

Explore the Bible: Being Useful

October 18, 2016

• *The Explore the Bible lesson for Nov. 6 focuses on 2 Peter 1:3-11.*

Recently, I received one of the greatest honors of my life. As the Hardin-Simmons University class of 1976 gathered for its 40th reunion, I was asked to speak at the reunion banquet. It truly was an honor.

It also was something of a nightmare. What would I say in a few minutes that affirms how those four brief years shaped the next 40? So many things came to mind.

Among them, I remember a great deal of anxiety as I graduated. I believed I was called to ministry. What might that mean? How will I accomplish all that God has called on me to do? Where will this call take me? Will I be able to make a good living?

As the time for the banquet grew closer, I thought of funny events I wouldn't forget to share—even at the expense of others! There were sad times, too. As time passed, so did some dear friends who died way too soon, some while we still were students. It's a long list of things to cover.

Finally, I decided on the one thing I would not forget to say. It was not something I learned in class as much as in the interaction Peter described in this text. We must “make every effort to support (our) faith with goodness, and goodness with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with endurance, and endurance with godliness, and godliness with mutual affection, and mutual affection with love. For if these things are yours and are increasing among you, they keep you from being ineffective and unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:5-8).

Everything needed for life

So many wonderful and beautiful things fall out of these few verses as we unpack them. In verse 3, Peter made the most remarkable statement: “His divine power has given us everything needed for life.” That’s a promise worth many hours of pondering.

At virtually every graduation, some speaker challenges the graduates to go out and make the most of what they’ve been given. That’s a sacred challenge. Yet, unless we get the promise first, the challenge is nothing less than overwhelming.

I decided to share with my classmates the promise, first, that it took me the better part of four decades to learn. My first responsibility is not to accomplish great things for the kingdom. My first responsibility is to remember “everything needed for life” is already ours.

We didn’t have to go out and get it. We didn’t have to accomplish one single thing, achieve fame and fortune or anything in order to obtain what was already ours through the grace of God, everything we’d ever need. We no longer had to prove anything to anyone. Everything we’d absolutely have to have we already had.

What a difference that would have made on my graduation day if someone, anyone, had promised me what Peter promised the early church. We already had everything we’d ever need. Now, knowing that, Peter was saying, go out and live it like you believe it.

Continuing to learn

That’s when Peter says that we are to work at being good people. That goodness doesn’t establish our faith as much as it verifies it. That goodness included growing in knowledge. Yet, goodness doesn’t just happen. It takes work to make the right choices and more work beyond that to measure out

love instead of hate, generosity instead of selfishness.

In other words, we don't get a Ph.D. in Christianity. We never come to the end of learning. I am among those who believe that, even in heaven, we'll keep learning and growing. I hope so. Now that I'm finally teachable, I cannot wait to get back to class!

In the meantime, growing in knowledge of God and of God's purpose and power through grace in Christ leads us to forge a trajectory of life shaped by self-control and endurance. In a growing knowledge of God's grace and power, we experience the power to endure, no matter what the test.

Up-close-and-personal love

It also is true that we cannot fully love others until we accept the promise all we will ever need is already ours. It is in the knowledge we can give everything we have away and still not go without what we need that we have the power to share the affectionate love of which Peter speaks.

This love is not long-distance love. It's up and close and personal. It's affectionate. It's love that wraps its arm around overburdened shoulders, gentle hands that wipe tears of grief from the faces of those whose souls are wounded, whose hearts are broken.

It is impossible to love another until you truly believe that everything you'll ever truly need, not measurable in any single human way, is already yours.

That holy, affectionate love becomes a holy contagion. It's infectious. The more each one loves, the more we all love until we're swimming in an ocean of hope and peace.

Then, and only then, will we be able to look back and see how purposeful our lives had been all along.

Glen Schmucker is a hospice and pediatric hospital chaplain in Fort Worth.