

FIVE FORKS BRETHERN IN CHRIST CHURCH

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SCRIPTURE: I Cor 9:23-27; 2 Peter 1:5-11

DATE: 2019-11-10

Place: Auditorium

SUBJECT: Growing in Faith

Series: Resilient Faith

SERMON: "Preparing for the Long Haul"

Introduction

(Credit: Steve May: The Seven Habits of Highly Effective Believers)

All year we have been talking about learning to know, love and follow Jesus. It has been our theme, our focus. I have really enjoyed it and been challenged by it and I don't want it to end or be forgotten next year when we have a different focus.

Have you ever been to conference or seminar or listened to a podcast that just resonates with you. You resolve that you are going to make some lifelong changes. But a few weeks later, the excitement has worn off, the pressures of life keep you putting off the resolutions you made, or you hear of a new idea, and the resolve fades, and you are back to your same old habits. Not much has changed. Have you ever experienced that? I don't want my "following Jesus" to be like that. I want it to move forward.

While thinking about this, I came across a book titled "**Resilient Faith**"

I like the author's use of the word "**Resilient**". It means "**to recover after bending, stretching or being compressed. Being able to withstand difficult conditions and recover.**"

I've asked **Martha Besecker**, one of my Advisors when I was in Youth Group, and one who has, in my opinion, demonstrated Resilient Faith; I've asked her to share a bit of her story with us this morning.

In the book, "Resilient Faith", author, Gerald Sittser writes about how the early Church, just getting started in the pagan Roman Empire, had surprising influence against seemingly insurmountable odds. The early Christians were immersed in the culture but their way of life was so

noticeably different that it caught the attention of people all the way to the top. What kept them going, growing and expanding, even in the face of significant hardship? Sittser goes on to ask, “What can we learn from the early Christians that might help us in a world that sees Christianity as largely obsolete?”

I asked myself – Am I, Are we, the Church at Five Forks becoming obsolete? Have we lost our influence in the community? Is the way we live and act noticeably different from the people around us?

The early Christ followers lived in such a way that they changed the world. Is there reason to believe we can be part of something that will change our world?

We have been bent and stretched and compressed. Can we recover? Pastor Shaun reminded us that we believe, from the bottom of our hearts, that we have to depend completely on God. And God invites us to participate in what God is doing.

I believe Paul is thinking about the effort on his part, to become the person God can use, when he writes in

I Corinthians 9:24

Don't you realize that in a race everyone runs, but only one person gets the prize? So run to win! I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should.

Paul has one main concern for the Christ followers he is addressing, **“Run in such a way as to get the prize.”**

It takes resilient faith on the part of God's people, and that is what we want to talk about over the next three weeks. Faith that will bounce back, recover, and even grow after a season of difficulty. How do you get or develop resilient faith. What do we work on in our lives?

Peter understood the need for resilient faith and so he wrote this:

2 Peter 1:5-8

I am writing to you who share the same precious faith we have.

Make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; 6 and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; 7 and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love. 8 For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Peter makes a bold promise. He says, in effect, "If you make an effort to add certain qualities to your life, and develop these qualities, increasingly over a period of time, I guarantee that you will be productive and effective for the glory of God." In other words, you will accomplish something great for God.

What are the qualities? There are seven things on Peter's list--seven habits of highly effective Christians. Peter says that this is what you need in life more than anything else. These are the qualities that grow resilient faith.

This is my challenge to you today. Whatever your priorities may be at this moment, whatever you may be chasing after--either in your career or your relationships or your spiritual life--today I challenge you to put these items at the top of the order. I think this is the training Paul was talking about. So let's take a look at the list.

We'll define each one, and we'll suggest a step that will help you in the process of building each quality into your life.

Peter said...

8 The more you grow like this, the more productive and useful you will be in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

"The more you grow like this," That's a key phrase. This is not an easy task Peter has given us; these qualities take time to develop. It won't happen overnight. If you're a follower of Jesus, then you're in it for the long haul--and years from now your objective will still be to see these qualities developing in your life in increasing measure.

Now, no matter where you are in your walk with Jesus Christ, you already have some amount of these qualities. Maybe some more than others, but however much you possess, you need more. God's plan for you and me is that we add these characteristics to our life day-by-day—growing in these qualities.

Resilient faith involves growth, not being content with being stagnant, the same next month or next year as you are now. We are talking about a dynamic process over time – your life time. But this is the joy of following Jesus. He keeps changing us for the good.

So today as we go through this list, go ahead and rate yourself. You may even want to write it down with a date so you can see if a quality is growing in your life. Following Jesus is a purposeful endeavor.

Again, the items on the list are: goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love. Now, let's take a couple of minutes to look at each one. First of all...

1. **GOODNESS**

Other translations the word are: virtue, good character. It refers to excellence in a practical sense. In other words, it's about behavior – how do you behave?

You may have heard someone being described as being a "good person" in spite of their many faults: "I know he likes to fight and steal and cheat on his wife, but he's really a good person." Have you ever heard someone say something like that?

Peter is not talking about us being content with merely having a good heart or good intentions or sincere motives--he's talking about behavior. Your good behavior is not what brings you peace with God, but Paul writes **Ephesians 2:10 We are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works.** We were saved for **the purpose of doing good works.** This is God's plan for us. So Peter says we need to add these good works to our faith.

Again, I want to emphasize that this goodness, is not a feeling. It's an action. The first quality

that you add to your faith is goodness--good actions. How do you develop this quality? You've heard people jokingly say, "I've done my good deed for the day." Well, the idea is not to stop with one, but the idea is to start with one. You want to get to the point where you're doing hundreds and hundreds good deeds a day. You start with one. **Look for something good to do.**

Have you ever watched children at play and noticed one is more than a little mischievous. Sometimes you can see them looking for the next trouble to get into. The parents might pull them away from one thing their not supposed to be doing, and immediately you'll see their eyes dart about--you just know what their thinking, "What's the next trouble I can stir up?" We need to be like that in the opposite way. We need to get in the habit of looking around and asking, "What's the next **good** thing I can do?"

2. KNOWLEDGE

This Greek word refers to **practical knowledge**. This isn't "philosophical theory" type of knowledge. This is the type of knowledge that is put to use. One person calls it "**knowledge which enables a person to decide rightly and to act honorably and efficiently in the day-to-day circumstances of life.**" Peter is saying, "add this type of practical knowledge to your faith."

Some people have made good grades and earned degrees from excellent schools, but can't get a job simply because they don't know how to conduct themselves in a job interview.

Similarly, some people who are interested in gaining Bible knowledge, allow themselves to get side-tracked into arguments about things that aren't really crucial to living the Christian life--such as where did Cain get his wife, or who were the Nehpilim, and so on. These discussions may be interesting, but it's more important to focus on how you apply the truths of scripture to your life.

Peter says add to your faith knowledge--practical knowledge that you can use. Here's how you develop that quality: Read. First, read the Bible. Every day. Before you look at the newspaper, before you check your email, before you read anything else, spend time in the Word. Also, it's a good idea to read books about Christian living.

3. SELF-CONTROL

Also translated **alert discipline**. Self-mastery. One person defines it as **"the ability of a person to act entirely of one's own free will without being swayed or coerced by other people, or one's own emotions."** Many people think this is the most difficult quality to add. It's mainly a matter of being able to say "no".

You have a budget to live by, right? And you have credit cards with big spending limits. And the people at the bank like you; they would love to be able to loan you money for a new car or a new boat. You could, if you let yourself go a little crazy, run up some big bills in a very short time. All day long the opportunity to spend presents itself to you. And all day long you have to say "no".

"No thank you, I don't want your magazines. No thank you, MasterCard, I won't spend the weekend in Europe, even if the memories will be priceless. No thank you, Ford, I won't buy a new truck today. No thank you, I'm just looking." And on and on.

When we can't say no very well, and we suffer the consequences, don't we? I've known people who have made purchases--big purchases--because they were afraid of what the salesman would think if they didn't spend the money. Self-control is not just in the area of finances, but with as many people who struggle with debt load it is worth mentioning.

Throughout the day you and I have countless opportunities to compromise our priorities—and even what we believe to be good and right according to Jesus' teaching. We think and dwell on what we shouldn't think. We say what we shouldn't say. Spend time on something we don't have the time to, Watch what we shouldn't watch. Our ability to say "no" to these various compromises are crucial in our journey into resilient faith. Do you want to develop self-control? Practice saying no. Practice saying no even to some things that may not be bad or harmful in and of themselves, but to learn to control your emotions and passions.

4. PERSEVERANCE – PATIENT ENDURANCE

St. John Crysostom, called this the "queen of the virtues." It is often translated patience but it means, literally, "to remain under" -- in other words, to persevere, to let the other person control the tempo. To stick with it. To tough it out. It takes a lot of humility for this one to grow. I like this

definition:

“The long waiting time during which a person refuses to give way to his or her anger”

Try this simple exercise: next time you have to wait for someone – particularly in your family, where we are less likely to pretend to be civil - when the wait is over communicate love, wellbeing, and blessing, in your words, tone of voice, breathing and posture.

In developing this quality, you not only have to learn to endure external opposition--you must learn to endure your own mistakes and failures. The road to Christian maturity is rough and rocky. You'll fall many times along the way. You will never reach the destination unless you develop the quality of perseverance. How do you develop it? Try again. Have you tried a thousand times to control your temper? Try again. Have you tried a thousand times to build a better relationship with your children? Try again. Have you tried a thousand times to develop a consistent devotional life? Try again. The book of Proverbs says, "For though a righteous man falls seven times, he rises again." (Proverbs 24:16). Try again.

5. GODLINESS

Also be translated piety. When many hear these words--godliness and piety--they get an image of self-righteous, condescending, putting on a show religion. We've all known people who are like that, but that's not what Peter is talking about.

In Greek literature this word is used to describe **a person who is in a right relationship with both God (or "the gods") and others**--a person who gives God the worship he deserves, and who treats others with the respect and dignity they deserve. This is what godliness is all about. Jesus made it clear that we can't be rightly related to God and continue to be wrongly related to people. [Mt. 5:23-24] The apostle John wrote...

He has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother. (1 John 4:21)

This is godliness. Do you want to develop this quality? Jesus told us how: Treat others as you would

treat Him.

6. BROTHERLY KINDNESS

Also translated mutual affection, warm friendliness. Peter is talking about having a relational connection with others. We are increasingly becoming socially isolated. We don't have many friends. Loneliness has become an epidemic and it is physically, mentally and emotionally very harmful. Too many of us live our lives completely alone, with almost no one to talk to seriously. No one with whom we can share our deepest hurts and needs, no one to offer encouragement during tough times.

Instead, we just bear it alone. We need to make an effort to build stronger friendships into our lives. We need people outside your immediate family that we love, trust, and that we can confide in, and who give us the freedom to be ourselves. Peter is referring to more than just our being friendly and kind with others. He's talking about building relationships of brotherly love, of mutual affection.

Here's how to develop this quality. Strengthen your friendships. You've got friends, no doubt--people with whom you talk about sports or cooking or movies or kids and so on. I want to encourage you to move some of those friendships to the next level. Spend some time with one or two of your friends, making an effort to open up just a little bit, to share a little more of your heart with them, to listen a little more closely to what they have to say about their own struggles in life. The idea of this brotherly love, this mutual affection, is that you can provide strength to one another. So, strengthen your friendships. This one is so important for developing resilient faith.

A primary aspect of the church is meant to be our relationships with each other.

7. LOVE

Of course, Peter's list ends with love, because love is the ultimate Christian priority. This is at the top of the list. As Paul wrote...

Over all these virtues put on love, which binds them together in perfect unity. (Colossians 3:14)

Jesus said...

By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another. (John 13:35)

How do we grow in love? The words of Jesus:

In everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets. (Matthew 7:12)

The best way to express love and the best way to develop the quality of love is to practice the Golden Rule.

CONCLUSION

Peter has fleshed out for us if you will, the nature of training and discipline Paul referred to as necessary to win at the race of life. These seven characteristics are crucial for living an effective Christian life. These characteristics are part of developing Resilient Faith – a noticeable characteristic of the early Christ followers.

When I consider the significance of a Resilient Faith I am always drawn the center of the Book of Revelation, the verses I believe are the crux of the whole book.

Revelation 13:9-10

Whoever has ears, let them hear.

10 “If anyone is to go into captivity,

into captivity they will go.

If anyone is to be killed with the sword,

with the sword they will be killed.”

This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of God’s people.

I challenge you to make it your priority to develop these qualities Peter mentions. Memorize this list, pray about each one, and look for ways to add them to your life.

PRAY