around. It's easy to react instead of pro-act. Yesterday, at our church, Pastor Anthony preached his best sermon ever on listening, lamenting, and praying through these days. When the world seems to be spinning out of control and each side is demanding we stand or die by their 'justice,' the better way is to pause to listen to all that's being said. Listen to what people are saying and ask Jesus for His help to know what it means. Then lament the sufferings that are happening because, yes, where people suffer, liberty suffers (and vice versa). Lament with those who are hurting, those who are oppressed, those who are grieving, those made to live in fear. Lament for our society and the church and our families. Finally, pray. Pray for healing, for God's peace, for justice, for fear to give way to hope, for the strength to stand for what is right and good, for Jesus's Spirit to move in our land. Pray that He would inspire you to do your part today to make your part of His world look a little more like Jesus.

How could anyone argue with that? How? Put it on Twitter and I'll bet you find a few people who will.

Yet, once that's done, it will still be the right approach because it takes into account that Jesus, who committed no sin and who didn't have a lie in his mouth, suffered because the rest of us do. George Floyd was a sinner; Derek Chauvin is a sinner; all Black Lives Matter protesters are sinners; all policemen are sinners. You're a sinner and so am I. Yet Jesus wasn't and He willingly died so that we might be reconciled to Him.

Instead of reacting when the news tells us of the latest demand for us to choose sides, the better way is to consider Jesus, then listen, lament, and pray our way through each day. Starting today, let's remold our words and actions to follow this better way.

For further reading: Isaiah 53:9, Matthew 11:29, Acts 14:22, Romans 8:28, 2 Corinthians 5:21, Philippians 1:29, 1 Peter 2:23

Lord Jesus, remind me today to listen, lament, and pray over all that comes my way.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Peter, 9 June 2020

When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. 1 Peter 2:23 (NIV).

I needed to read this today. All too often, I let my emotions get the best of me and I react. Perhaps Peter would understand. He was impulsive, too. Yet, as you can read, Peter wouldn't settle for that, either. He'd call it out for the shameful dodge that it is, and he would demand that me, we, and he, do better. Peter would invoke Isaiah, who prophesied that the Messiah would be led like a lamb to slaughter and that He would not respond when He was tortured and killed. Peter would invoke Jesus, whom he had known and had seen fulfill Isaiah's prophecy. And he might just use his own example, when he denied Christ on the day He was murdered, and how so many times before, he had exhibited ignorance and unruly emotion when Jesus was trying to teach.

So this verse convicts me. No amount of self-justifying can excuse the times when I lash out at people who attack me; when I refuse to let go of an argument; when I debate and I react with a snarky or insulting comment; when I say something to demean 'the other guy' and win instead of refuting points to reach understanding. This isn't a call to be a wimp, or to surrender to error or what is wrong. Instead, this is a call to actually be bigger, to further understanding by refusing to mire myself in the rhetorical mud.

Or maybe even get in the actual mud, if that's what the journey in Jesus requires. It's not just the insignificant arguments online: it's standing up for Jesus with quiet dignity and resolve and going wherever that leads. It may lead to a mountaintop or adulation. Or it may lead to being humiliated, and chains, and the gallows. Displaying faith in Jesus to educate a wandering sister or brother may lead me (or you) to "take it;" to take the insults and spears and bullets so as to not disgrace Christ and, thus, educate those who don't know Him or who are weak.

Living in the days of protest, this is a good lesson to remember.

It won't be easy; it'll require me getting over myself. It'll require bending my will, or ours, to His. It'll require changing how I and we behave. Yet these are small things, first-world problems, and matters of little consequence. What does matter is standing for Jesus the way He stood: with my mouth shut wherever possible.

For further reading: Psalm 9:4, Isaiah 53:7, Luke 23:46, Hebrews 12:3, 1 Peter 2:24

Lord Jesus, may Your Spirit teach me again and again to help me help my stupid self. Help me to change how I behave.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Peter, 10 June 2020

“He himself bore our sins” in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; “by his wounds you have been healed.” 1 Peter 2:24 (NIV).

You’ve been here before. You understand this verse highlights the basic principle of Christianity. You understood it when you first said, “I believe,” and meant it. Jesus died so we may live. So why do we need to keep repeating it? Why is it that we the people keep coming back to this basic, first principle over and over again?

Got skin, got sin. Take out that “k” and, within your skin is sin. Cliché, I know, but it’s also so true. We keep coming back to the cross because, despite our belief in what Jesus did there, we can’t help ourselves. We need constant reminders that He forgives us, that we have overcome the world because He overcame the world of sin.

We need to be reminded that God raised Jesus back to life after people no different than us had Him murdered. The sins of every person from Adam to Caiaphas put Jesus on that cross. The sins of every person since, including me and you, put Jesus on that cross. He died that agonizing death and experienced the spiritual banishment we deserve because of our sins that put Him on that cross. And yet, through it all, God the Father was both apart from Him and with Him. And on that following Sunday, God breathed life back into Jesus’ dead heart and made it beat again. No matter what disease or injury plagues us, at that moment, He healed us from within forever.

We need to be reminded that we died to sin on the cross with Jesus. He bore our sins there when He didn’t have to. He took on the guilt and anguish we feel, then He took on the spiritual punishment we earn with each transgression. He submitted to God’s holy justice there and pulled our sinful life out of us in doing so. When that was done, even before we were born, He had made us ready to be re-filled again, only this time with His life-giving Spirit.

Last, we need to be reminded that we’re waiting for Him to come back and bring the physical redemption He promised centuries ago. It’s been a long, long time and the world of common sin still siren-calls us to fall back, to slide back into the muck of ordinary rebellion. “It won’t be so bad,” sings the song, “it’s natural.” Jesus has been gone for so long; just give in this once. We need the reminder that, because all His words were honest, His final promise – to abide with us, then return – is honest as well. He’s coming back, and soon.

We’ve been here before. Thank the Lord for that.

For further reading: Acts 5:30, Romans 6:2, Hebrews 9:28, 1 Peter 2:25

Lord Jesus, I need You and Your reminders today!

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Peter, 11 June 2020

For “you were like sheep going astray,” but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls. 1 Peter 2:25 (NIV).

Don't lose sight of the place where this verse is said. It comes at the end of a section where Jesus' innocence is proclaimed; where Peter echoes Isaiah in reminding us of how Jesus did no wrong yet took our wrongs on Himself. Before that, Peter had exhorted his friends to submit to both God and men out of respect for Christ. And now Peter says this.

Because we're sheep going astray. Sheep lose their way. Sheep wander off and get lost. Sheep are bright enough to know the voice of their shepherd but not bright enough to always stay in ear-shot of it. Sound familiar? We are poor little lambs who have lost our way...baa baa baa. Say, is that coat of yours Angora?

Thank God the Shepherd was looking for us. Thank God we were the one and not the ninety-nine. Thank God He didn't give up. Thank God for Jesus because, thank God, Jesus is merciful.

Jesus sees past my pettiness. Jesus sees past your grudges. Jesus sees past the rioters' vicious hatred and the bigotry of low expectations from our society. Jesus sees when the lies become like truths. Jesus sees us as we are: smelly, dumb, weed-eating, tangled-fur sheep, wandering off when we should be staying close.

Instead of letting us be attacked by wolves, Jesus protects our hearts. Instead of letting us die alone, Jesus makes us His friends, His siblings. Instead of giving us the smack on the head that we deserve, Jesus brings us His justice and His forgiveness. Instead of shearing us before the slaughter, Jesus cleans up our hearts and takes our place in the executioner's dock.

Don't lose sight of the fact that Jesus, who was innocent, who did no wrong, who took our infirmities on Himself, still watches over us even when we walk away looking for greener pastures.

Because Jesus understands we're like sheep. Because He's been there. Because He's a sheep too, following His Father's lead, following as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Because He was the true Passover lamb, sacrificed for our deliverance so that death would pass us by.

You get the picture. Baa baa baa.

For further reading: 1 Peter 2:26

Lord Jesus, I'm like a sheep. In fact, sheep are better than me in many ways. But thank You for chasing after me, for saving me, for watching over me, for loving me.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Peter, 15 June 2020

Wives, in the same way submit yourselves to your own husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives. 1 Peter 3:1-2 (NIV).

Just last week, during another devotion, my wife and I were talking about these very verses and how verse 1 is misunderstood. About how we the people misunderstand what Peter is saying when he tells wives to “submit.” Remembering the context of this verse in its place after chapter 2 helps to understand it better because it’s part of a whole message instead of just a few words taken out of context.

That’s what we the people tend to do these days: take words out of context.

God is the only being in the universe who exists as three persons. Father, Son, Spirit: all three individuals in only one person. If you don’t understand how that works, join the club. Neither does anyone else. We stop trying to understand it by submitting to the fact that He Is the God who He says He Is.

Jesus understood that. He, as the Son, submitted to the will of His Father, who willed that His Son would live, die, and live to pay the final penalty for human sin. Jesus did that. He submitted Himself out of love for the people He created to be children, friends, and people forever. His very good creation. So He submitted Himself to a better plan.

When we marry, we give up ourselves. Decades of our world railing against that fact hasn’t changed it. The bride gives herself to the bridegroom. The bridegroom gives himself to the bride. Two become one by submitting. This is a picture that recurs in the New Testament, in the Gospels, where Jesus talks of His church as His bride, as the bride to whom He forever commits Himself by submitting to her. Will she submit to Him?

God ordained marriage and order for men and women, and gave us marriage to both model and preserve His ordination. Men and women have yin and yang roles to play in marriage but both are equally important, vital for preserving and advancing the relationship. When we forget this idea – when we take it out of context – we challenge a good thing God gave us for our own health and success. Marriage was intended to be a way for women and men to witness God’s love to each other, and to others around us. A spiritually suffering husband is more likely to come to faith if a devoted wife leads him there. A spiritually struggling wife is more likely to continue in the faith if her devoted husband continues as well. That is God’s intent.

For further reading: 1 Corinthians 7:16, Ephesians 5:22, 1 Peter 3:3

Lord Jesus, preserve our marriages so that we all might come to You together. Help us to submit.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Peter, 16 June 2020

Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as elaborate hairstyles and the wearing of gold jewelry or fine clothes. Rather, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight. 1 Peter 3:3-4 (NIV).

Have you ever really loved someone? Admit it: when you love someone, it's not just the outside that draws you to them. There's something inside, some quality, some thing about the other person that is so attractive to you that it captivates your heart. Sure, we want to look good, look our best for the one who loves us, but the one who loves us (or who we love) is attractive because of who they are inside.

That's why Jesus died for us. Before we were even born, He saw ahead to each of us and was in love with us. Not just the sexy guy or gal who walks around in nice clothes. No, Jesus loves the real us, the real you and me who we are when the clothes are off and we're staring in the mirror.

Tell me: do you like who you see there? Are you getting chubby in the mid-section? Turkey neck? Wrinkles and crow's feet? Less hair (or too much)? A little less spring in your step since the years are marching on, or is it that they just can't march fast enough because there's a world out there waiting for you to conquer? You're only looking at the surface. What about he or she underneath?

Last night, we watched the Elton John movie, "Rocketman." The bottom line in the story was that Sir Elton felt he was a rejected and unloved little boy who grew up to be a self-indulgent but still unloved and rejected man. Millions of dollars, a warehouse to store your wardrobe, and all the sex, booze, and drugs one can buy still couldn't cover over that knowledge that he simply wanted someone to love him as he was. Or is.

Dear Elton: it's Jesus. Dear friendly reader: look in the mirror and remember that the one who sees through the Gucci, Coach, and wrinkles is Jesus. He loves us as we are, inside, where we're real, with the bark (and the Ferragamo loafers) off.

Have you ever really loved someone? Maybe a good follow-up question should be, "have you ever loved the way Jesus loves us?" You know the answer, the hard-to-face answer. And if it is actually no, then perhaps it's time to re-learn that the God who made all this fabulous bling loves us much more than silver, gold, or sequins. If you ever meet him, remind Elton John.

For further reading: Isaiah 3:18-23, Romans 7:22, Ephesians 3:16, 1 Timothy 2:9, 1 Peter 3:45

Lord Jesus, thank You for loving me, for seeing through the clothes and loving me in my heart. Help me to love like You do.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Peter, 17 June 2020

For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to adorn themselves. They submitted themselves to their own husbands, like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her lord. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear. 1 Peter 3:5-6 (NIV).

For the last few verses, Peter was talking mostly to women. Even as there are lessons for us all, let's make no mistake: Peter's advice was predominantly for women; here he's obviously talking about and to an audience of women. Submission and modesty were foundations of faith, yet key in on the very last word of verse six and you'll find the theme that underlies the entire section. That applies to everyone.

Our church is in a series discussing fearlessness. In a nutshell, we, as believers in Jesus, need not live in fear, especially during these times of political upheaval and supposed viral pandemic. Even when the world around us is falling apart, we need not live in fear, anxiety, and dread over what's happening. Faith is more powerful than fear.

Idolatry is really at the heart of every sin. If you murder someone, you aren't just wantonly taking a life: you're doing that and putting yourself in God's place. If you steal, you're both stealing and putting your desires ahead of God. If we curse or lie or sleep with someone else, we're doing those things but also giving the proverbial finger to God. Every sin is one of both action and idolatry: expressing our adoration for something other than God.

I'd submit that happens because of fear.

Because we forget our reverence for God. Because we cast off our knowledge that He is God and we aren't. Because we misplace the sometimes distant love of Jesus to embrace the lie of temporary satisfaction right now. Because we are afraid of what might happen if we're caught but we're caught up in the thrill anyway. Large or small, every sin we do has an element of fear wrapped around it.

The antidote for fear is faith. Jesus always beckons us back, even in the middle of sin.

We're talking on Tuesdays (and Sundays) about ways to confront our fears, about what the Bible says about it. Listen, lament, pray; seek, reflect, listen, act: all these are actions that Jesus' Spirit enables us to do to suppress fear. No matter where we are in life, Jesus ALWAYS abides with us, especially when we're challenged by fear to ignore Him. Our modesty should reflect our reverence for God but also display our confidence, through Him, to defy the pettiness of fear. Yet each of us must face our fears. We must stand up to them to defeat them. The only way to overcome them is by living through Christ.

For further reading: Genesis 18:12, Esther 2:15, 1 Timothy 5:5, 1 Peter 3:7

Lord Jesus, help me face fear today.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Peter, 18 June 2020

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. 1 Peter 3:7 (NIV).

We're modern, right? I mean, feminism happened decades ago, and we're supposed to be enlightened, here in the West, about how the two sexes treat each other. Men and women are indeed equals in our society, even though some see it differently (and some have good reason). These verses are not applicable to us anymore, right?

No, not right.

Have you considered that Peter, Christ's Earthly right-hand-man, considered women as partners and heirs of Christ's eternal life? Where, in the verses immediately preceding this one, Peter had been speaking to women, so now he speaks to men. He's counseling men to not lord their position as God's chosen vessels for family leadership over women in that family. He's telling men to be mindful of the women who are their partners, their co-heirs in life, marriage, ministry, and eternity.

After all, in our own lifetimes, some of the most fearless people on earth have been women. Rosa Parks, Indira Ghandi, Golda Meir, Sandra Day O'Connor, Phyllis Schlafly, Coretta Scott King, Elizabeth II: you couldn't find stronger people in a thousand years. They're the courageous heirs of Esther, Sarah, Ruth, Priscilla, and any number of Mary's: women of Bible times whose examples of enduring faith have encouraged millions of people ever since.

Hardly seems like a "weaker sex" to me. In fact, "weaker" is a word that wraps us around its axle. We get hung up on it, reading inferred insults into it when none were ever intended. And "hindering our prayers" isn't just advice on how to pray. It's a command on facing down the idolatry of distraction.

That's what Peter was saying, you see. Men, treat the women in your life with dignity, honor, and deference as the partner in your life working a different role. Men, remember this always so that you can worship our Lord Jesus with clear heads and hearts so that your words and actions won't come between your relationship with God.

THAT is actually modern. It isn't weak and doesn't hinder.

Peter might not feel too comfortable in this supposedly modern world, but I do feel confident in saying he wouldn't be surprised by it. Maybe by technology, or abundant food, or so many people in so many places. But how people interact? How men and women interact? No, I doubt Peter (or the other apostles) would be very surprised at all. The lessons he taught two thousand years ago are just as necessary to us today as they were to people of Peter's day. In this, he was more modern than we are.

For further reading: Ephesians 5:25-33, Colossians 3:9, 1 Peter 3:8

Lord Jesus, let me treat men and women with deference to You.

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Practical Proverbial, from 1 Peter, 22 June 2020

Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble. 1 Peter 3:8 (NIV).

Like Paul, Peter implores his friends (and us) to exhibit some Godly behavior. Couldn't we use some of that now!

Actually, I'm betting you'll find we could use that in any generation. Our world is living through some awful times; things not seen in a century, or ever. Yet in most of our world, things are much worse than they are in the West. In most of the world, there is crushing poverty, economic desolation, rampant disease (much worse than Covid-19), and no hope. Most of our world doesn't know Jesus. Out of 7.5 billion people currently alive, a little less than 2.3 billion are Christian (or know of Christianity or Jesus). You do the math: twice as many people alive today don't know about Jesus as do. Translation: there's a ripe field for mission.

More importantly, there's a constant opportunity for us to exhibit Christian behaviors that demonstrate God's Spirit: being like-minded, sympathetic, loving, compassionate, humble. We have the opportunity, the God-given chance, to show Christ-like behavior to people who haven't heard about Christ. We have the mission (and Jesus' permission) to act in ways that He would to strangers in hopes that they will see this and want to know more about Him.

That starts with living out Peter's charge for ALL of us to start out being like-minded. That doesn't mean having all the same opinions or acting like minions or drones. It means agreeing on the basics of our faith and being ready to share it: that Jesus died for the forgiveness of sins and that He lives to offer us life forever. We are to be sympathetic, looking at a fallen world and realizing these are our brothers and sisters for whom Jesus provides the same as He does for us. We must love one another, starting with our circles of family and friends, then extending it out to share with wider populations. We are to be compassionate, offering tender mercy and help wherever we can. And we are to do all this humbly, with the attitude of a servant.

Like Jesus would.

That's a tall order these days. "Tear down that statue!" "Black lives matter!" "All lives matter!" "Racists!" "Shoot the looters!" "Shoot the cops!" We're all hearing, or saying, these things.

Definitely not like Jesus would.

So, Peter's words are refreshing today, on a Monday when another week of political division gets underway. When another day starts in which 2/3 of the world doesn't know about the God who both made and saved them. When our words aren't helping or healing. On another Monday, we sure could use some Godly guidance now. Thank you, Peter.

For further reading: Romans 15:5, Ephesians 4:2, Philippians 5:1 Peter 3:9

Lord Jesus, forgive my sins. And forgive the sins of those who oppose You, or me. Help me to show Your kind of behavior to everyone around me.

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Practical Proverbial, from 1 Peter, 23 June 2020

Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. 1 Peter 3:9 (NIV).

In my opinion, "The Godfather" is the best movie ever made in America. Every intertwined storyline is resolved. The acting is perfect; the scenery and sets are subtly arranged for maximum effect. In many ways, the brilliance of the movie is in how it actually underplays the gravity of a story about murder and revenge. "Family honor," and "justice", right? No. It's about revenge. Among many things, The Godfather is about revenge.

Revenge is embracing evil. Sure, it's "justifiable" sometimes, isn't it? I mean, if you're married and you've been in a terrible relationship for decades, it's understandable, it's ok, for you to want to rake that so-and-so over the coals because they deserve it, right? No, it's just embracing evil.

Or 'your promotion' was given to someone else, some upstart who sucked up to the boss and got what you've been working years to get. It's ok if you work to subvert them, to make them look bad, to hang them out to dry because what they did to you was wrong, right? No, it's just embracing evil.

We get cut off in traffic, or at the grocery store, and we curse the one who did it. After so many years of 'oppression,' it's understandable that rioters destroy stores, police cars, public property, right? The bully who persecutes you month after month, slamming you into the lockers, making fun of your clothes every day, spreading rumors about you just so they can laugh with their clique.

It's ok to wish for "justice" to happen to these people, isn't it?

No, it's just embracing evil.

The Lord asks us to trust Him. His justice, as He decides, is perfect and applies to all of us, even those who do us wrong. Our role, as Peter reminds us, is to bless those who persecute us. Turn the other cheek; pray for the relief of our oppressors; ask for God's mercy on those who hurt us. That doesn't demonstrate weakness. Deep inside, even those who are hurt confess that it demonstrates underlying superior strength. There has never been an unspeakable evil done by mankind that wasn't out-done by even the simplest act of mercy. After all, so many decades later, what matters more: the horrible inhumanity of Auschwitz or the faith of those who relied on God to survive it?

Reject evil. Repay injustice with mercy. Give forgiveness where you don't have to. Yes, don't forget and, yes, trust God to administer His justice through our legal systems and through His working in the world. But resist evil with good and overcome the devil with Jesus. Don't be the Godfather. Reject revenge.

For further reading: Matthew 5:44, Romans 12:17, 1 Thessalonians 5:15, Hebrews 6:14, Peter 3:10

Lord Jesus, help me to overcome evil by trusting only You.

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Practical Proverbial, from 1 Peter, 24 June 2020

For, "Whoever would love life and see good days must keep their tongue from evil and their lips from deceitful speech. They must turn from evil and do good; they must seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil. 1 Peter 3:10-12 (NIV).

Did you know that Carlos Santana believes his music is God speaking through him? Santana, who has been playing soulful music from the heart since before Woodstock (where he performed), believes very strongly that music has supernatural powers to reach people at a fundamental level. He believes music is healing, that it speaks to us in a common language that soothes hatred and helps to build divinely-inspired understanding.

Right on, right on.

Carlos Santana might know a bit about the Apostle Peter. In today's verses, Peter paraphrases Psalm 34, which was written by David while he was on the run from King Saul. David was being hunted because God had forsaken Saul as king, and had chosen David instead. Driven by hatred and jealousy, Saul had pursued God's anointed new king, so David took refuge in the home of his enemies, the Philistines.

And while living in jeopardy for his life, David penned the words of this psalm. In them, he sang how the face of the Lord is against anyone who does evil (like Saul). A thousand years later, Peter echoed those words, reminding his friends, whose lives were also in jeopardy, to put their trust in God, who would speak to them as He would.

Or like us, today, two thousand more years on. Think rioters. Think oppressive government. Think anarchists and political operatives and those who would do harm to others, especially during a time when the entire world seems upside-down. Anyone who does evil does so against the Lord, who sets His holy face against them. We could use more Santana and less rioting in the cities.

The way to stay in God's good graces? Sing that spiritual song with Santana (and Peter and King David) and keep our tongues from evil. Receive God's healing through God's word, through the peace that only He can give to a weary and worried heart. He watches over us even when we seem blinded. He speaks to us still, even when we don't think we can hear Him. Turn from our evil ways and seek His ways of good and love and peace. Even in the quiet times, even in the days of anxiousness, He's still speaking.

Or maybe He's singing. Maybe He is speaking through that music. Maybe turn up the radio a little. Maybe tune over to find Carlos Santana and his supernatural guitar. Then join in the song.

For further reading: Psalm 34:12-16 Peter 3:13

Lord Jesus, do not set Your holy face against me. Refresh me today with Your word, Your peace, Your truth.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Peter, 25 June 2020

Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? 1 Peter 3:13 (NIV).

Who's going to harm you if you're eager to do good? Seriously? Peter never lived in the age of social media. Your political opponents will do whatever they can to harm you if it will advance their cause. Urban terrorists, drunk with the power of fomenting violent change, are eager to destroy anyone (or anything) in their way. Uninformed critics will gladly tear you down if you disagree with any part of their dogma. In our "modern" era, the list goes on and on.

Hint: "the list" and the words and actions of the naysayers all mean nothing. Zip. Zero. Nada.

Who is going to harm us means nothing because the love of Jesus is stronger. What anyone says to detract from us or destroy us means nothing because the power of Jesus is found in His peace, not in their words. Anything anyone can do to target us, including physical harm, even death, is meaningless because the resurrection of Jesus has already overcome even their most deviant fantasies.

Generally speaking, those who are eager to do good are not harmed by those who aren't. Robert Schuller had something of a point: there is God-given power in positive thinking. It's not just that positive thinking and eagerness to do good become self-fulfilling prophecies. Instead, it is what comes from thinking, then doing, good that allows God to further His kingdom in the face of human depravity.

Think about it. Turning the other cheek is perhaps the most courageous thing a person can do. An act of random kindness usually leads to another, especially when done in good faith for another.

Generally speaking (again), I don't care for movie sequels. They're largely unoriginal. Yet that phrase – Act of Random Kindness – stuck with me when we watched "Evan Almighty" a few years ago. That's the Steve Carrell sequel to "Bruce Almighty." The up and coming Evan/Carrell moves to DC to take his place as a newly elected Congressman. But a message from God soon has him building an ark just like the one Noah built. Through it, Evan has to learn to rely on faith and vision. Yet, through the process of building a physical ark, God makes it known to him that the real ark He wanted in Evan's life was that Act of Random Kindness. That kind of ark not only weathers a storm: it builds on itself into something good in the world.

Who can harm you if you are eager to do that?

Peter might agree. Even Steve Carrell might agree. So that's our challenge today. Especially if you find yourself in a bad situation, perform just one, good act of random kindness for someone today. Launch that ark and see where God takes you.

For further reading: Titus 2:14, Peter 3:14

Lord Jesus, create for me today the opportunity to do an act of random kindness.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Peter, 29 June 2020

But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. "Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened." 1 Peter 3:14 (NIV).

Fear God, not people. That's Isaiah's declaration. Respect the Lord, not the people of the world because the Lord is holy and people aren't.

Did you see the video of the couple in St. Louis who guarded their home with weapons? Protesters with unknown intentions entered a private, gated community and two homeowners went outside, armed, to drive them off their property. Social media is abuzz with the video today and, no matter what one thinks about guns, the rights of the protesters, or the rights of the homeowners, one conclusion can be drawn that's universal to everyone. Those who don't fear aren't easily frightened. That couple wasn't afraid. They subdued their fears and resisted a potential threat.

Do you realize that you and I are in the same position? God has given us His Son to show us His love and mercy. He has forgiven all our sins and saved us from all eternal punishment for our willful rebellion. He sent us His Spirit to give us community and perseverance. Apart from Him we can do nothing. When we realize we are in Him, we cannot fail. He arms us.

Ephesians 6 talks about wearing the full armor of God. The Spiritual gifts and protections that He gives to us – or uses on our behalf – make us invincible to the enemy. Indirectly, though Ephesians 6 was written by Paul, this is part of the blessing that Peter is talking about. The enemy may attack, hurt, even kill us, yet we will live on because of Jesus. The enemy only attacks us to try to hurt Jesus but he doesn't realize he's already been defeated. We have nothing to fear from the devil when we realize we are armed and protected divinely.

We can fear, respect, love, and honor God because He has fights for us, loves for us, proves Himself over and over to us.

Yet perhaps the bigger blessing that Peter is talking about is how suffering for God, even being persecuted for God, is a blessing. It's a chance to stand up for God in ways that He rewards eternally. A million angels praising Him for your action; an eternity to ponder the satisfaction of doing the right thing in a meaningful way. When we are persecuted for following Jesus, we serve as an example of courage to others, and as an inspiration for others in the same situation.

Fear God, not people. It's common sense. It's becoming more and more inevitable, and will be more so the closer our world approaches it's end. It's our privilege. And it's blessed by God in ways we may not even understand.

For further reading: Isaiah 8:12, Ephesians 6:11, Peter 3:15

Lord Jesus, You are my armor in this world. You protect me and I'm thankful for You.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Peter, 30 June 2020

But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. 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 (NIV).

When was the first time you remember standing up for Jesus and saying, "I believe in Him?" To be honest, I can't remember my first time.

I know when it wasn't. I was baptized as a baby, and don't remember that. It wasn't on my confirmation day, when I gave all the right answers to stand up in front of the congregation and pass the test of membership; I've always been good at tests, anyway. And it wasn't at the Billy Graham crusade in DC, where I prayed with a stadium full of people and began to think that what I learned about all my life might just be for real. And it wasn't ringing the bell for the Salvation Army, or handing out food at a soup kitchen, or working with homeless in different cities; those things matter, too, but it wasn't then.

But it was this morning, and every morning for, oh, about two years now, since I learned I had a tumor in my brain. I quickly learned to thank God every morning for just one more new day. Even after the tumor was removed and gone, it's a personal, thankful witness I kept and now look forward to each day: begin the fresh day ahead by saying, "Lord, thank you."

And it was when I saw the verse for this post. When I read, yet again, Peter's famous challenge to every believer, to tell just why we believe in this man who is the Son of God.

The first time I knew deep in my heart that all that was said in the Bible was completely, inerrantly true was the night my father died. Our pastor came over to read a devotion with us late that night. He read from Romans 8, and when he got to the verse where Paul said, "For I am convinced," I simply understood that it was all true. That everything Pastor Vogt was saying in that very moment was true. That Jesus was fully God and fully man and fully right there in our home, at that very instant. That He had welcomed my father that day, and that He was mourning the hurt of death with us there.

I was thirty-two years at the time, and for the first time in my life I believed in my core that it was all true. Every bit of it.

I've told that story many times since, and now that I've told it again, I hope it helps you like it did me. Because it's all true. When someone asks me why I believe, I can tell them, "because it's true."

For further reading: Romans 8:28-39, Colossians 4:6, Hebrews 3:6, Peter 3:16

Lord Jesus, everything You shared with us is all true. Bless and thank You for that.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Peter, 1 July 2020

But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. 1 Peter 3:15-16 (NIV).

We live in an age of slander. In many ways, social media really hasn't brought people together. Instead, it has enabled us to verbally hit-and-run using slander as our weapon. For many of our brothers and sisters, even followers of Jesus, it isn't enough for us to slander someone. For many people, we work to destroy them.

It's not just online, though the anonymity and impersonal distance of online forums makes it much easier to slander or destroy. In person, have you worked with people who take credit for your work? Or who talk behind your back? Have you known people who say one thing and do another at your expense? Have you known people who seem to get their thrills off insulting other people, or tearing someone down to make themselves look better?

Is that you? Or me? Finally, have you considered that, maybe, Jesus has you where you are and who you are to serve as a kind, gentle, but strong witness to such people through your contrary attitude and behavior?

I mean it. We shouldn't just pray for our enemies. Instead, we should both pray for our enemies and then serve, as we do, in front of them. Those who would slander us, or seek to destroy us, or use and misuse us should see what we say and do, how we act, so that their conscience may affect them. Why? Because Jesus loves them, too. Because Jesus wants everyone wayward sinner to come back to Him.

It's tough to do, especially when we want to respond in kind to personal attacks. Yet the better way to persevere through such things is to follow Jesus. To do what He would. Instead of responding to personal attacks, let them serve as a witness to what the other person is doing. Instead of descending to the level of slander or destruction, answer only in ways that can make the other person examine themselves or to make their conscience kick in.

That doesn't say we must live as pincushions or be bullied. These verses are saying that we should be ready to give a witness to what we believe in both what we say and how we say it in all situations. Especially in those where we are under attack.

And this is tough advice to take. But if we are to truly help others and heal divisions, following Jesus first is the only way that works.

For further reading: Acts 23:1, Colossians 4:6, Hebrews 3:6, Peter 3:17

Lord Jesus, help me today to show my faith in You through how I respond to others.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Peter, 2 July 2020

For it is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. 1 Peter 3:17 (NIV).

Is it God's will that we sometimes must suffer? If we're being honest, we must conclude that, yes, it is.

So that means that wars are God's will? AIDS, cancer, muscular dystrophy, and the Corona virus? Bankruptcy, joblessness, divorce? Riots in the cities and indifference in the suburbs? It's God's will that millions should die of hunger and poverty while the wealthiest among us live in affluent apathy?

Read the verse again. Focus in on "suffer for doing good". The only logical outcome of this statement can be to say that, yes, God allows His people to suffer for doing good. If He would let His only dear Son die a suffering, torturous death to accomplish the miracle of redemption, do you or I think He would spare us from suffering if we are working for His world's greater good?

Does that make God cruel? Does that make Him wrong? Does that mean those who say "I can't believe in a God who allows people to suffer" are right?

Instead of going down that path, perhaps we should ask ourselves, "who am I to judge God?"

You and I aren't God. Shame on any of us who so wrongly judge Him by saying we won't believe in Him because He allows human suffering. Why haven't WE ended it? We're the human community: why do we allow 50 people to get shot in Chicago every weekend, or the crackdown in Hong Kong (meaning thousands have already been arrested, tortured, and executed), or the grievous sin of human trafficking. It's estimated that most of those trafficked in the US are cycled through our suburbs; why do we allow that? What have you or I done, as individuals, to work against those things happening?

God does indeed allow suffering to occur so that His Kingdom might grow. People turn more to God during times of suffering and pain. It's a dysfunction of our human psyche that we tend to ignore faith more when things are going well for us. Imagine how God's Kingdom could grow, and how much kindness and love might spread, if we could reverse this trend. Imagine a world where human love, through faith in God, could replace our suffering.

If God's will allows suffering so that good might result of it, imagine a humanity where God's will is allowed to flourish because we reject suffering in favor of faith in Him? Imagine our world if we realized that God plans for us to prosper, to hope, to live in harmony with Him. Even John Lennon's dopey song couldn't imagine that.

For further reading: Jeremiah 29:11, Peter 3:18

Lord God, encourage me today to implement ways to reduce suffering of those around me any myself by living closer to You, living more through You.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Peter, 6 July 2020

For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit. 1 Peter 3:18 (NIV).

My wife and I attended a wedding yesterday. I've been to many Christian weddings, and to be frank, I usually ignore the wedding sermon. I mean, I get it: it's a God-based ceremony. It's man and woman being joined together by God to form a picture of Himself, His Trinity, His church. But I'll be honest: most wedding sermons are boring. They're tedious and preachy. You go to weddings to see the couple, and to visit with friends and family. You go to weddings to celebrate and have fun and share in one of the highest points in a person's life. The brief sermon preached by the officiating pastor is usually forgetful; just a formality as part of him doing his job.

Not yesterday. Anthony, who married the couple, wasn't long-winded or boring. He talked a bit about what they'd discussed in pre-marital counseling. He shared a story of their last session, how the start of it was tense because one person had done or said something dumb and it caused tension, stress. So, he told them he'd leave the room so they could confess their sins to each other and forgive, then he'd come back a few minutes later. He then said that, when he returned to the room, the atmosphere was completely different, that you could feel it had lightened, and that God was afoot in the couple. That God was there and present. He said that should be the model they practice every day.

Right on, right on.

And he talked about how serious the marriage commitment is, especially in our "modern" time when marriage is scorned. About how Christ was calling the new husband to lay down his life for his wife every day, fully committed to both Jesus and her, and how he should be willing to die for them. About how the new wife should always be willing to lay down her life for his every day, fully committed to both Jesus and him. About how we crucify evil every day and take up Christ's new life as our own. About how this is what marriage is all about.

Right on again!

That's a wedding sermon I'll remember. It's the perfect picture of the two most critical elements in a long, happy, prosperous, and adventurous marriage. Without Christ and His forgiveness, nothing will work. Without Christ in a marriage, two sinners in the body are just shackled up. With Christ, it is a perfect relationship to always advance in a world hostile to our faith.

For further reading: John 10:17-18, Romans 5:2, Ephesians 1:20, Colossians 1:2, Hebrews 7:27, 1 Peter 3:19

Lord Jesus, bless the new couple today, and let their new marriage be a model for my own.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Peter, 7 July 2020

After being made alive, he went and made proclamation to the imprisoned spirits—to those who were disobedient long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. 1 Peter 3:19-20 (NIV).

These two verses are deeply mysterious. In the end, we don't really know specifically what Peter was saying. He's talking about Jesus, of course, yet that's where the understanding stops. Even Martin Luther, learned man he was, said (of these verses), "A wonderous text is this, and a more obscure passage perhaps than any other in the New Testament, so that I do not know for a certainty just what Peter means."

It could be talking about what the pre-risen Christ did between His death on Good Friday and His resurrection on Easter Sunday. He may have gone to the under-world, to the souls of those who died before His time here. He may have gone to proclaim His coming resurrection to all who never knew Him in His earthly form. We don't know.

Or Peter might be talking about those who were still alive on the earth, people who, since the time of Noah, had seen and heard God's proclamations about Himself yet refused to believe it in full. Again, we don't know.

Or he might be talking about Christ preaching to the angels, though that doesn't make much sense in terms of salvation, for Christ didn't die and live for the angels' salvation. Yet, once again, we don't really know.

But one message is understandable: Christ, being made alive, is for us to believe in. People saw Him, touched Him, communicated with Him, lived with Him after Easter Sunday. For at least 40 days after, in fact. And yet still many people – most people, in fact – didn't believe Christ was real. They were like us (or we are like them). We're both like the people of the anti-deluvian world, during the days of Noah. It took Noah and his family over one hundred years to build the giant ark. And while it's likely that people questioned Noah of what he was doing, it's also likely that he answered them, imploring them to repent and turn to God who had promised the end of humanity.

How many listened? None. Only Noah, his wife, and their sons and their wives rode on the ark to safety. Everyone else died; untold millions, maybe even billions. We don't exactly know how many people were on the earth back then; we can only guess. But that guess doesn't mean much because it's certain they all died. They died because they refused to believe they needed to be saved.

Maybe that's the mystery lesson Peter was trying to teach us, too.

For further reading: Genesis 6:3, Romans 2:4, Hebrews 11:7, 1 Peter 3:21

Lord Jesus, I believe in You. Thank You. And thank You for this strange lesson.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Peter, 8 July 2020

In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God. 1 Peter 3:20-21 (NIV).

Do you remember your baptism? I don't. I was baptized in 1966 by Rev. Dr. Reuben Youngdahl, at Mount Olivet Lutheran Church, in Minneapolis. I know this only because I've seen my baptism certificate and because my parents told me. My godfather was my uncle, John Edmonds, and my godmother was my aunt, Nancy Kornmann. Again, I know this because it was told to me. Beyond this, I have no knowledge or memories of the event.

I belong to a church that practices infant baptism because I believe even infants are sinful, though perhaps not consciously so. We're all sinful from birth; it's our inheritance from Adam and Eve. My church practices infant baptism, which is how I was baptized, because we believe even infants can suffer death, which is the penalty for sin. Thus, we want even the tiniest of us to be marked especially as adopted sons and daughters of the Lord.

Yet I'll confess something: I understand, and even long for, the knowledge of knowing what it felt like to be baptized. What I would have thought of it; what it would have meant to me; if I had noticed any change. These are thoughts to be considered only at a distance, because they can lead down a road of selfish focus. Yet they're also not unreasonable, not sinful just to consider. I respect those churches that choose to wait until a child is older so they might actively decide whether to undertake this adoption into Christ's family. It's a choice I wish I remembered.

I wouldn't have made a different choice: I would still have elected to choose baptism. I simply wish I could remember what it felt like.

I suppose that's because I would love to feel my conscience being washed clean. Baptism symbolizes salvation. In a way, the flood of Noah's day was the world being washed clean, saved from the sin of mankind gone wicked. Our own baptisms should reflect both this physical reminder of the deadly consequences of sin, and the spiritual cleansing that results from Jesus marking us officially as one of His own. In truth, that happens when we believe. Professing our belief is the only action we take to 'seal the deal' of salvation. Everything else was done by Christ. Yet in baptism we receive a symbol of this belief, much like a legal adoption ceremony. It's for us to know and recognize something done by God on our behalf. He's already done the heavy lifting.

I sometimes wish I remembered more about it.

For further reading: Acts 22:16, 1 Peter 3:22

Lord Jesus, thank You for the gift of baptism, for adopting me into Your family. For marking me as Your saved child.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Peter, 9 July 2020

...and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at God’s right hand—with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him. 1 Peter 3:21-22 (NIV).

Water saves or Jesus saves? Jesus, of course, without whom the water would just be wet liquid mass. Consider, then, what Peter has been saying in this last part of chapter 3.

To refresh your memory, Peter talked about suffering, and about how, if it is God’s will for people to suffer, then we should submit to His will. We should do this because Christ willingly suffered for us so that we wouldn’t have to. Then, Peter reminds us that, after suffering, Christ rose back to life and mysteriously visited people to proclaim God’s power and justice. He said that, just as God used the ark to save Noah and his family, God used Christ to save all people. And, in saving all people, He gives us the spiritually symbolic sacrament of baptism, to remind us of how God sealed our adoption into His family through the washing blood of Christ.

For what purpose? After all, Jesus is the all-powerful God, three-in one, Father, Son and Holy Ghost who is in all and before all and outside of all. Why would God do all this through His Son?

You already know the answer. You’ve known it every time you say, “yes, I believe.” You’ve known it every time you utter a prayer to a mysterious God who you can neither see nor feel but still sense hears every word you say. You’ve known it in the moments when divine beauty, like a ray of light, reveals itself to you in a momentary revelation of truth.

Love.

Jesus didn’t have to: He wanted to because of His love. Because of that, all angels, authorities, and powers of the universe are under the dominion, now, of Jesus Christ. Everything that was made by and through Him is under His control, His feet, His eye. And everything lives because of the love that beats in His heart. His heart of love swells love in each of us because it’s the love of God in Him that saves us, that trod up to that cross to lay down upon it.

Only light can brighten the darkness; only love can warm over the hate. Too much darkness and hate have occupied our world lately. Perhaps, now, is the time to remember that our present sufferings matter very little when compared to the power of the love that is Jesus Christ.

For further reading: Mark 16:19, Hebrews 4:14, 1 Peter 4:1

Lord Jesus, Your love drives everything. You died and live because of perfect love. Thank You. Bless You. And I love you in return.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Peter, 13 July 2020

Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because whoever suffers in the body is done with sin. 1 Peter 4:1 (NIV).

This weekend, my wife and I took two of our grandkids to Hot Springs, Arkansas, where we stayed in a cabin for a few nights. Our grandkids (who are six and three) especially enjoyed being outside, playing in the pool, fishing, and playing frisbee golf. We did a little sight-seeing, drove through the National Park, and had a long hike in the woods.

You know what was best about the place? Shoddy internet. During my workweek, I'm constantly online. This resort, out in the woods, had fairly sketchy internet. That was a hidden blessing because it helped us to focus on simply being together instead of being inter-connected electronically. For me, it mostly removed my temptations to debate and argue online. By the end of yesterday, I had largely given up.

Oh the horror: that's hardly suffering.

Real suffering looks like hunger. And no bed to sleep in. Suffering looks like poverty. And poverty of spirit. Suffering causes others pain, even when it's emotional pain. Or worse. The Uighurs know suffering. So do kids in the sub-Saharan. And those suffering violence in Chicago. How privileged we are to be able to enjoy a short vacation that such people only dream of. Sin still afflicts us.

So we're gracefully blessed to get away from things for a short time to realize that the better way in this life is to be done with sin. We suffer in affluence, not even realizing that we're suffering in spirit. Last night, my tired grandson was longing for his own bed, and complaining that he had to share a bed this weekend with his wiggly sister. I told him that I knew of kids who didn't even have beds, or places to sleep, or even food; that there were so many kids in the world who were really hurting, and couldn't even begin to dream of a getaway at a resort. His complaining quickly died down.

This weekend, we did anything but suffer. But coming back home, where things are 'normal,' it's time to take to heart the lesson that Jesus suffered for us to live and enjoy a full life. That He did this for everyone, not just people enjoying free time off. This week, as we get back to our routines, our challenge is to take to heart a few days of being away from our online world and remember why Christ died for us. He suffered for us, and real suffering is still happening in our world today. Because of Him, let's be done with our common sins and move on to something much better.

For further reading: Romans 6:18, 1 Peter 4:2

Thank You, Lord, for vacations. But thank You, more, for suffering for us. Help me to be more thankful in all I do, and to help alleviate the suffering of others.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Peter, 14 July 2020

As a result, they do not live the rest of their earthly lives for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God. 1 Peter 4:2 (NIV).

Charlie Daniels died last week. You know the man: country music singer who sang “The Devil Went Down to Georgia” and a slew of other hits over a fifty-year career. Did you also know that Daniels was a man of very deep faith? An ordained minister, he would gladly, enthusiastically talk about his faith in the Lord whenever he could. I believe that’s the single biggest reason why his God-given talents generated 70 years of success for him.

It’s almost as if he was living for the will of God. Yes, great songs get lots of play on the radio. Yes, musical talent generally lends itself to making great songs. Yes, musical talent is vital if you’re going to go on the road, and if you’re going to continually record and be played on the radio. And, yes, being a patriot leader among other patriots helps to build a loyal following of dedicated fans.

None of those things happens without the will of God. None of those wonderful things happen unless God allows it, God wills it, God gives it as a gift. It’s the same with anyone who has a talent, whether it’s driving trucks, doing dishes, or leading crowds in a movement. When we’re given a talent, when we thankfully submit that to the Lord who gives it, He prospers us as He wills. Sometimes that means fame and wealth; sometimes it’s something else, yet nothing can stop or hinder the will of God when He opens His hand of blessing.

It’s the same with you. Living in faith if Christ can sometimes mean suffering, persecution. It can mean hardship and, if you let it, the beginnings of fear. That fear can take our eyes of Jesus and distract us. Yet living through faith can also give you the strength to put aside those fears and move forward. God always blesses us. Usually, He does indeed prosper us and bless us further when we use the talents He gives us. Whether it’s the knowledge of a job well done, or real, tangible prosperity blessings that we call ‘the fruits of success,’ God blesses us when we use what He gives us to further the faith.

If you aren’t where you want to be, before you work to get there, have you checked to see where you are in relation to your faith in Jesus? He doesn’t move: have you? And if you don’t have the wealth, fame, or prosperity you wish for, have you stopped to realize all the other ways in which God has blessed you? Perhaps those are what He intends. It’s always for the good of the faith.

God rest a good man in Charlie Daniels.

For further reading: 1 Peter 4:3

Lord Jesus, You bless me every day. Thank You!

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Peter, 15 July 2020

For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do—living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry. 1 Peter 4:3 (NIV).

Been there, done that. If you want to read a list of all my sins, go back to 2010 and start re-reading this blog from then. The sins are there; I've talked about them; I opened up a rhetorical vein to bleed them out, confessing to so many things that were inexcusable and wrong; things that hurt and hurt people; awful things. That'll be the last time I'll mention them here. Been there, done that.

Jesus forgave them.

I lived as a pagan and I did so while professing my faith in Jesus. That officially made me a hypocrite. Worse, it officially made life awful for the people I loved most, and even for people untouched by my sins. When we willfully sin, we affect so many other people, many more than just ourselves or those immediately around us.

Jesus forgives it.

God touches all of us, and when we sin, we offend God. We hurt Him first with our small and large rebellions, and when He allows the consequences of our sins to follow their natural paths, it hurts the world and the people around us. The worst part of it is that we sin by choice. It isn't something we have to do. No, we choose our sins; nobody chooses them for us. We each do these detestable things, and they do much more than we intend.

And still Jesus forgives them even when He doesn't have to.

Knowing that, isn't it a better choice to put off our old ways? To go to Jesus, and confess what we've done, and let Him take the burden off us? To do those things, then walk away from our sins and stop revisiting them? Jesus forgives us all of our sins, and then He asks us – He commands us – to leave our lives of sin and sin no more. He forgives us, refuses to condemn us, and tells us to move forward away from the sins, to truly repent.

We can choose that just as easily as we can choose whatever pet sin plagues us.

A long time ago, I said things, did things, and did things again that were sins. Sins against God, sins against what I believe, sins against people I love, sins against others. I did them, and I was responsible for them. And I went to Jesus and He took away my guilt. And when my vestigial guilt over them tries to bubble up, I choose now to remember that He forgave them and remembers them no more. And I should choose to do the same. Been there and done that, too.

For further reading: John 8:11, Romans 13:13, Ephesians 2:2, 1 Peter 4:4

Lord Jesus, I praise and thank You for taking away my sins, for forgiving me, for helping me to change.

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Practical Proverbial, from 1 Peter, 16 July 2020

They are surprised that you do not join them in their reckless, wild living, and they heap abuse on you. 1 Peter 4:4 (NIV).

Changing is a tough thing. When you're trying to make a positive change, old habits make things tough. Your friends make it tougher. Your circumstances make it tougher. Where you are isn't where you are working to go, and that makes it tougher.

When that happens, persevere, my friend. Persevere by remembering that suffering produces character, which leads to perseverance, which, before long, finds itself in hope.

Yesterday was anniversary for me: six years since I've had a cigarette. I picked July 15, 2014 as an easy day to remember to throw away my last pack of smokes. I remember praying for God's help to let them stay in the trash and to walk away. He answered my prayer and it worked. No, I didn't use Chantix or patches or gum. No, I didn't replace one addiction with another, though I did drink more coffee and I put on about 20 pounds. No, I didn't switch to chew, or cigars, or a pipe. And, no, I didn't have any regrets. I quit cold-turkey and haven't touched one since. The craving occasionally comes back; you can't do something for 30+ years and not occasionally hear the beckoning siren song. But that song lost its allure. My smoking was hurting me, and it was hard on my wife. Quitting became easier because God made it worthwhile to me. I trusted Him to give me the strength to push through when I felt a craving and He hasn't ever let me down.

If a simple guy like me can do that with a tobacco craving, anyone can do it with any pet sin. Yes, it will be tough. Yes, the habit may be hard to break. Yes, there will be times when you're tempted to back-slide. When those things happen, reach out in prayer. Pray for Christ's help for you to persevere; for His Spirit to fill your character so that you can have the strength to push through a tough spot. To persevere when it's rough. To reinforce that perseverance with character, then the success of hope because the hope of Jesus is the promise of full forgiveness.

And sweet relief.

I'll admit: there are times when a cigarette would taste great, especially after a steak. But it just isn't worth it now. God gave me this gift to quit, and with middle age and other health issues, I need that gift more than ever. The stale illusion of satisfaction would only leave me feeling guilty while hungering for more. Better to stay the course and push forward. God gave me the strength to turn from that past sin. He's given it to me for so many others as well. He'll do the same for you.

For further reading: Romans 5:5-8, 1 Peter 4:5

Lord Jesus, thanks for helping me to fight off my past addictions, to conquer them.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Peter, 20 July 2020

They are surprised that you do not join them in their reckless, wild living, and they heap abuse on you. But they will have to give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. 1 Peter 4:4-5 (NIV).

We should focus on our own behavior and not judge anyone else's. It's ok, a good thing, to look at the behavior of others to judge how this affects us or how it paints our own behaviors. But that's where the judging must stop. We shouldn't judge ourselves better than others, or anyone less than ourselves. We should only use others' words and actions as a barometer that tells us how we should or shouldn't respond. We should do these things because it is Jesus' job to judge between the living and the dead, between those who believe in Him and those who don't, between right and wrong for His church.

That's it.

And make no mistake about it: each of us will give an account of our faith to Him. Whether it is during a moment in our lives here, at our death, or at the last judgment, we will stand before Jesus and He will ask us and we will answer. There won't be a time to seek further advice, or ask for another chance, or plead for a do-over. A time will come when we will have to answer to Him just what we believe about Him. He is the only way to eternal peace, the only gate into heaven. There are many paths in this life that lead to Him, but only one path – Him – that leads to the Father and eternal love. Nobody goes directly to the Father unless He moves that person to His son through the Spirit. A mystery? Yes; very much so. If it perplexes you, perhaps you should consult the Gospel of John, chapter 14. Then Matthew 7. Then the other verses referenced here.

Read Matthew 25. It's the future. Don't read it in fear, unless you don't believe. Then, yes, please do read it and be afraid. And when you (hopefully) realize that your individualistic unbelief makes you a goat, please go back to John 14. Or John 3:16-17. Jesus is the only path to heaven. He's the only path possible because He came, lived, died, and lives again to make an eternity of love possible for us. Because God so loved the world.

Again, that's it.

In remembering that, then today remember to focus on yourself. Look around and see what's happening, and what's being said, and what it means to you. Don't hold judgment against someone else. Simply look for yourself and decide who to follow. Choose wisely.

For further reading: Matthew 7:13, Matthew 25:31-46, John 3:16-17, John 14:6, Acts 10:42, 1 Peter 4:6

Lord Jesus, I believe in You. Move my heart to observe and adapt, to change my ways for the better to better follow You & help others to do the same.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Peter, 21 July 2020

For this is the reason the gospel was preached even to those who are now dead, so that they might be judged according to human standards in regard to the body, but live according to God in regard to the spirit. 1 Peter 4:6 (NIV).

The time is now to talk about what you believe. One day, we will each die; one day, each of us will be dead. Then, it will be too late for us to hear about Jesus and, if we have rejected Him, to change.

For me, this whole passage of 1 Peter 4 isn't a fear-based motivation. I believe in Jesus, and the more I dig deep into just what He said & did and why I believe in Him, the more I see it's because He truly is perfect love, peace, justice, and living. He showed us all how to live; He gave 100% of Himself so that we might live. I'm thankful, now, that so many people in this life have talked with me about these things, or reached out online; that people used their voices to talk about faith. I'm thankful that others who also said, "I believe," shared why so that I could get to where I am now.

Here's where it is best to remember "it's not about me." It really isn't. It's about Jesus. It's about following Him and helping others to get to following Him. It's about living in ways He demonstrated. It's about growing the church so that, while this life is happening, we may all better share His peace and love; it's about the end of this life, that we may live an adventurous eternity with Him.

It's about sharing Him with others.

The time to talk about all this is now. The time to live out the fruits of Jesus' Spirit is now; to allow love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control guide what we think, say, and do. The time is now to share that Jesus is pure love and did all that was necessary to forgive all the Spiritual consequences of our rebellions against God. The time is now to talk about how Jesus loves all 7.7 billion people on this planet and wants each one of us to know Him and be with Him forever; that it's our privilege to carry His message to each of them in what we think, say, and do. And the time is now to remind everyone that Jesus is the same, loving God of the New Testament who repeatedly, sometimes viciously called out & punished His people in the Old Testament for their rebellions against Him.

The time to talk about these things is while we can learn from them, and turn to Him because we don't want to participate in sin against Him any longer. One day, it will be too late.

For further reading: Galatians 5:22-23, Hebrews 9:27, 1 Peter 4:7

Lord Jesus, help me to profess You today.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Peter, 22 July 2020

The end of all things is near. Therefore be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray. 1 Peter 4:7 (NIV).

Stop me if I'm wrong, but 2020 feels like the end of all things is near. This is a feeling that many generations have had; we aren't the first.

Those who lived through that week when Christ was crucified felt that the world was ending. Or a generation later, in 70 AD, when the Romans sacked Jerusalem and burned down everything (including the Temple). Or a few years later in Pompeii and Herculaneum, when Mount Vesuvius destroyed them in a few hours. Perhaps the Romans felt this when the Vandals sacked the city in 455, which began the irreversible decline to the end of the Roman Empire a few years later, in 476. Living through the Black Death in the 1300s must have felt like the end of the world. British soldiers at Yorktown surely felt despair in October of 1781. Americans who lived through the autumn of 1860 surely felt the end of things (as they were) approaching, as did the people of Europe in July of 1914, or their children 25 years later, in August 1939.

The end is coming. Be sober and be ready because something big is about to happen.

We can face the approach of historical events with either fear or faith. Even people of faith sometimes feel fear, and people living in fear sometimes sense flashes of faith. Yet these are opposite poles on the spectrum of how we can choose to live our lives. Both can help us gauge our surroundings, yet a posture of fear always lets us down. Faith is the only posture in which we can move forward contentedly yet boldly into whatever is in store. Only faith helps us to be both sober and alert.

Have you considered that, perhaps, in the middle of all this chaos, the best actually is yet to come? Perhaps what we're on the verge of witnessing is the most wonderful thing possible. As it says in Romans 13, the hour is come because our salvation is nearer than at any other time. My daughter is expecting, so a new grandchild is only a few days away. My company was purchased and that has the potential to spread prosperity. A new book is taking form in my mind. And, while she's out of work at the moment, my wife daily finds new job postings near to home and well-paying.

Fear or faith? I'll choose faith. There has been enough fear this year.

I'll choose faith because something big is coming. The end – and a beginning – is nearer than it was before. Something phenomenal is approaching fast. I believe in Jesus, so whatever it is, I know He'll be with me throughout. I know that this, too, will work out for the good of His people.

For further reading: Acts 24:25, Romans 13:11, 1 Peter 4:8

Lord Jesus, I believe in You. Let's face tomorrow together!

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Peter, 23 July 2020

Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. 1 Peter 4:8 (NIV).

A quick recap: Peter reminds us that love helps us to be sober and alert. Love provides for vigilance. Fear doesn't. Fear isn't love, and love doesn't show itself in fear. Peter said this after reminding us that the end of things is coming so we should be sober (vigilant) and alert (wise) in how we live. He then tells us that, while being this way, we should love each other deeply.

So, we like watching those shows about families that have lots of kids. Our family has spent countless hours watching Duggar's, Bates', Waldrop's, Derricos' and other families that have multiple kids. If you know about the Bates and Duggar families, they each have 19 kids (and counting). That's a lot of kids. Yet these families are positive, caring, showing lots of love. And they do it while shrugging off tons of animosity and Twitter/Facebook/manufactured hostility toward them. They love and forgive.

Love each other deeply. All the families I've listed above are devout Christians, and that isn't surprising. In my own life, all of the large families I've known have been Christian. Or at least followers of God. It not only isn't surprising to learn that most of the families I've known are Christian: it makes sense. It makes sense because love covers over a multitude of sins and love helps us to be sober and alert. You couldn't 'keep it together' in an extremely large family if you didn't share a lot of love.

Sure, I've known large families (or large groups) that weren't bound in love; we all have. Stop me if I'm wrong but those groups, those families, don't last if they don't love each other. Where love isn't, division and anger are. Where people don't share love, they share its opposite. Maybe that's our collective problem with 2020: we just aren't loving each other enough. Somehow, I think Jesus might just be nodding His head "you betcha!" at that thought. We aren't treating each other like family; we aren't loving each other deeply.

And when we don't, well, the multitude of sins bubble up. Violence, hatred, murder; pettiness, insults, disrespect; tears, pain, and loneliness: aren't all these things evidence of a lack of love somewhere along the line? Maybe, somewhere, we've let that line break down, forgetting that love crowds out fear. That love grows forgiveness.

So how about this: starting today, right now, let's give each other some benefit of the doubt. Let's work to try to love each other more, to seek understanding, to let things slide that would otherwise offend us. Imagine what could be accomplished when we love in the name of Jesus. It's something the Duggars and the Bates seem to already understand.

For further reading: Proverbs 10:12, James 5:20, 1 Peter 4:9

Lord Jesus, forgive me for not loving yesterday. Help me to love better today.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Peter, 27 July 2020

Offer hospitality to one another without grumblings. 1 Peter 4:9 (NIV).

The best memories I have of my kids growing up surround Sunday dinners. Starting when they were young, we set aside Sunday dinner as a time to be together, like people did in 'the old days.' Early on, we tried doing the dinner with no phones but, as smart phones became more prevalent, the poisonous little devices found their way into our routine. Still, even with that, we would gather at our table, usually mid-afternoon, to have a meal together with one of our favorite recipes. Often, one of the kids' friends (or two) would join us, and we'd rarely say no.

That's the good stuff, you see. Sitting at your table with your family there, listening as they talk and ramble and eat a meal you prepared for them. Jesus was there; He was part of our fellowship. Not just blessing the meal but actually being in it, being a part of our gathering. Even when we didn't realize it, even when we ignored Him or used language we shouldn't, He was there in all of it, and that's what made it special. We could all be together with Him in our favorite safe place.

Yet I sometimes grumbled about doing the dishes. It's my fault, really. I didn't instill in my kids to help clear the table. To offer up their time to clear the table, rinse the dishes, load the dishwasher, and hand-wash the rest. So they didn't. Their (eventual) spouses always jumped in to do it, but I didn't do a good job teaching my own kids to do it on their own. So I would grumble about having to do the dishes even after this great fellowship, even after these special times together. I wish I hadn't.

Nowadays, I go to my kids' homes and watch them with their own kids. They're really good about teaching their own little kids to empty the plates and put things by the sink. And the fellowship part still happens, and that's best of all. The tradition and journey continue.

And, perhaps, they'll do a better job of listening to the apostle Peter than I did. It's harder to arrange get-togethers when your kids grow up and move to different towns. It takes planning and effort. If you think about it, it takes that to have any kind of dinner or party, what with busy schedules and conflicting priorities. Yet we still cherish those times to make memories together, to share a meal, to invite Jesus back to our table. He always brings a good time.

That's my challenge to you today. Make plans to have a dinner with someone soon and show you're glad about it. You never know who might show up. Shake it off if you get annoyed over the dishes. The togetherness matters more.

For further reading: Romans 12:13, Philippians 2:14, 1 Peter 4:10

Lord Jesus, be in and lead our fellowship.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Peter, 28 July 2020

Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. 1 Peter 4:10 (NIV).

We've talked about this before: everyone's gift matters because God gave each of us different gifts, talents, and abilities. What you can do isn't the same as what I can do, but we both have a place. Some people have gifts that are used (and are useful) every day for years. Others have gifts or things to contribute that only matter once or a few times in their entire lives.

Both matter. God uses all our lives to contribute to His world. We may never know when what we say or do might affect others. Shouldn't we, then, use every moment to do our best for Him, live to the fullest, 'give it our all?' You know the answer.

The key is to serve others. In doing that, we serve God. If you're like me, you are guilty of not always doing a good job at this. I'm a sinner. I've failed at this. That's a confession, not an inoculation. I stink on ice at using my gifts to serve others. For every one time I've done the laudable things God wants me to do, there are other times when I have enthusiastically failed.

Thank God He's merciful when I haven't been. Thank You, Jesus, for being the man I'm not. Thank You Holy Spirit for filling me with the drive to do better.

That makes it possible to wake up every morning and try again. To throttle things I say and do. To take responsibility for when I mess up. To recognize when God has given me an ability & opportunity to share for His purposes and not my own. To serve instead of being served. Yet, when I serve others, I find that God is serving me. Does that make serving others selfish? Not at all. Instead, it reveals Jesus' character.

Thankfully, it also reveals our hypocrisy when we fall short. Yet, when that happens, it also reveals Jesus right there, beckoning us to let go and let Him so that we might move forward and serve again. We may never know if what we say or do is exactly what someone else needs right there and then. Even so, God knows.

If you can lead, you have a gift. If you have Down's Syndrome, you have a gift. If you can knit, cook, dig trenches, build things, weld, write programs, play video games, cry, take pictures, or share something in any way, you have a gift. Jesus wants us to use each of them in ways that serve others so that, in doing so, we're serving Him.

Because that matters.

For further reading: Romans 12:6-8, 1 Corinthians 4:2, 1 Peter 4:11

Lord Jesus, encourage me again today to use the gifts You give me to serve You by serving others.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Peter, 29 July 2020

If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen. 1 Peter 4:11 (NIV).

Yesterday, a long-time friend of mine asked to be taken off the email list for this blog. My friend knew me from many years ago, decades in fact. He knew me from the time when we were kids, when I was mean. Years ago, I said and did stupid things; kid things but hurtful ones. Cruel, in fact; not illegal but not justifiable. Just plain mean. I don't know if he remembers them, but I hope not. I hope he doesn't because the regret I've felt all these years is enough for both of us.

I know Jesus forgives all things, that He long ago forgave these. I'm not sure if my friend has; to be honest, I'm not sure I have the guts enough to ask. I don't deserve his forgiveness. Maybe that's why he asked to be taken off the list. Or maybe it was politics, or some other reason I don't even know. Maybe it isn't even my business. Whatever the reason, I did what I usually do when someone asks to be removed from my message list. I took his name off, and today he won't receive it. Yeah, he might read this on Facebook and, if you do, Eugene, I'm sorry for what I did way back when we were kids.

See, if you can't honestly speak the words of God with the strength only He can give, then you are wasting your words. Faith in Jesus teaches us this, along with that forgiveness mentioned earlier. Yet even when we have good intentions, sometimes we get in the way of the message. Lots of things can be the reason for that, yet the fundamental outcome is the same: we blow it.

So, I find comfort in going back to Jesus, to maybe, publicly, profess my sorrow over things I've done, and ask His forgiveness once again. Jesus doesn't ask us to stew in our sins forever. His glory and power forever remove the need for that. Yet He also gives us strength to apologize and maybe make amends where we can. To help others heal. To lay down the things with which we hurt ourselves over and over, then walk away from them for good. To do better for Him. To let His subtle yet glorious power shine through. If that had been my motivation when I was growing up, maybe I would have been a better kid, and grown into a better man. Either way, I'm sorry.

For further reading: 1 Corinthians 10:31, Ephesians 6:10, 1 Thessalonians 2:4, 1 Peter 4:12

Lord, I'm sorry for my sins. I'm sorry I hurt my friend.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Peter, 30 July 2020

Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. 1 Peter 4:12 (NIV).

At our house, we're making our way through the last few episodes of, "The Man in the High Castle." If you haven't read the book or seen the Amazon series, it's about what the world would be like if the Axis powers had won World War II. I won't give away the plot line because it's fairly compelling TV; go watch it. But I will say that a world run by the Nazis is pretty much what you would expect it to be. Orderly, regimented, clean; totalitarian, brutal, dictatorship. In the show, what the Nazis did in the 1930s and 40s, they continued in the other lands they conquered.

Why would you expect any different?

And in our world today, especially here in the United States, there are thousands of people who are flirting with the idea of socialism, even outright communism, as being preferable to our own system of a representative republic. No, I'm not going into a political lesson, but I will say that those systems of government have crowded out freedom wherever they have been tried. The further left one trends, the more the freedoms of speech, peaceful assembly, and worship are gradually extinguished. No "State" can compete with God, so they inevitably try to eliminate Him. It has happened everywhere these ideologies have taken root.

Why should we expect any different now?

Two thousand years ago, the Apostle Peter lived in a time of both lifesaving revelation (by the Son of God) and brutal inhumanity (by every government since the beginning of the Bronze Age). Rome had ruled the world of the Mediterranean with brutal control. Before them, the Greeks did the same. Before them, the Persians. And the Babylonians. And the Phoenicians. And the Egyptians. Where man places himself in front of God, disaster follows. Without God, anarchy and destruction quickly rule.

Yet consider this: it is through suffering and turmoil that God builds our character. It is through ordeals of anarchy that God refines us, teaches us to persevere so that our ordeals may lead to stronger character. So that character may sustain us to better do His work and instill the hope of His forgiveness, His mercy, His love for others, and His coming return.

It was true in Peter's time. It's still true today. Why would things be different now when this has always been our way?

You know the answer. Only God can keep us in check. Only the love of Jesus can put an end to the hatred. And even then, the hate will still fight to squelch freedom. Yet God's freedom never dies out. The Man in the High Castle could tell you that.

For further reading: Romans 5:3-5, 1 Peter 4:13

Lord God, please forgive us and help us put away evil. Be our only God and hope.

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Practical Proverbial, from 1 Peter, 3 August 2020

But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. 1 Peter 4:13 (NIV).

Remember your Romans 5 here. If you'll recall, in Romans 5, Paul tells that "we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us."

These are my wife's favorite verses in the whole Bible. I can see why. You can see, too, that Peter is echoing Paul here.

I've said before that the first time I innately understood that everything that was said in the Bible was true was the night my father died, when our pastor read to us from the book of Romans. At that time, I had a 'God moment,' accepting the full truth of what Pastor Vogt was saying. It was like entering a room full of books where all your questions were answered. More than that, it was relief. Real, true, fulfilling relief. My Dad was gone but he wasn't. He wasn't truly gone because Jesus really had taken him home the way He promised He would. In that moment, Jesus revealed His glory: His glory through His truth.

It was a moment that happened 'in the now'. It happened concerning a time Jesus long ago promised about our future. Whether that future is the end of each of our lives or the end of humanity's time on earth, the promise is still true. Jesus forgives. Jesus loves. Jesus will take each of us to paradise to be with him, today or tomorrow. Jesus is all He says He is and so much more. We suffer, yes, but feel relieved.

Knowing that makes the toughest moments here bearable, even understandable. Suffering in faith through them helps us to persevere. That perseverance builds character. And that character follows through faith into the hope of God. Suffering, death, worry, destruction? No, I don't want them. No sane person would. But bring em on, baby. I won't be alone. God will prevail and, in the end, I'll see His face on the earth. He said so. He meant it. His Word is proven plainly in our daily lives. His promises have all come true. Only God can save us from ourselves, specifically from the eternal consequences of the things we say and do.

If we're part of eternity now, and we're embracing our sins, then before we become part of eternity IN eternity, there is still time to make wiser choices. To turn to God and let Him turn our suffering into hope. If you haven't done so yet, why do you want to suffer?

For further reading: Job 19:25, Luke 23:43, Romans 5:3-5, 1 Peter 4:14

Lord Jesus, I believe in You. Forgive my sins and help me to truly repent, to change for You

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Peter, 4 August 2020

If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. 1 Peter 4:14 (NIV).

Have you ever been insulted for believing in Jesus? I work in a career field where it isn't politically correct to talk about being a believer. Sure, if someone is sick or in trouble, it's ok at work to say, "I'll pray for you," but you'd best leave it at that. Faith is not approved of. That isn't really an insult, I suppose, but it's in the same vein.

Once, my nephew chewed me out for sharing Bible verses with him.

In the course of my life, I've been called a hypocrite. Some people have told me that I'm a lousy believer and a lousy representative of Jesus. To be honest, they once had a point. People have ridiculed me for being a bad Christian, but I can't recall a time when people have ridiculed me for actually being a Christian.

But be advised: those days are coming. Over the weekend, at the political riots in Portland, a group of rioters began to burn Bibles. That isn't personally insulting: it's much worse. It indicates that 'peaceful protest' has now legitimized the destruction of our faith. First comes burning the Bible. Can insults, then worse, be far behind?

Yep: brace yourself. Those days are coming again and soon. I just bought a history of Christianity called "Tried by Fire," by William Bennett. In just paging through the book, one thing is clear: the early church was outright persecuted. Not just insulted: murdered, punished, persecuted. For the first 300 years of Christianity, insults were the easy part. All that changed with Constantine, and the last 1700 years have been ones in which it was acceptable, even encouraged, to openly follow Jesus.

Is all that changing? Time will tell. Most likely, it is.

What isn't changing is that Jesus blesses us when we stand up for Him. When we side with him, even unto death. It's easy to stand up for easy things, but it shows great character to stand up for something when people are cursing you or worse. That's how Jesus Himself died, and the reward for Him was that the Father put all things under Him. When we take the insults, the targeting, the persecution for believing in Christ, He blesses us in ways we may never know this side of paradise.

In the very least, there's peace.

So even in my workplace, where it's frowned upon to believe, I still do. I still tell people about this blog. And about the devotions we do. And more. I don't push it, but I don't back away. Oh, and I still send the bible verses to my nephew. Hard times are coming again, but faith has made me ready.

For further reading: Matthew 5:11, John 15:21, 1 Peter 4:15

Lord Jesus, I believe and stand for You!

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Practical Proverbial, from 1 Peter, 5 August 2020

If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name. 1 Peter 4:15-16 (NIV).

In Acts 5, there is the account of Peter and the other Apostles being hauled in front of the Sanhedrin – the Jewish ruling council that had ram-rodged Jesus to the cross – to be persecuted. The council berated them, then had them flogged. If you have seen “The Passion of the Christ,” you have an idea what that would have meant. At the end, the Apostles were rejoicing. Rejoicing? Yes. Happy, ecstatic to have been able to witness to the pagan rulers of Judea and then be so severely punished for pronouncing their belief in Jesus.

Or you’ll remember Dietrich Bonhoeffer; we talked about him a few weeks ago. Up until his very last day on Earth, he was praising God and denouncing the Nazi’s. He was literally led naked and unafraid to the gallows for believing in Jesus. Our last account of him is of him praying as they put the hood over his head.

Or there’s what’s happening in California right now, where you can protest all the live-long day, but if you hold a church service indoors with more than 10 people, you’ll be arrested. There are photographs of it happening, but we’ll save that for another discussion.

The point is that, at some time in our lives, we may very well be physically abused, even killed, for believing in Jesus. Peter was, and years after the episode with the Sanhedrin, he still said his friends should rejoice and praise God that we bear the name of Jesus on your hearts and lips. Here in our lifetimes today, we may very well be pressed to recant our belief in Christ, to put something other than Him in the focus of our faith. That may happen because of friendship, work, or government; only time will tell.

What will you do? Sure, each of us wants to assume we’ll be the one to boldly stand up and say, “I believe.” But will we? Will we when the strangers in uniform are standing at our door? Or when the boss calls us into his office? Will we stand fast in the courtroom, knowing that life or death depends on our answer? No matter what we say in that moment, Peter advises what the right answer will always be.

Believe. Rejoice. And accept whatever comes. Our God is much more powerful than anything that can be dished out here on the Third Rock. So bring it. Let’s go all Acts 5 and rejoice when they bring it. Eventually, someone will.

For further reading: Acts 5:41, 1 Peter 4:17

Lord God, strengthen me to stand for You in the moment. Speak words through my mouth and move my heart to beat fast in Your service.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Peter, 6 August 2020

For it is time for judgment to begin with God's household; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? 1 Peter 4:17 (NIV).

The believers of the Old Testament – in other words, God's people for most of human history – didn't know about Jesus. They knew God would save them, and they knew that only God could forgive sins, and they knew God would fulfill His promises (He always had). God promised Adam he would die and Adam did. God promised to deliver Israel from slavery and He did. God promised to bless King David's house forever and He did. God promised to bless King Solomon with wisdom and glory and He did.

And God promised Israel that, if they deserted Him, He would remove His blessing and they, as a nation, would be destroyed. That's what happened, starting with the Babylonian Exile and, over time, completing with the Jewish diaspora that began in 70 AD and continues even to this day. If God keeps His promises to people who believe in Him, how well do you think He keeps His promises to people who don't?

Answer: the exact same way.

God doesn't have more vengeance on people who reject Him. God doesn't 'have it in' for those who think He's a myth. Instead, God simply keeps His promises. He promises to remove His blessing from the lives of those who don't believe in Him, whether they are His chosen believers or those who simply outright deny who He is. It isn't God who expects different promises: it's we the people. God is constant.

So is His word. He promises to bless people who follow Jesus with eternal life, with being part of eternity both now and forever. Like the saying says, "No Jesus, no peace. Know Jesus, know peace." Even believers suffer, or haven't you known good Christian men, women, and kids who have cancer, bankruptcy, depression, or worse? For the believer, these challenges can become refining events instead of life-enders. Sometimes, God allows – or even causes – terrible things to happen through His people so that His glory might be shown to everyone. When that happens, as Peter reminded us yesterday, rejoice...because God keeps His promises.

Yet for the non-believer, events such as disease, unemployment, or worse can literally be life-threatening. They can lead to further despair and disillusionment. Such things can lead people even further away from God. What a tragedy it would be for someone to lose an opportunity for peace, for eternity, for Christ's forgiveness. There's a better way, but those who reject God reject that better way. It happens too often. It happens because God promises to turn us over to our sins, and God keeps His exact same promises the exact same way.

For further reading: Jeremiah 25:29, Ezekiel 9:6, Amos 3:2, 1 Timothy 3:15, 1 Peter 4:18

I praise You, Lord Jesus, for Your loving promises.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Peter, 10 August 2020

And, "If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?" So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good. 1 Peter 4:18-19 (NIV).

Jesus said, "for if men do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?" He said these words on his way to Golgotha, just before he was nailed to the cross.

Remembering that, here we are in the summer of discontent. Across the world, COVID is allowing governments to take unprecedented actions on their populations. Here in the US of A, there are arguments over staying shut down, over going back to work, over whether or not to wear masks. Through it all, there are riots over race issues, and riots over police actions, and vast changes to how we, as a society, both interact and live. Sin is still at work and the devil is still laughing at us.

Have we realized that all this is happening while times are actually good? I mean, it's common for us to decry 2020 as this crazy year (and it is) but times are actually pretty good. Economically, even after a self-initiated crash, things are not bad. I paid only \$1.46 for gas in south Texas just yesterday; here, that's cheap! There is disease, but there are thousands more hospital beds than there are hospital patients. Ditto doctors, clinics, and medicines. Stores are still full. There is unemployment, but there are thousands more jobs available than there are unemployed. There isn't a world war, at least not one in the sense of World War II, which has been over for 75 years now.

Through it all, Jesus is still king, still Lord and Savior, still forgiving and receiving believers back to His fold.

The tree is green. Yet there are still people who reject Jesus, even when things are relatively good. In the midst of it all, despite these people, there are still people who continue to do good, who continue to reach out. There are people who still reach across the aisle, or the street, or the world, to help others who are suffering because God removed His protective hand and allowed them to face the consequences of the choices they made. Samaritan's Purse is still hard at work. The Salvation Army is still hard at work. Missionaries in Africa and Asia and Europe and South America (and even America's inner cities) are still hard at work.

There is still real need (because real sin is still at work in this world) but there are still real believers in Jesus who are really sharing their real faith in Him to really help other people. THAT is still really happening even when the green tree seems withered. Really.

For further reading: Proverbs 11:31, Luke 23:31, 1 Peter 5:1

Lord, You are still stronger, still in control. Forgive us in these times.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Peter, 11 August 2020

To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ's sufferings who also will share in the glory to be revealed: 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. 1 Peter 5:1-2 (NIV).

I've never been an elder in a church. I suppose I'm not mature enough for that, or that I'm too outspoken, or I don't fit. Whatever the reason, I've not been selected for that particular office. But I'm a leader, and a father, and a grandfather. I'm willing to do anything, but I'm especially willing to do those roles because, in my book, they're vitally important. I'd like to serve my church but, perhaps, I'm doing it in a better way already.

And I've never been a general in an army, though I admire great generals in history. I suppose I don't have those kind of gifts, and it's not likely that I'm going to be called to lead armies in battle. But I'm a fighter in a daily spiritual battle for the very soul and existence of God's church. I'm a fighter among many, and a leader of a few, and I know it's my lot to take the battle to the enemy and prevail over him in the name of the living God.

And I've never led corporate mergers or billion dollar deals. But I have led smaller teams, and several large projects on which big things depended. Through them, I learned that it's people who do the work; people doing the best they can with what's available to them. The people matter: the work will get done as it does.

Peter was just a common man. He was a fisherman with no particular distinguished future ahead of him...until Jesus plucked him from obscurity and sent him on a path in which his name would be remembered for the rest of time. Jesus made Peter an elder, then Peter learned to lead Jesus' church by caring for its people. By making sure they were safe, and fed, and sheltered, and that they knew Jesus was with them in even the most frightening of times.

God told Peter to serve where he was. He's telling you and I to do the same. For some, that means leading grand movements, large groups, doing 'big' things. Yet for so many more – for most of us, in fact – it means doing even bigger things just by serving and leading where we are. Don't believe me? Listen to a friend in need, one whose faith depends on you just being there. Feed a hungry soul. That matters more than the glory. In fact, that may just be the mission God has in store for you. That matters more.

For further reading: Luke 24:48, John 21:16, Acts 11:30, Revelation 1:9, 1 Peter 5:2

Thank You, Lord, for letting me serve where You have me.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Peter, 12 August 2020

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. 1 Peter 5:2-3 (NIV).

This is great advice for everyone, not just elders or leaders. In fact, except for the Golden Rule (and maybe Matthew 18), it's the best practical advice for both leading and following in any group.

If you want to lead a group, serve it. Do it by being the best example.

This isn't negative advice, full of "don't do this or that." Instead, it's the Apostle Peter exhorting his friends to BE. To be the kind of people they would want to follow themselves. To be the shepherds of a flock who would follow them because they know they're following good shepherds.

A friend of mine has a daughter who is raising young animals for 4H. The most recent video he shared was of his daughter leading a young sheep around their yard. They live in very suburban Frisco, TX, but still participate in the county 4H program. I think that's awesome; the best thing a young person today could be involved in. If you don't know, the H's in "4H" stand for, "head, hands, heart" and "health." They offer programs all throughout the country that teach solid values to young participants so that they'll grow into model citizens.

My friend's daughter raises animals, young goats and sheep, I believe. She feeds and tends to them from when they're very young, teaching them to follow, obey, and caring for their every need. She has won at local competitions, and is learning both animal husbandry as well as the value of time and life. I don't know what she does with the animals after she raises them; I assume their sold for breeding stock or meat. After all, that's why people raise farm animals. They aren't pets: they're food, part of a real circle of life.

And my friend's daughter is learning lessons that I wish more of our young people could learn this way. Learn real life skills instead of just internet surfing or false bravado online. I'm thankful that my own kids – themselves and their spouses as well – have learned such things. How to save others, how to help others learn, how to build things, how to serve others, how to be healthy people: they may not know it but they're following the Apostle Peter's advice. So are my friend and his 4H daughter: they're leading by example.

Maybe that's a skill even a few of us old-timers could do better.

For further reading: Ezekiel 34:4, Luke 24:48, John 21:16, Acts 11:30, 1 Timothy 4:12, Revelation 1:9, 1 Peter 5:2

Lord Jesus, bless those who serve others, who live as good examples for others to follow.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Peter, 13 August 2020

And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away. 1 Peter 5:4 (NIV).

See if this sounds like you. I follow Jesus because He's real and everything He ever said was true. He's the Son of God, is fully God, and is the only Savior of the world. He forgave all my sins, even the ones I've forgotten or didn't even know I did. He gave His life so that I could be with Him, the Triune God, forever. He is the Good Shepherd, the only Way to Heaven, and the ultimate love in the universe. I follow Jesus because He is the only truth in a world that hates truth. I follow Jesus because He stands for me even when I don't deserve it. And I follow Jesus because of love: His love for me and mine for Him in return.

Is that you? If it is (or if it isn't but you follow Jesus, too), Jesus is going to give you a reward. He's going to revere you like a king (even though only He is the real King). He's going to love you with a love you can't fully understand right now. He's going to make you glad in your heart every single second that you accepted Him as Your Savior. He's going to introduce you to the perfection He will lay on you so that you, through Him, can feel what it is like to be completely perfect.

All that is involved in the crown of glory. It's not something we prove ourselves worthy to attain. It isn't something we earn, or deserve, or merit by our good deeds. It isn't something that living a good life or even being a good example for others, will get you, even though those things are worthy goals. No, Jesus gives it because of Himself, because of who He is, because He first loved us when we were un-loveable.

So, see if this also sounds like you. I do things every day that are un-lovable. I say things every day, even when I believe in Jesus, that, by the measure of the world, make me un-lovable. I've sinned, but Jesus loves me anyway. HE makes me lovable because of His merciful and extraordinary love. He makes it so those things don't matter.

He made me part of eternity right now. His crown of peace is one I wear right now. Whatever He does when He returns will be wonderful. What He's given me now is already more than enough. That matters. Maybe the crown Jesus gives actually will be a literal crown; a token of His thanks and a symbol of His love. Perhaps, though, what matters more is He who gives it rather than the thing He gives. Both are forever. HE is the crown.

For further reading: John 10:11, 1 Corinthians 9:25, 1 Peter 5:4

Lord Jesus, all praise and love to You!

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Peter, 17 August 2020

In the same way, you who are younger, submit yourselves to your elders. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, "God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble." 1 Peter 5:5 (NIV).

Reality checks are great. I spent the weekend in College Station, with my new grandson. Huge blessing and a wonderful moment to be alive. There's nothing like holding a newborn baby, knowing that God chose this very special, little person to be alive with this family at this very moment in history. He's a miracle; it's a miracle; God gave us another miracle. I haven't bragged on him yet, so welcome to the world, Logan Ryan Tew. I've waited all my life to meet you!

We had a great weekend and came home yesterday. On our drive home, my wife and I sat in a comfortable, air-conditioned car, not bothered by the 108-degree heat outside. We stopped at Buc-Ce's for snacks. We made good time. We even bought steaks for dinner, and we had a fine afternoon. Blessing after blessing poured out over us and all was well in our world.

And then the storm hit. And then the power went out. And then, on that 100+ degree day, the power was out for about 3 hours. And then the complaining started. No, it wasn't my wife: she's pretty good natured. It was worry-wart me. It was getting hot. I wished we had a fan. It was uncomfortable; this wasn't fair. We got in the car and drove to get gas (and sit in the A/C), and on the way, I had to fill up all four tires in the rain. At home, the temperature had gone up two degrees; ugh.

But the power did come back on. While trying to fall asleep, I prayed and then the thought hit me: it's not about you, Dave. I prayed to get to the nub of what was bothering me: my selfishness. I was only one of thousands without power, but I didn't hear them whining about it. No, it was my lack of humility, my self-focus. Hadn't God taken care of me, of us, all weekend without my help? Jesus lived His entire life without electricity, let alone A/C. God put this new baby in our lives but I was worried about my own comfort.

It's a small thing to be uncomfortable in the summer heat. It's an even smaller heart that focuses on that without, instead, focusing on how wonderful it is to be alive in a time such as this. God, thanks for the power outage. And thanks, too, that the power and A/C came back on. Most of all, thanks for this new life in our family. You and that new life mean so much more than air temperature.

For further reading: Matthew 23:12, Ephesians 5:21, 1 Peter 5:6

Lord, thank You for Logan. Thank You for blessings I don't deserve. Thanks for a humility check. And thanks for A/C.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Peter, 18 August 2020

Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. 1 Peter 5:6 (NIV).

Be careful what you wish for, but be bold in praying for it anyway. What God does is always good.

What does it mean to be lifted up? In our can-do, optimistic country, "He may lift you up" must surely mean that we will succeed. That we will be blessed by God and that He will abide through us so that His blessings bear fruit that is good for us. This isn't some lying prosperity Gospel, where Jesus will make you rich, famous, and have hair dipped in plastic (along with your smile). No, this is about real success, about everything we do having God's hand at work. If we only humble ourselves, God will richly reward us in this life and the next.

Maybe. I'll leave that up to the Lord. Perhaps we all should.

Perhaps we should because being lifted up by God is also something He required of His only Son on the cross. He Himself felt those nails, the scorn, the terror of death. He Himself not only allowed it: He wanted it. He knew we needed it, so His perfect love demanded the perfect sacrifice for a justice we couldn't withstand. God wanted it. He wanted those nails. So He watched as the soldiers lifted Jesus up so He could die an agonizing death.

And Jesus had always been humble.

Perhaps there are mysteries about God that we'll never really understand while we live out our lives here on Terra firma. God is the ultimate good, really the only true good in this universe, and He wants to share Himself full with us: His very good creation. But we put sin between ourselves and Him...and yet still He loves us. He wants to see us shine in glory. He wants the best for us. He does indeed want us to know true success.

His definition of success. What matters most.

What matters most is Him, His eternity, Him sharing that eternity with us now and forever. What He asks of us is to love Him with all our heart, soul, and mind, and then to love each other the same. Jesus said these were the most important commandments of all; that they summed up the Ten Commandments better than the Commandments did themselves. Jesus lived, died, and lives again so that the lowly in spirit may be raised up in His Spirit. Don't we all wish for that? Shouldn't we all be praying for that?

If not, perhaps we should. Starting to do it begins on our knees in reverence because what God does for us is always good, even when it hurts.

For further reading: Job 5:11, Luke 10:27, James 4:10, 1 Peter 5:7

Lord God, You lift up who You lift up. Teach me to humble myself, to pray on my knees to You, to better serve You.

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Practical Proverbial, from 1 Peter, 19 August 2020

Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. 1 Peter 5:7 (NIV).

Here's another one of the more well-known verses in the Bible. I find it amazing that gruff, manly-man, burly Peter is the one who said it, yet perhaps it also gives us a real glimpse into Peter's inmost being. The 'real Peter' – the man who Jesus saw deep inside – was a loving man who cared deeply for the people around him, caring that they hear what he had to say about his friend, Jesus Christ. Peter does this after spending most of the chapter exhorting elders to act as if for the Lord in all ways.

We are to commit our ways to God because He cares for us. We are to cast all our ways and cares and thoughts on God because He hears us at all times. We are to avoid worry because God provides for us in all ways. We are to keep our lives focused on God because through Him we will find contentment. In doing all these things, we are to do it out of caring and love for our fellow man and woman, leading them to Christ if they don't know the way themselves.

Of this verse, the 1599 Geneva version of the Bible says, "Cast all your care on him: for he careth for you." That sounds more appealing to me. It isn't just anxiety: it's all that we care about, all that makes us sympathize, or care, or wonder, or love. That's hard to do when people antagonize us; it's hard to lift them up to God in prayer. It's hard to do when we are self-focused, when we want to be rugged individuals and be in control of our lives. It's just hard to do.

You know what isn't hard? Giving up on excuses like these, then casting all our cares on Him because He cares for us. Rough, tough Peter did it.

God works every day to refine us and use us in His good work. To make us know we are part of His plan. Jesus looks for new ways every minute to involve us in His work. To do that, we must humble ourselves before Him. And part of doing that is getting in the Peter frame of mind by letting go of what we care about, what bothers us, what concerns us, what we want and handing it over to Him. Doing that because He cared for us first.

That's the side Peter saw in his friend, Jesus. Peter knew his Savior as both God and man, and two thousand years after he died, this best part of Peter is left for us still to ponder. Because Jesus cares enough for us to do it. Jesus saw this ability in His friend, Peter. He sees it in us, too.

For further reading: Psalm 37:5, Psalm 55:22, Matthew 6:25, Hebrews 13:5, 1 Peter 5:8

Lord Jesus, take all my cares and hopes.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Peter, 20 August 2020

Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. 1 Peter 5:8 (NIV).

Here's another of the most famous Bible verses. Maybe the reason for that is that it evokes so many vivid thoughts while being just as pertinent today as it was in Peter's time.

Do you hear about wandering lions these days? In some places in rural Africa or Asia, this is a problem. Closer to the US, it's also still very much a problem. We lived for 13 years in suburban Colorado Springs. Every few weeks, you'd see a TV report or a story in the paper about a mountain lion wandering into a neighborhood. Here in the suburbs north of Dallas, you also frequently see mentions of bobcats wandering around someone's backyard.

Ever gone up against an angry bobcat? Or a mountain lion? I don't think I want to meet an African lion face to face without protection. In fact, I don't want to meet any of those big cats without a cage separating us. Or a gun in my hand.

The image of a threatening big cat, roaring, projecting its raw natural power, perfectly fits the ever-crafty devil. Or at least it does in his own mind. He is the father of lies, and has lied for so long that lying has become his native language. He lies to himself that he's more powerful than the God who made all things with just a few words. The devil is puny compared to Jesus, and his defeat was already guaranteed two millennia ago. The devil, however, rejects this.

Yet, to us, that same defeated devil is a roaring lion. He's a rabid animal on the loose, looking to tear something to pieces to satisfy his unchecked hunger. He's a bobcat on the loose in your backyard, looking for a way out and willing to destroy whatever he has to in order to find it. He's a mountain lion on the streets, threatening to maim and destroy because he's lost and out of control. Peter the gruff fisherman described the devil this way so that we would pay attention; so that we would know the devil is angry and serious.

Yet what helps us avoid him? The sobriety of faith in Christ. Faith in Christ is both armor and advantage against a powerful and wily foe. It helps us to be ready when the beast comes to attack: ready to prevail over his attacks instead of just repelling him away. Faith in Jesus is our sure defense because it teaches us to be mindful of our world and ways. These days, we need that more than ever. Maybe that's another reason why this verse still matters so much.

For further reading: Job 1:7, John 8:44, Acts 24:25, 2 Timothy 4:17, 1 Peter 5:9

Lord Jesus, You are my sure defense against the wild animal devil. Guard me, equip me, stand with me, fight for me.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Peter, 24 August 2020

Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings. 1 Peter 5:8-9 (NIV).

We really are in the middle of a spiritual war. We're just human beings here, living our lives as best we can, and we sometimes lose sight of the fact that there's this war happening around us. It's not just riots in the cities or disagreements everywhere else, though those things are skirmishes ahead of battle. It's real; it's real war. In it, we are both pawns and prizes. Dark forces battle against God and manipulate us in how they do it. Opposing them is the Lord of Hosts who sends his forces against the darkness and battles them for our good. That happens because His good is our good, the only real good that there is, in fact.

Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness: those all-American ideas are ones implanted in the mind of Thomas Jefferson by the hundreds of years of philosophy, theory, and faith which he studied before writing them into our Declaration. Those are ideas worth standing up for. Yet more important is standing up for the God of all Heaven who gave those ideas to us as important things, good things, ways to share in His happiness. Jefferson's enlightened ideas started in the even more enlightened heart of the living God.

Arrayed against God and His ideals are forces of evil darkness. Our task: resist the devil. Not defeat him; that's Jesus' job. No, you and I get to choose to resist the devil so that he will flee. And flee he will.

Choose the darkness and you get what you get. Choose the light of God, and there's peace and victory in your future, and in your today. You're part of the Resistance that really matters. It isn't a Star Wars thing. And it isn't the petty lie of political posturing. It's standing for God through your faith in Jesus Christ and letting Him (through that faith) guide you in battle. In this there is strength unlike any other. In this, there is hope as the promise of better days to come.

And in this is victory over the forces of darkness that the darkness just can't seem to understand. When we stand up against the devil, he's powerless. He, the father of lies and a mighty warrior of evil, is powerless against the simplest faith in Jesus Christ. All we have to do is learn to stand up and resist him. That all starts by humbling ourselves to Christ and letting Him be our shield

For further reading: Acts 14:22, Colossians 2:5, James 4:7, 1 Peter 5:10

Lord Jesus, You are my General, You are the peaceful warrior of hope and true liberty. Fight and equip me to stand with You.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Peter, 25 August 2020

And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. 1 Peter 5:10 (NIV).

After resisting the devil, after standing up for Jesus, after being strong leaders in the faith, after all this, Peter reminds us that God Himself will restore us to how He knows us to be. The New Testament is full of this idea; see the passages below from Romans, 2 Corinthians, and 2 Timothy. Indeed, this idea is fundamental to the cross, where Jesus let Himself be nailed to the worst of human torture devices so that He could defeat death for us and make us strong, firm, and steadfast.

I suppose it's ironic that it's God who restores us because it sure isn't God who makes us in need of restoring. My wife and I, like millions of others, are watching "Yellowstone." We're only 5 episodes into the series, and already it's shaping up to be brutal. And yet, so far, at the bottom of the storyline is the one that many solid westerns follow: a father trying to preserve and then restore his family. After only those three episodes, I don't expect the show to take a Godly turn any time soon. Still, the storyline is what it is and I wouldn't be surprised if it plays out as I'm expecting it will.

Do you think God expects us to turn out the way we do? Or does He expect us to suffer and then be strong, firm, and steadfast? Ask Kevin Costner. Is this heaven or is this Iowa? Or is it a ranch out in Montana?

Indeed, wherever we find ourselves, we find ourselves in need of God's restoration. My wife and I also like shows about restoring things. We watch the "Barnwood Builders" and the "Maine Cabin Masters" and watch how these people take old things and make them new. Old things that seem beyond usefulness are given new life when they're brought back to working form. Usually it takes hard work, elbow grease, and maybe a new coat of finish.

When God restores us, He strips us down to what matters: what we believe about Him; what we believe about His love; what we believe about His Son. And when He has chipped away what doesn't matter, what's left is usually strong, firm, and able to be steadfast. He can put us back into use, maybe put us back in the game of our lives, whether it's on Kevin Costner's ballfield in Iowa or his pretend ranch outside Bozeman. Wherever God has us, we get the privilege of standing for Him and resisting that old devil some more.

For further reading: Romans 8:28, 2 Corinthians 4:17, 2 Timothy 2:10, 1 Peter 5:11

Lord Jesus, chip away what's broken in me and make me strong to stand for You.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Peter, 26 August 2020

To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen. 1 Peter 5:11 (NIV).

To God be the power forever and ever. Amen. Randy Travis couldn't have sang it any better. Sometimes, the best thing for us is a simple prayer like that; a simple affirmation of just who Jesus is.

So, this week I read an article about Jessa Duggar Seewald To refresh your memory, my wife and I watch reality TV about the Duggar and Bates families; you know, the families with 19 kids each (and an ever-growing number of grandkids, in-law's, and more). This week, Jessa Duggar Seewald, one of the older daughters, confessed to having gone through what she called "spiritual depression." She felt disconnected from the Lord, felt that she had placed unrealistic expectations on herself and her life to be and live as someone she didn't think she could live up to being.

In an interview with Fox News, Mrs. Seewald said that she put too many conditions and expectations in how she thought she needed to live in order to be a good Christian. She felt she needed so much prayer time, so much devotion time, so much time being upright and justified for Jesus that it all caved in on her. Instead of resting in Gospel peace, she took on burdens that only Jesus can take on. It left her feeling dejected and depressed, so much so that she questioned her very faith and her place as a follower of Christ.

On her way through beating back the depression, perhaps Jessa Seewald stopped here at 1 Peter 5:11 and got back down to the basics of faith. It all starts with giving Jesus the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen to that. I hear Randy Travis again.

Jesus is God and we aren't. I'm not; you aren't; Jessa Seewald isn't. He can take the weight of the universe He made, and never once does He ask us to do it for Him. He requires we be perfect, that we live perfect lives, and that as soon as we realize how impossible that is for us, that we turn first to Him, because He's God and we aren't. When we realize that, hitting our knees in praise is the first action in giving ourselves fully back to Him so that He can stand us up again.

When we try to hold onto too much, it weighs us down. It's natural that when we take our focus off of Christ, depression will soon set in. It happens to atheists and unbelievers all the time; is it any wonder that we who follow the Lord would sometimes get the blues as well?

When that happens, take it to the cross. Give it over to God and let Him be Him. Then pray like Jessa and Randy and Peter would.

For further reading: Romans 11:36, 1 Peter 5:12

Lord Jesus, all glory and power to You forever and ever. Amen.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Peter, 27 August 2020

With the help of Silas, whom I regard as a faithful brother, I have written to you briefly, encouraging you and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand fast in it. Amen. 1 Peter 5:12 (NIV).

I had to do some research to find out who Silas was. Several commentaries agreed that the Silas whom Peter mentions here was likely the same Silas mentioned in Acts 15, 2 Corinthians, and both 1 and 2 Thessalonians. Some translations of the original text have him named "Silvanus". Early scholars considered these two names to refer to the same man, with "Silvanus" being a Romanized version of "Silas." Look for yourself in a Concordia study bible, Wikipedia, https://biblehub.com/commentaries/1_peter/5-12.htm and <https://www.studydrive.org/commentary/1-peter/5-12.html>.

Whoever Silas was, he was known to first century Hebrews, Jews, and Gentiles across Rome and Asia Minor. Peter was (obviously) equally well-known as one of the closest friends of Jesus Christ Himself, yet he sought to have his epistle more widely accepted by associating his own name with that of someone with more 'street cred.'

Not much has changed in 2000 years, or haven't you watched the RNC, DNC, America's Got Talent, and a host of other programs. When we want to build credibility, we associate ourselves with people who are credible. Silas had traveled with Paul on at least two of Paul's missionary journeys through Asia Minor, and had been appointed by early church leaders as an elder. He was credible to his peers.

In a more contemporary reference, "Uncle Si" Robertson's full first name is Silas, perhaps named for this early saint.

You know what all this is? Trivia. It's good and helpful to know things about history, about people who did things that shape our world, especially those of so long ago. Yet the more important thing to draw from Peter's closing notes is what they say about God, about faith in Christ. THIS was what Silas, Peter, Paul, and the other early church leaders dedicated their lives to. "...this is the true grace of God. Stand fast in it."

What they said about Jesus Christ, whom only some of them had known face to face, is truth and grace given by God Almighty Himself. The testimonies given about Jesus, what He said, and what He did to prove Himself to be the God of our Fathers: all true. What happened to Peter, and Paul, and Silas, and all the others matters to strangers then and now because they were willing to live and die for it because it was true. They literally staked their lives (and most later gave them) standing by the truth of saying "Jesus Christ is God and Savior of all."

No matter who Silas (or Uncle Si) were or are, I agree with them. What they said is still true. Stand fast in it.

For further reading: Acts 15:22, 2 Corinthians 1:19, 1 Thessalonians 1:1, 2 Thessalonians 1:1, 1 Peter 5:13

Lord Jesus, thank You for Silas and truth he told

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Peter, 31 August 2020

She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you her greetings, and so does my son Mark. 1 Peter 5:13 (NIV).

What does this mean? “Mark” mentioned here is John Mark, the John Mark mentioned throughout the New Testament and the author of the Gospel of Mark. But what does “she who is in Babylon” mean?

The simplest explanation I found was at <https://margmowczko.com/she-who-is-in-babylon-1-peter-513/>, where “she who is in Babylon” refers to a church. Some explanations say “she” actually is a real “she,” being possibly Peter’s wife or maybe John Mark’s mother. In truth, we can only speculate.

By the time Peter wrote these words, Babylon hadn’t been a world power for centuries, yet the image of it as pagan, powerful, and potentially menacing presence was ingrained into Hebrew consciousness. It was into Babylon that the people of Israel were exiled over six hundred years before Peter. The Assyrians had long ago overthrown the original Babylonians, replacing the Babylonian Empire with an Assyrian one. At one time, Babylon had been the world’s largest city, perhaps the first major city in all of human history. Its reign as an empire was short lived, lasting only a few hundred years, yet from Babylon we (as a world) gained written law, patterns of commerce, and perhaps even modern languages (for some believe Babylon was originally known as Babel, where God confused man’s language).

Yet we’re still left at asking “what does this mean?” Who was “she who is in Babylon” and what does that mean to us today beyond historical trivia? Think about it the next time you gather for Sunday worship.

Peter led the early church. It was into Peter’s hands that Jesus Himself placed the care of that church. As the disciples traveled all over the Mediterranean, Asia Minor, and into Mesopotamia, they were disciples who made disciples who made disciples. A “church” at that time would have been a group of believers meeting together, maybe in a common place or perhaps someone’s home. Peter and the other disciples of Jesus started many such groups wherever they went, being led by God to grow the group from a minor Jewish sect into the most biggest movement in history.

Yet the church-itself was the body of believers in Christ instead of hundreds of individual groups. That even includes groups far away or in places hostile to it. She who is in Babylon may indeed mean Peter’s wife or Mark’s mother or maybe even somebody else. Or it could also mean the group who worshipped with Peter where he found himself when he concluded this short letter to us all. Whoever “she” was, may God be praised we can still talk about her today.

For further reading: Genesis 11:1-9, 1 Corinthians 16:13, Hebrews 13:22, 1 Peter 5:14

Lord Jesus, thank You for she who was and is your church, both in the time after You left our Earth and the time now today.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Peter, 1 September 2020

Greet one another with a kiss of love. Peace to all of you who are in Christ. 1 Peter 5:14 (NIV).

A kiss: that's how we say goodbye, or hello, to someone we love. People have done it for thousands of years. At the end of his letter of encouragement, brusque, burly, tempestuous Peter the fisherman tells his friends to say hello with a kiss.

Now, I'll admit: that seems odd to me. I've lived in Europe, where it's still common for men and women to greet each other with a hello kiss. The first time my unshaven Italian landlord greeted me at his house, he welcomed me in with a kiss on the cheek. For a twenty-something American NCO, that felt, well, weird. It was his custom, not mine. Here in the US of A, we usually reserve our kisses for people more familiar than a uniformed airman dropping off a rent check on his way to work. But not so in southern Italy.

They're simply carrying on an ancient tradition that would have been familiar to Peter, or John, or the other disciples. It was familiar to Jesus; He likely did it Himself. Can you imagine getting a peck on the cheek from Jesus? Or any of the others? You'll remember that a holy kiss was how Judas betrayed Jesus in Gethsemene. You'll recall how Issac kissed his son, Jacob, before blessing him...and how Jacob's brother, Esau, also kissed his father, hoping for the blessing that had already been given. Look up "kiss" and "Bible" in the same internet search and you'll find dozens of examples of what a kiss meant back in those days.

So, even though it may seem odd in today's America, let's ask an important question: why would it matter? Indeed, why should it matter when Peter was simply expressing a common wish of goodwill to his friends, and then blessing them with peace to all who followed his friend, Jesus? Peter never got to kiss Jesus goodbye. The last time Peter got near enough to Jesus to touch him was there in Gethsemene, when Peter cut off Malchus' ear (and Jesus then heaved it). After that, there simply wasn't time or close enough proximity. Perhaps that's something Peter often thought about as he grew old.

And perhaps that's why we should cherish a kiss now. If you kiss someone goodbye, you don't know when you'll see them again. You give the kiss not knowing even IF you'll see that person again. It's what Jesus would have done...and, in fact, did. Yet remember this, too: that peace matters even more. It's His peace that Jesus conveyed in the holy kiss of greeting. It's sending off someone, or greeting them after an absence, by sharing a token of love.

Knowing that, next time we see each other, my friend, pucker up.

For further reading: Romans 16:16, Ephesians 6:23, 2 Peter 1:1

Lord Jesus, bless a holy kiss of friendship and fellowship among Your flock.