

Warm-up

If you were in charge of sending out a team to accomplish a strategic mission, what types of things would you place on your checklist of essential equipment? What instructions would you make sure were clear?

- ▶ *Praise guards our soul and feeds discernment.*

July 26, **Part 1****Center Point** (vs. 9-14)

“Do not be carried away by varied and strange teachings; for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace...” (v. 9)

I used to have a small sailboat that my daughter and I used at Lake Natoma. It had a plywood centerboard that dropped into a slot in the hull, serving to stabilize the boat when the wind filled the sail. Without the centerboard in place we had no bearing; the rudder was useless!

God’s designed His word to be the stabilizing factor in our lives. Taken away, we have no bearing. Even more, it gives us hope which functions as an “anchor of the soul” (see Hebrews 6:19). Notice what strengthens us and keeps us stable: Grace. Without God’s grace we drift without an anchor.

“This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil.”

What lies at the center of your value system? What standard gives you discernment and wisdom? What centers and stabilizes your life? Dads you are the moral compass for your children; how is your bearing? What is the source of wisdom in your life (see Col. 2:3, Prov. 2:6).

“...I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the cleverness of the clever I will set aside.” (1 Cor. 1:19)

“the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men,” (1 Cor. 1:25)

“For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect.” (Matt. 24:24)

“carried away” (v.9) – Be on guard against off-center teachings; Satan is tricky! In Hebrews 2:1 we are cautioned about drifting, *“For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it.”* The image is of a boat breaking loose from its mooring and being carried away by the current.

“We have an altar” (v. 10) – God provides for believers in a special way. Don’t expect to be accepted and blessed by non-believers. Be content to be set apart (see vs. 11). We may need to go “outside the camp” (v. 13) where Jesus will meet us and provide for us. Don’t expect the world to bless you.

- ▶ *Equipment is of little value unless calibrated. Our Christian life is hollow unless centered on Jesus Christ daily.*

Channel for Praise (vs. 15-16)

“Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name.” (v. 15)

I’ve noticed that my son and his wife have taught their children to be courteous and say thank you. The more the kids do this the more natural it becomes. It is now second nature to them. Mom and dad also created a channel for praise to the Father by teaching their kids how to recognize God at work and to thank Him. Isn’t that great?!

Hebrews 13:15 invites us to *“continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God”*. What am I willing to do to exalt Him? When I’m suffering I have a great opportunity to “sacrifice” some praise to the Father.

Verse 16 encourages us to be quick to help and share with others, saying that *“with such sacrifices God is pleased.”* God knows that our human nature is self-centered, and that we can easily neglect doing this. Apparently a pattern of regular helping and sharing touches the heart of God

- ▶ *Continually praising God coupled with a habit of helping and sharing with others creates a posture that pleases the Father.*

Cheery Leaders (v. 17)

“Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.”

It’s easy to criticize those who lead us. When I’m doing my best to serve the Lord and lead others in His direction it deflates me when someone criticizes me. It strikes deep sometimes. Notice that this verse says God’s leaders “keep watch over your soul”. Godly, humble leaders need to be honored and encouraged, not criticized.

When your heart is encouraged everything else is better. When a leader gets discouraged he or she often becomes ineffective and sometimes will quit. We must encourage our leaders and bring them joy! Send them a note of encouragement; treat them to something unexpected. Be patient with them when they flounder; give them the benefit of the doubt. They will be at their best, and so will you, when you do this.

▶ *“A joyful heart is good medicine, but a broken spirit dries up the bones.” (Prov. 17:22) Encourage others!*

August 2, **Part 2**

Cherished Prayers (vs. 18-19)

“Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a good conscience, desiring to conduct ourselves honorably in all things.” (v. 18)

Trisha and I have been sustained many times by the prayers of others. Phil. 1:19 has become one of my favorite verses, saying, *“for I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayers and the provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ”*. What a great partnership: your prayers and God’s Spirit! I believe that your prayers for another believer can empower them to accomplish God’s work and conquer the enemy. God did not intend for His people to “go it alone”. James says, *“the effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much”*. Pray!

And so prayer brings restoration. This applies to relationships as well as circumstances. I also believe it applies to God’s timing. Verse 19 says, *“so that I may be restored to you the sooner”*. Remember, no man can instruct God (see 1 Cor. 2:16), but He designed prayer to encourage us to plead with Him to work in our lives for good. Think about the parables that encourage us to persist in prayer. Jesus said, *“You do not have because you do not ask”* (James 4:2).

▶ *God cherishes our prayers for others. Adopting this habit connects us with His work in others’ lives.*

Equipped for Eternity (vs. 20-21)

*“Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, even Jesus our Lord, **equip you in every good thing** to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.” (vs. 20-21)*

We have a Shepherd, Jesus Christ, who works in us and through us. He meets every need we have and equips us fully to do what He’s called us to do.

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them. (Eph. 2:10)

Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass. (1 Thess. 5:24)

Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from these things, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work. (2 Tim. 2:21)

God will equip you to do His will. Do you believe this? Imagine the One who made the universe choosing us (Acts 13:48) and determining to use us in His work! He has equipped us with everything we need to please Him.

“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.” (2 Peter 1:3)

▶ *The degree that we submit to God and obey His Spirit while on earth determines our joy with Him for eternity!*

Patient Grace (vs. 22-25)

“But I urge you, brethren, bear with this word of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly.” (v. 22)

God has told us all that we need to know in His word. His grace is immeasurable, and we are to patiently extend it to others in like manner (v. 25). We are to be teachable, especially when other godly believers exhort us (v. 22). We are to invest in and celebrate godly relationships, honoring those who walk with Christ (v. 23).

▶ *As we do these things consistently, our lives will please the Master and we’ll be equipped for eternity!*

Group Discussion

1. If you were being interviewed by the media what would you say anchors and stabilizes your life? (vs. 9-14)
2. What effect has praising God had on your life? (vs. 15-16)
3. Share a time when prayer has made a difference in your life. (vs. 18-19)

We are thus equipped for eternity!