

01/03/10

**New Years – Looking Back and Looking Ahead – What is Your Plan for Growth in 2010?
– 2 Peter 3:18**

- I'd like to begin our new preaching year by asking you a couple of questions...
 1. If we had the ability to speak directly to the Lord and hear His audible reply, and we asked Him if He had a plan for 2010, what do you think He'd say?...
 - are you fairly certain that we'd get a "yes, I have a plan for 2010"...or would it be more of--
 1. well, I've been pretty busy with the holidays
 2. or there's been a lot of football on TV
 3. or the new gadgets I received for Christmas are consuming a lot of my time
 4. or I just believe in taking life as it comes...
 5. or, I'm pretty much focused on how the Colts are going to do this afternoon...
 - are you fairly certain that God has a plan for 2010...that He has a specific set of initiatives he intends to accomplish this year...
 - that he could speak precisely about His analysis of where His world is today, and where he wants it to be 12 months from now...and exactly what steps he plans to take to go from here to there?...
 - do we all agree that God makes plans?...
 2. now, those of you who know me probably know where this discussion is heading...
 - could we find anywhere in the Bible that would suggest that we should be becoming more like our God?...that we should be imitators of Him?...
 - that's a pretty easy case to make as well...
 - I think this is a great Sunday to study that issue...because this is sort of an in-between weekend...
 - some of our church family is still traveling – please be sure to pray for them while they're away...
 - because of that, it's a bit early to do our beginning of the year kick off on why we're here, where we're going, and how you fit in...we're going to tackle that next week Lord willing...
 - but this morning we'd like to focus on **Looking Back and Looking Ahead – What is Your Plan for Growth in 2010?**
- with that in mind, please open your Bible to the book of 2 Peter 3:18...page 185 of the back section of the Bible under the chair in front of you...
- While you're finding your place, let me lay out our objectives this morning...
 - 2 Peter 3:18 is the final word we have from the apostle Peter – it is the last verse in this book...and it is all about the issue of growing...of people like you and me having a specific plan in place for the way we seek to be more pleasing to God in the days ahead...
 - part of the beauty of this is that a significant amount of what Peter has previously written in both 1 Peter and 2 Peter is intensely practical...
 - so this morning we're not going to talk about a plan for growth in some ethereal fashion--- we're going to go back to the specific areas that Peter called out to help us mark out the most important areas of emphasis...
 - I'm also going to be encouraging you, because of where we are in the calendar, to use today as an opportunity to evaluate this past year – that's the looking back part...and then think about what the Lord would want you to work on in the coming days...that's the looking ahead part...

- Introduction

- here's **1. Our goals this morning**

After careful study of the Scripture and thoughtful analysis of your current spiritual condition...

- a. **Each person in our church family will identify at least 5 specific steps you believe God wants you to take to grow in Him this year.**
- b. **Each person in our church family will identify and secure whatever resources are necessary to help you in this process.**
- c. **Each person will have the appropriate system of accountability in place to help you stay on track in coming days.**

- let's read our key verse, and then we'll talk some more about these goals...**read 2 Peter 3:18**

- now let's just make some **2. Initial observations about 2 Peter 3:18**

a. The man God used to write these words knew a lot about spiritual growth experientially.

- if you've not already decided what you're going to be studying from the Scripture early this year...let me encourage you to consider this...do a study of the life of the apostle Peter...
- start in the gospels...and a simple concordance search will tell you all the places his name appears in the first 4 books of the NT...
- then move right into the book of Acts...and marvel at how Peter is a changed man after the resurrection of Christ...
- then read the books of 1-2 Peter – and again, stand back and praise the Lord for the way He changes His people...

b. It is very instructive that Peter's last words addressed the issue of growing.

- that goes back to some of the initial questions we posed this am...
- when you think about what you'd like to see happen in this coming year...how high is the issue of your spiritual growth?...
- and by the way, please don't think about this as some sort of lame discussion about New Year's resolutions that no one intends to keep more than a week...
- I believe God created the world with the calendar we have to help us stay on track...you could clearly make that argument for the schedule of annual feasts God laid out for OT Israel...
- so we ought to capitalize on the fact that we especially have the opportunity to naturally think about these matters at this time each year...

c. Peter talks about growing, not about perfection.

- this verse is loaded with hope...
- on the one hand, Peter believes that you can/must get to a better place...[again, his life clearly proves that...]
- on the other hand, no one expects you to get there over night...
- which is why, by the way, you should never compare yourself to someone else...none of this, 'well, I could never be like so and so, therefore I'm not even going to try to grow...the Bible actually condemns that habit...Paul spoke about people in...
- **2 Corinthians 10:12 - ...but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise.**

d. Our growth is to be in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

- we could spend the rest of the morning right there...there are all sorts of implications of that marvelous phrase...but for sake of time, just remember this---we're not talking about pulling ourselves up by our own spiritual bootstraps...

- this isn't some sort of self-help exercise...
- Peter, if anyone, knew the danger of trying to serve God in the flesh...[even if everybody else denies you, I will not...]
- so he understood that any growth was the result of the grace and knowledge of Christ...so please don't let what we're talking about this morning be overwhelming to you...let it be the adventure God intended for it to be...
- in 2010, I want God's grace to be more at work in my life, and I want to know my Lord and savior more intimately...
- this isn't a series of steps or some sort of artificial process...this is walking with Christ and growing in Him...

e. The goal is that Jesus would be more glorified in us between now and the day He calls us home.

- we're not here to magnify ourselves or magnify our church....it's "to Him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity, amen."
- now, how do we make this specific?...it will never work unless we have a clear plan...
- well, let's go back and see some of the clear themes that have already been developed...statements like 2 Peter 3:18 are not made in a vacuum---let's study it in its context...
- and here's what we're looking for...**Eight possible areas in which God's people can grow spiritually in this coming year...**
 - now, remember what we said before – your goal is to identify 5...we can't grow in 100 ways at once---some of these will be more applicable than others...so, Looking Back and Looking Ahead – What is Your Plan for Growth in 2010?...[repeat proposition]

I. Regarding the Assurance of Your Salvation

A. Emphasized in this passage

- Peter makes it very clear that a starting place for growing is being sure that you know that you know that you know that you have a personal relationship with Christ...
- here's a survey of what he says...
- **1 Peter 1:2 - ...according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood...**
- we're not even out of the second verse of the book and Peter is already emphasizing the sufficiency of the blood of Christ...
- there was a day when Jesus tried to talk to Peter about the centrality of His death and she blood and Peter actually rebuked him for that...do you remember that discussion in Matthew 16 [not so, Lord...]?...that day is over...
- **1 Peter 1:3 - Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,**
- **2 Peter 1:10 - Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble;**

B. Connection to Christian growth in 2 Peter 3:18?

- **how are these 2 ideas related?**
- there are people who come into the doors of the church and try to live the Christian life without ever first repenting of their sin and coming to Christ in humble faith...
- that might work for a while, but eventually you'll run out of steam...
- now, you might say – how can I know for sure?...

C. Understanding the doctrine of the assurance of salvation

- we like to think of this subject from three biblical perspectives...

1. Theologically

- you have to know enough about the gospel in order to understand the nature of the decision God is calling you to make...
- that doesn't mean you have to be a Bible expert...
- there are plenty of examples in Scripture of people who came to Christ the very first day they were exposed to the gospel...
- but on the other hand, it's not simply a matter of being really sincere, or trying your best...
- the gospel is a set of concrete ideas that you have to decide whether you will embrace or reject...making a definite decision to repent of your sin and trusting Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior on the basis of His death, burial, and resurrection is the essence of the gospel God calls upon us to believe
- **1 Corinthians 15:3-4 - For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,**
- the Bible also speaks about assurance of salvation...

2. Historically

- this is a decision that you make at a point in time...
- **Romans 10:9-10, 13 - That if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation...for "Whoever will call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."**
- now, not everyone knows the exact day – but there ought to be some recollection of the general period of time – not this, well, I've always been a child of God--- that is certainly not the testimony of the Scripture...and then...

3. Experientially.

- there has to be fruit...
- **2 Corinthians 5:17 - Therefore if anyone is in Christ, *he is* a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.**
- **1 John 2:3 - By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments.**
- when there's no evidence, either the person was never really saved to begin with, or they were never taught how to grow...
- but the point is – until this is settled – there's not going to be a whole lot of 2 Peter 3:18 going on...so what are...

D. Possible take-aways?

- Peter already gave us that one – make your calling and election sure...
- friend, if you don't know for sure that you have a personal relationship with Christ...here's what you should write on your list of take-aways at the end of the notes...make an appointment with one of the pastors, or one of the deacons, or an ABF teacher or someone, and study how I can know for sure that I have a relationship with Christ...it is time to get that nailed down...
- **1 John 5:13 - These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.**
- now, I realize that many would say – PV, by God's grace, that one's handled for me – great--- let's keep moving ahead...what's your plan for growth...

II. Regarding Your Source of Joy.

A. Emphasized in this text

- 1 Peter 1:6 - In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials,
 - 1 Peter 1:8 - and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory,
 - 1 Peter 2:4 - And coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God,
 - 1 Peter 4:13 - but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation.
- you can tell by that summary of verses that Peter is writing to people who were facing significant trials and they were...but he wanted them to have the kind of joy in Christ that transcended their circumstances...
 - here's one of the reasons that one's on there – I have been surprised this past year by the number of people I worked with in counseling where their love for and joy in their sin was far greater than their love for and joy in their Savior...
 - or their love for and joy in some object that was not necessarily sinful, but was certainly trite and temporal – outstripped their love for and joy in Christ...
 - and I would just ask you...

B. Looking back.

- was 2009 a year for you where you increasingly found your joy in Christ?...
- not because of duty, not out of raw discipline...but because you are cultivating a genuine and growing loving relationship with Him?...
- is there evidence that you love Christ?...would the people who are closest to you be able to confirm that fact?...
- if not...there's one of your take away's...

C. Looking Ahead.

- I am absolutely convinced of this both theologically and experientially...
- you choose the object of your desire....you choose the object of your love...you decide where you're going to find your joy...
- and if you say – well, where would I start?...perhaps for you it's a matter of reading...
- that's another "looking back" question by the way – how many books did you read last year?...how many Christian books?...
- a good place to start in this area would be Desiring God by John Piper, or The Cross Centered Life by C.J. Mahaney, or Trusting God by Jerry Bridges

III. Regarding the Cultivation of Your Walk

- let's say that you are sure of your salvation, and you are really working at finding your joy in Christ...what about the spiritual disciplines?...

A. Your prayer life.

- we'll talk about all the ways we hope to emphasize this as a church next week...but is this an area where you could stand to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ"?

1. Emphasized in this text.

- 1 Peter 3:12 – For the eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous, and His ears attend to their prayer...
- 1 Peter 4:7 -- The end of all things is near; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober *spirit* for the purpose of prayer.

- Peter was one of the ones who fell asleep when Jesus asked him to pray with Him in the garden...but he's grown a lot since then...how about you...

2. Looking back

- was 2009 a solid year of prayer for you?...or would you say...

3. Looking ahead

- I believe God would be pleased if I took some steps of growth here...
- selecting a place, selecting a time, making a list, reading a book on prayer, finding a prayer partner, asking someone to hold me accountable

B. Your study of the Word.

- it is amazing how many times the Scriptures are mentioned in these two books...
- here's just a small sampling...

1. Emphasized in this text.

- **1 Peter 1:24-25 – For all flesh is like grass, and all its glory like the flower of grass. For the grass withers, and the flower falls off, but the Word of the Lord endures forever. And this is the word which was preached to you.**
- **2 Peter 1:3-4 - seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of *the* divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust.**

2. Looking back

- was 2009 a year where you learned more of the Word?...and did you become more skilled at applying it in real time?...
- there's no way you will be able to grow without it – in fact, that's the point of...
- **1 Peter 2:2-3 - like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, ³ if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord.**

3. Looking ahead.

- for some – this needs to be a take away---might want to read James MacDonald's God Wrote a Book, or 30 Days to Understanding the Bible-
- might want to make a decision that you're going to get involved in one of our ABF's or men's/woman/s Bible studies...

- now, let's keep moving – what's your plan for growth...

IV. Regarding the Development of Your Family

- when Peter said what he said at the end of the book, that was in the context of several significant statements about the family...

A. Emphasized in this text.

- 1 Peter 3:1-4 - In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any *of them* are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, ^{as} they observe your chaste and respectful behavior. Your adornment must not be *merely* external—braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, or putting on dresses; but *let it be* the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God.**

- 1 Peter 3:7 - You husbands in the same way, live with *your wives* in an understanding way, as with someone weaker, since she is a woman; and show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered.**

B. Looking back

- if you're married, did that relationship go forward or backward in 2009?

C. Looking ahead.

- would God be pleased if 2010 was a year where you put special emphasis in developing this area of your life?
- would that be one of the ways God would want 2 Peter 3:18 to come true for you?...
- what would your spouse say?...why not ask him/her this afternoon – areas I/we could work on this year?
- if necessary – get some help...[talk about availability of pastors, counselors]
- there are all sorts of great books in the resource center...
- should this area be one of your take-aways?...what's your plan for growth in 2010?...

V. Regarding the Stewardship of Your Body

A. Emphasized in this text

1 Peter 4:1-2 - Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God.

B. Looking back.

- was 2009 a good year for you regarding the stewardship of your health?...
- now, several caveats...
 1. I have struggled with weight my entire adult life – I'm preaching to myself here...
 2. We're not going to worship the body, or let culture determine what "normal" is, because no one can stand up to the starved airbrushed models of our culture, and no one should...
 3. In the Scripture, the concept of being fat is sometimes a sign of God's blessing...
Nehemiah 9:25 - They captured fortified cities and a fertile land. They took possession of houses full of every good thing, Hewn cisterns, vineyards, olive groves, Fruit trees in abundance. So they ate, were filled and grew fat, And reveled in Your great goodness.
 4. There is much about genetics we don't know...
 - I'm not geneticist, but I do know that some people seem to be able to eat whatever they want without gaining a pound – I used to gain weight just driving by the Krispy Kreme shop...
 5. Many diseases have little/nothing to do with our lifestyle choices
 6. Bodily exercise can be profitable, but only a little...

1 Timothy 4:8 - for bodily discipline is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.

 - however, there is no question that God calls upon us to be good stewards of our bodies... **1 Corinthians 6:19-20 - Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body...[could apply to health care debate]**

C. Looking ahead.

- now, even with all the balance I've tried to place on it...is this an area that should get increased attention this year?
- that might mean getting a regular physical, it might include having the right kind of cancer screens if that's what your doctor recommends, it might include more regular exercise of better eating habits...

- the issue isn't how we look – it's whether they can support/serve our families as long as possible and serve the Lord as long/effectively as possible...
- there's also safety of the body issues...here's one random one, but an important one...when's the last time you changed the batteries in the smoke alarms in your house?...if you say – well, they're hard wired into my electrical system...good, did you know those are still supposed to be periodically changed [cf the ones in our house...also, do they have a battery back-up in case there is a power outage – develop how the deacons will help anyone for whom that would be a problem financially]...

- what does growth in 2010 look like for you...

VI. Regarding Your Finances

- Peter has a lot to say about false teachers and the way they tempt God's people to greed and self-centered use of their money...

A. Emphasized in this text

2 Peter 2:3 - and in *their* greed they will exploit you with false words; their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.

2 Peter 2:14 - having eyes full of adultery that never cease from sin, enticing unstable souls, having a heart trained in greed, accursed children;

B. Looking back.

- was 2009 a faithful year for you financially?...

C. Looking Ahead

- do you have a plan in place to grow in financial stewardship?

1. Have you (and your spouse) prepared your annual budget?

- I personally do not see how someone could be a good steward without a budget, a workable spending plan, and a method to track who is spending what and how those decisions are made...[if you and your spouse can't discuss these matters without a fight, get some help)

2. Have you reviewed your retirement plan and communicated with your spouse?

3. Have you reviewed your college savings fund and communicated with your children?

4. Have you established savings accounts for other long term purchases?

- develop – may need to take a financial peace class this year...

5. Have you reviewed your life and disability insurance and discussed it as a couple/family?

6. Have you updated your family balance sheet?

- do you know if you are going forward or backwards financially?

7. Have you updated your “gone to heaven” file?

- this sounds a little morbid – but I believe every person should have a death file – or if you prefer, a “Gone to Heaven” file...
- and obviously it should be kept in a safe, secure place...but it's all the information someone would need if you passed away...
- and, the point here is – it should be updated once a year, and now is a great time to do that...what should it contain?...

a. Full names (s)

b. Will

- especially if you have children in your home...

c. Social security number (s)

d. Tax information

- especially if you are self-employed
- e. Family balance sheet**
- f. Medical and Life Insurance information**
- g. Retirement plan/funds**
- h. Credit card information**
- i. Decisions/preferences about funeral home, grave plots**

- if you don't have any of this kind of work done, that may be one of your take-aways...to grow by getting your financial house in order...

VII. Regarding Your Love for the Church Family

A. Emphasized in this text.

1 Peter 4:8-9 - Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins. Be hospitable to one another without complaint.

B. Looking back

C. Looking Ahead

VIII. Regarding Your Outreach to Others

A. Emphasized in this text.

1 Peter 3:15 - but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always *being* ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence;

B. Looking back

C. Looking Ahead