

A Faith Never Forgotten

by David Roper

David Roper's sermon explores how to live life as intended by God through reliance on divine resources and the development of key spiritual virtues.

Duration: 39:25

Scripture: Romans 8:29, Ephesians 1:6, Philippians 1:6, 2 Peter 1:3-11

Topics: "Resisting Temptation", "Spiritual Transformation"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher talks about the struggle between the influence of sin and the desire to follow God. He uses the metaphor of a young man being tempted by a lizard, representing sin, and a light one, representing God's truth. The young man eventually gives up his sin and experiences transformation. The preacher emphasizes the importance of obedience to God's authority and the need for self-control in order to resist temptation. He also discusses the idea that difficult experiences in life are part of God's plan to shape and mold us into the character of Jesus Christ.

Transcript

When I was a boy, we lived in North Texas, and I spent a good deal of time on a farm. I was in the 4-H club, and one of my projects in the 4-H club was raising Angora goats. We always had two or three goats that we kept around the house that we fed on a bottle, because for one reason or another their mothers hadn't accepted them.

And we had one goat in particular that I grew quite fond of, his name was Angie, and we had him around for two or three years. I used to get down on my hands and knees, and we'd play the games that goats play, and we'd butt each other around. And one day, we hadn't played this game for some time, and he'd gotten quite a bit bigger, and I challenged him to a duel, and he backed off about three paces and cocked his head, and he let me have it, right on top of the head, which might explain my affliction, I'm not sure.

And a few minutes later, when the fog cleared, I discovered that I had learned a new principle. Briefly, it's this, you don't fight goats on a goat's level. You don't fight them on their own terms.

And I often think of this little story whenever I think about life, and that's what we've been talking about the last week and this week, how to live life, how to approach life and live it as it was intended to be lived. And I think of this little story in regard to that in this way, that you don't approach life purely in terms of a human life. It was never intended to be lived that way.

We think that all we need to solve the problems of life is one human personality, but life was never intended to be lived on those terms. Only God can live a human life, and that sounds paradoxical, but that's exactly the way we were created. When man was created, he was plugged into the source of life itself, the source of power, and all life was intended to be lived on that level, by drawing upon the resources of God.

When man fell, from that point on, he began to try to live life purely on a human level, on the terms of men. And he discovered that something was wrong. He couldn't solve the problems that he had to face.

That's why today there are so many frustrated, tired, bored, uneasy people who are living meaningless, purposeless lives. I picked up a quotation from a book by Ashley Montague on immortality this last week. It's a poem, it goes something like this, from too much love of living, from stress and fear set free, we thank with brief thanksgiving whatever gods may be, that no one lives forever, that dead men rise up never, that even the weariest river winds somewhere out to sea.

What a note of pathos. Just nothing to live for, no resources for facing either life or death. The best that he can hope for is oblivion, is to forget.

Now God never intended for man to live this way. The scriptures are very clear that man was intended to reign in life. He was given the resources for triumphing in life.

And of course this resource is God himself. And what Peter is doing along with the other writers of scripture is he is showing us how to establish and maintain that contact with a source of life in order that we might live life as it was intended to be lived. Now let's just review briefly what he has said in the first four verses because this is basic to our understanding of what follows.

Peter says that he was called into association with Jesus Christ as his apostle. This was always Christ's method to call men to be with him, to live with him. And Peter says when we first saw Christ we evaluated him in purely human terms.

We came to the conclusion that he was a remarkable man. But after we had seen something of his life at short range, we realized that he was more than just a man, that he was more than one great man in a line of succession of other men. He was unique.

He was God. But more than that, he was a man living in dependence upon God as man was intended to live. He saw that he was the author of life, that he had, in the words of Peter himself, the words of eternal life.

As they watched Christ, they saw how man was intended to live and they saw that Christ was God in the flesh. They realized that they had been called into an intimate personal relationship with the God of all creation, that they could know him in a personal way. And then he says that because of this knowledge two things were granted to them.

One, that through his power all things were given to them that relate to life and godliness. That is, everything that they needed to solve the problems of life on tap, available to them. Secondly, he says that these promises, all fulfilled in Christ, were given to them, to the apostles.

The apostles wrote them down in the form of scripture so that we can, by becoming a partaker of the divine nature, escape the corruption that is in the world through lust. That is, we can have the same

relationship to Jesus Christ that the apostles had. The same one.

Although we don't know him in flesh as they did, we can have the same personal relationship. And therefore having all that we need to escape the disintegrating processes that are in the world. Now the emphasis in verses one through four is on his part.

What he has committed himself to do. That by faith in the promises of God we can become a partaker of the divine nature. The emphasis in verses five through seven is on our response to his part.

This is our responsibility. Revelation demands some sort of response. You can either spurn it or you can embrace it, but we can't be neutral about it.

And so Paul, in these next verses from five to seven, talks about our response as it should be. Knowing that we have the very life of Jesus Christ himself dwelling in us and available to us, what should be our response? Well, Peter writes in verse five, For this very reason, that is, because we have become partakers of the divine nature, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. For if these things are yours and abound, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, we want to pick up these characteristics that he says we are to assume. But before we do, I'd like to just make a couple of brief comments that I think will help us in understanding something of what's involved. One has to do with the relationship between our part and his part.

There's always a great deal of uneasiness here, I sense, in my own thinking and often in the thinking of others. What does God do in his program for our lives? And what do we do? The scriptures are very clear that God is sovereign, that nothing gets by him without notice, that nothing happens that's beyond his control. And yet, on the other hand, the scriptures say that we are responsible.

Now, what are the limits of his responsibility and what are the limits of ours? Now, there are some little statements that we often use to try to explain how these two relate, and I'm not sure that they're at all helpful. One of them is this statement that you hear so frequently, that heaven helps those that help themselves. And, of course, this statement is found nowhere in the scriptures.

In fact, it's wide of the mark. Or people say, well, we work as though it all depends upon us, and we pray as though it all depends upon Christ. And even that is wide of the mark.

We have to accept what the scriptures actually say about his responsibility and ours. And although it may be difficult to understand how the two relate, we can go no farther than what the scriptures themselves say. Now, let me read some statements to you that are found in the New Testament.

First, some statements that have to do with his responsibility. The first, the passage that we read this morning in Ephesians 1. Now, you don't need to turn to these unless you'd like, because I'll just pick up one statement or two from each section. Paul says in Ephesians 1, In him, Christ, according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to the counsel of his will, we who first hoped in Christ have been destined and appointed to live for the praise of his glory.

The point that Paul is making is that God has his way in the world, that he accomplishes everything according to the counsel of his will. He's absolutely sovereign. And he's chosen us in order that we might live to the praise of his glory.

That is, there is no doubt of the outcome as far as God sees it. We're going to live to his glory. We're going to manifest in our life the character that he wants us to have.

No question about it. Paul says in Philippians 1.6, this familiar passage, Again, he who has begun a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. Again, God doesn't do things halfway.

He never stops short of completion. He will not allow any of us to have our own way in this matter. He will bring us to completion.

The 8th chapter of Romans, Paul says again that those that God foreknew, he predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son in order that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. What he's looking for is a host of people just like Jesus Christ. And he's called us to this.

It's a certain thing. And one final verse in 1 Thessalonians 5, verses 23 and 24, Paul writes, May the God of peace himself sanctify you wholly and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who called you is faithful and he will do it.

Now, that's an amazing verse. It simply means that what God has called us to, he's going to accomplish in every life. Now, this means that if God is sovereign over the broad picture, the outlines of our life, then he has something to say about the details of our life.

He's not only working in general, but he's working specifically to produce in every life the quality of life that he's looking for, God-likeness. Now, on the other hand, the Scriptures say that we're responsible for this, that God enlists us in the process, that he does not work apart from the human will. The Scriptures say, Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness.

Peter says in his first epistle, To sincerely desire the sincere milk of the word, that you may grow thereby. The book of Hebrews says that we're to labor to enter into that rest. Paul says that we wrestle against principalities and powers, rulers, authorities in high places.

He says that we're to fight the good fight of faith, we're to lay hold of eternal life. And here in 2 Peter 1, he says that we're to make every effort, bend every effort to supplement our faith with virtue and these other characteristics. See, God does not bypass the human will.

He does not operate apart from our own desire and effort. In the first chapter of James, James makes an interesting statement that I think ties these two ideas together. He says that he who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer that forgets but a doer that acts, he shall be blessed in his doing.

The point seems to be that as the human will moves toward an object, as we determine that we want this kind of life, that more than anything else in the world, we want to have these characteristics, we want to reflect in our life the character of Jesus Christ himself. As we move in this direction, we are, James says, blessed in our doing. That is, we have all of the resources of God available to move us along in this direction.

You see, God is looking for people who sincerely want him to fill their lives. Now there's a second word that we should look at. It's this word supplement that's found in verse 5. I did a little bit of reading this past week in a book by William Barclay on 2 Peter.

Dr. Barclay is an outstanding Greek scholar. He made the comment that this particular book, this particular word, is perhaps one of the most picturesque words in the whole New Testament because it means literally to outfit a chorus. And what he's talking about is this.

As you know, the Greeks were famous for their plays and dramas, and these were great productions. Usually they were centered in a town like Athens. And in conjunction with these great dramas, they would have a large chorus, sometimes four and five hundred voices in the chorus.

The expense to enlist and train and maintain and outfit a chorus like this would be tremendous. And the traveling companies that produced these dramas wouldn't have the means to supply all that was necessary for these choruses. And so some public-spirited man in each town would undertake willingly and out of his own means to outfit the choirs.

He would enlist them, and he would train them, and he would see to it that they had all that was necessary for this production. The word, therefore, has a certain lavishness about it. It means lavishly and willingly to pour out everything that's necessary for a noble performance.

It's not half-hearted effort. It involves the total personality, the will directed toward producing in our life all that God wants to be there. And this, I think, is the test of our call.

As he says later in this same section in verse 10, Therefore, brethren, be the more zealous to confirm your call and election. You see, God operates on our will to move us to walk in obedience to Jesus Christ. And the real test of whether or not we belong to Him is our own willingness to be all that God wants us to be.

Now let's begin with this list of virtues and talk a bit about each one, just briefly. The first, he says, is faith. And, of course, everything starts here.

Paul says, Without faith it is impossible to please God. And that the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith because the just shall live by faith. Faith is the conviction that what Christ says is true.

The utter certainty that we can commit ourselves to His promises and launch ourselves on His demands. And He's telling us the truth. And we can bank our very life upon it.

A number of months ago, I got a letter from my draft board. And this is always kind of frightening. So I tore it open.

And to my surprise, they said that I was available to be recalled because I had a critical MOS, whatever that was. And that they were transferring me into another control group. And the thing that shocked me was, to the best of my memory, I wasn't even in the Army anymore.

I was supposed to, my term of service was supposed to expire in February of 65. And this was some months after that. So I went back in my records and I rummaged around in my files and I found an old crumpled up piece of paper.

And on that paper, I discovered a little notation down at the bottom that my ETS, my expiration term of service, was February 14, 1965. And was I ever happy. And so I wrote a very nice letter to my draft board

because that's the kind of letter you write to your draft board.

And I said, on the authority of form, whatever it was, it is my understanding that I no longer have any reserve obligation that I'm free. And on the basis of that information, they sent me my discharge papers. Now, the whole point is, I had something that was an authority that I could point to that gave me freedom.

Now the same thing is true, Peter is saying, about the scriptures that are given to us, as he follows this argument all the way through the book, that we have an authority, something we can base our life on, something that's dependable, that never fails. We can trust it. And this is the basis of all Christian experience.

You see, we already have been promised all that God wants us to have. It's already there, available to us. It's just a matter of our claiming by faith and moving forward.

Secondly, he says that to faith we must add virtue. We talked a little bit about this word last week. This word has the idea of moral energy, of manhood.

I like to think of it in terms of spiritual tone. In athletics, there is an expression that is often referred to muscle tone. I majored in physical education in college, and I was no athlete, believe me, but I've always been interested in athletics.

In our physiology classes, they used to tell us that all of the training that an athlete goes through is designed to produce just the right kind of muscle tone. On one extreme, there is the individual who is completely out of shape, and his muscles are flabby. That's me.

And they're unresponsive. On the other end of the spectrum, there's the athlete who's over-trained and who's tense and uncoordinated because he's not relaxed enough. But right in the middle, there is the athlete who has correct muscle tone.

That is, his muscles are responsive. They can move at a command. And I think that this is what Peter is talking about.

Spiritual tone. The kind of quality of life that moves immediately when God speaks. The desire to be obedient at a moment's notice.

Move with swiftness in whatever direction the Spirit asks us to move, to obey. I like to think of this in conjunction with Romans 6, where Paul talks about yielding our members as instruments of righteousness unto God. And the same word used again in Romans 12, where it says, present your bodies a living sacrifice.

It has the idea of standing at attention, to be ready, to be alert, to be available. A kind of spiritual tone that makes us move immediately at the voice of God. Now the second, the third characteristic is knowledge, insight.

A practical understanding of spiritual principles. And I sense that the order is very important here because God only gives knowledge. He only gives insight into spiritual principles to people who want to move, who want to obey.

God never indiscriminately gives out truth. To use Christ's expression, stated quite strongly, God does not cast pearls before swine. He does not ladle out truth just so we can know it.

He gives it to us in order that we may obey. He starts with a willing, toned-up heart, and He gives enough truth to move us to the next phase. Not too much, but just enough.

And then when we're obedient to the truth we have, He gives us more truth. But if we're disobedient, the process stalls. There's no more truth.

I'm coming to see in my own life and in the experience of others that I come in contact with that this is a basic spiritual principle. As long as we have spiritual tone, as long as we're ready to move, God will give us truth and there will be growth in grace. But the minute there's disobedience and we resist the authority of Jesus Christ in a given area, the springs dry up.

The scriptures become dull and dry and lifeless to us. And if we persist in disobedience, the scriptures say there's the danger of losing our faith. But if we go back to the point of departure, to the very issue that we faced once, and we're obedient to that, then the process begins to move again and we're given additional truth, more to live on, to be obedient to.

The fourth characteristic is self-control. The ability to take a grip on oneself. Proverbs says, A man without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls.

That is, he's open on all fronts to attacks. He has no barriers at all to attacks of the enemy. What Peter is getting at is every passion, every desire, under the perfect control and mastery of Jesus Christ, so that our desires, our passions are not our masters, not our tyrants, but our servants.

C.S. Lewis, in his little book, *The Great Divorce*, tells a story of a busload of people who came to heaven to look at it, see what they could see. And as they got off of the bus, there was one young man who met one of the light ones who was sort of a tour guide, and he had a huge red lizard on his shoulder. And as they got off the bus, it was obvious that the lizard and the young man were arguing with each other, and the lizard wanted to go back home immediately, but the young man wanted to see what was there.

And as the story develops, it's quite lengthy, you discover that there's a great animosity between this lizard and the young man, but the young man can't do anything about it. He knows that the lizard will destroy him. He's bent on his destruction, but he's under its influence.

And it keeps whispering little suggestive things in his ear, and he cringes and he doesn't want to do it, but he does it anyway because he can't control the lizard. And so the light one says, let me destroy the lizard for you. And there's a great struggle that takes place between the lizard and the young man, until finally, with a great deal of personal anguish, the young man gives up his right to the lizard, and the light one takes it and he throws it to the ground and breaks its back.

And the moment it touches the ground, it's transformed into a great white horse. And the young man jumps on its back and he rides away. And of course the picture is so clear that when we give every thought, every passion, every desire to Jesus Christ, and we allow him to crush it beneath his feet, then it becomes a great force in our life.

The fifth characteristic is steadfastness. Steadfastness, endurance, or patience, or the ability to remain under pressure. It's the brave, courageous acceptance of everything that life can bring to us, and transmuting the worst event into progress.

The book of Hebrews says that for the joy that was set before Christ, he endured the cross. He remained under the cross, despising the joy. Seeing this as an instrument in God's hands, that this was all part of God's program for his life.

This is another of these great characteristics, the ability to sense that everything that comes into our life is designed by God to produce the character of Jesus Christ in us. We all experience this kind of pressure in our life, the periods of darkness, the tunnel experiences. And yet part of what God expects is that we recognize this is simply God's hand working in our life, preparing us, shaping us to be the kind of man that he wants us to be.

There was an article in the Sunday School of Times recently by Dr. Raymond Edmond, entitled, Advice when in the Tunnel. And he made a couple of interesting comments about what trains do, or the attitude of passengers when they're in a train that's in a tunnel. And he pointed out, first of all, that tunnels are always on the main line.

You never build a tunnel on a siding. It's always right on the main route. So he says, recognize that when the pressures come, the periods of darkness, know that this is all a part of the plan, that you're still on the track, that you're moving in the right direction.

It's all programmed. Secondly, he says, recognize that you're making progress, because they always build tunnels in the mountains. You never find tunnels in the valley.

They're up in the hills. Know that this is a part of God's working in your life, and that there's progress there, and this is something that's just necessary in order to bring further progress. Third, he says, recognize that tunnels always come to an end.

When you're in them, and things seem bleak and dark, they seem interminable, but there's always an end. So he says, don't stall out in the tunnel. Just keep moving on.

Now this is what Peter is talking about. Endurance, the ability to just keep moving, keep walking in obedience, no matter how we may feel, what our emotions tell us, or what circumstances may tell us, but to continue to make progress. The sixth principle is godliness, and this is a bit difficult to define, but it speaks of relating everything in life to God.

This is the great mark of maturity, to see that everything that happens is a part of God's program in our life. It's one thing to say this and to know it intellectually. It's another thing, under the pressure of circumstances, to recognize that this is the finger of God in our life.

And this is the thing that evokes in us a godlike response to people, to circumstances, to events, because we see that this is an instrument that God is using in our life. To see all things in relationship to God, to see that the Lord is at hand. The seventh, brotherly affection.

There is a kind of false spirituality that separates men from others, where the claims of others upon our life become an intrusion, and we become insensitive to their weaknesses because we feel that this is not our particular weakness at the moment. Peter says that we should have a genuine concern for the weaknesses of others, a desire to move in and help, a willingness to bear the burdens of others, though we have burdens of our own. And eight, he talks about love.

The same kind of love that God has for us. Just as inclusive, just as wide. The kind of love that loves those who are unlovely.

The kind of love that, in the words of Scripture, God has for the unjust, for the froward, for the rebellious. The kind of love that doesn't discriminate, that always seeks the best for others. Some weeks ago, we went into a dorm at Stanford to speak to some students.

And afterwards, we were having a discussion with some of the men. And one student was telling us about some of his activities the past few weeks. He had been involved with some of the Delano strikers and had participated in one of the marches.

And he came back home because, in his own words, he said, I ran out of gas. I went down there and I loved those people and I wanted to do something for them. But I discovered that while I loved mankind in general, when I got with those people, I didn't love them.

And I came back home because I lost any real reason for being there. He said, listen, if I become a Christian, will I have the kind of love that will love people regardless of what they're like? And, of course, we do. This is exactly what the Scriptures promise.

That is, if this is our desire, if we want to love people this way, and we begin to move in this direction, and we ask God for the love that he has for men and women, we'll have it. He'll supply it. He's the author of love.

There's no other place to get it. Now, all of these, he promises, are marks of progress. To faith, we add virtue.

To virtue, knowledge and understanding of principles. To knowledge, self-control. And then steadfastness or endurance.

Godliness, brotherly affection. And finally, love. And then in verses 8 and 9, he gives us some alternatives to progress.

He says that if we're not making progress, if we're not moving along the line of these characteristics, we've become ineffective and unfruitful. And in verse 9, we're blind and short-sighted. We've forgotten what God has called us from, the old life with all of its desires, and what he's called us to, a life of obedience, a life that's already secured.

He's promised to move us along until we possess the character of Jesus Christ himself. And in verses 10 and 11, he concludes by saying, Therefore, brethren, be no more zealous to confirm your call and election, for if you do this, you will never fall. So there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

We have no guarantee of our call unless there is moral progress in our lives. The doctrine of election does not say that we're secure no matter what we do. It says that God has secured the total process, not only calling us to himself, but seeing to it that we're going to be the kind of people he wants us to be.

And the real test is the degree to which we want what God wants for us. Are we willing to cooperate with him? Are we willing to move in the direction he wants us to go? He's not talking about perfection, but a willingness to move toward perfection. I heard recently of a little boy who fell out of bed in the middle of the

night, and his mother went to pick him up, and she said, What happened, son? And he said, Well, I guess I was too close to the getting in place.

And we need to inquire into our own lives. What progress have we made? How much farther along are we in terms of these character traits than we were when we first came to Jesus Christ? Are we willing to allow him to conform us to his image? And are we bending all the energy of our will in that direction? If we do that, we know that we belong to him. We know that we have the faith that never forgets.

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