

My Life in Christ

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[0 : 00] Now, will you turn with me for a reading this morning and then our study to 1 Peter chapter 1? It will be on the screens, but if you have a Bible, Church Bible, it's on page 1014.

We're going to read a bit from towards the end of chapter 1 and then on into chapter 2 and verse 10.

So the word, therefore, at the beginning there means that he's following on from something that's already been said and he's just been talking about the gospel. He's been talking about how good the gospel, the good news of the gospel is.

Therefore he says to this believing group of people, preparing your minds for action and being sober minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be given, will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you as holy, you also be holy in all your conduct. Since it is written, you shall be holy, for I am holy.

[1 : 02] And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, knowing that you are ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.

He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but was made manifest in this last times for the sake of you, who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory so that your faith and hope are in God.

Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, since you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable through the living and abiding Word of God.

For all flesh is like grass, and all is glory like the flower of the grass. The grass withers and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains forever.

And this word is the good news that was preached to you. So put away all malice and old deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, and like newborn infants long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.

[2 : 25] As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men, but in the sight of God chosen and precious. You yourselves, like living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

For it stands in Scripture, behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone, chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame. So the honour is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe the stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone, and that a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence.

They stumble because they disobey the word as they were destined to do. But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people. Once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. This is the word of God, and we give thanks for the privilege and freedom to be able to read that word together.

So this morning we are going to carry on for another today and for another two weeks, I think another two weeks, maybe three, looking at the idea of planning and praying.

[3 : 56] And we kind of introduced that last week by looking at the verse, commit your ways to the Lord and your plans will be established. And so today we are looking at the theme of really planning our life, our Christian life, and praying through that as well, both personally, and I am going to mention also the church.

So really this is about, as we move forward I guess into this new year, academic year as it were, and our plans both individually and the church.

So what am I trying to achieve in this sermon series? Because preaching also has a plan.

It's not just random, and it's, I hope, never just thoughtless. It is intentional, there is a reason behind it. And it's really, I want to get across to myself and to all of us the vitality of praying into our lives and into our church, and also planning the gospel into our lives and into our church.

Prayer is our lifeblood. We simply can't exist without it. And as you plan your lives, and you know, we are very fortunate here to have a young congregation.

[5 : 17] So at the, just the entry door of their future lives. But all of us at whatever age or stage we are at, the importance of taking Jesus Christ and the gospel into the plans for our lives and for involvement in the gospel community.

And so really my hope is that we will be challenged to look at the priority of prayer in our lives and see the place and be challenged by whether Jesus does really have a place in our day-to-day living and the planning of our life.

Because in many ways, I think if you could measure faith, and I know you can't really measure faith at that level, but if a good litmus test at a good temperature gauge of our faith in Jesus is our prayer life.

And only you know that, and only I know that for myself. So as a fundamental truth behind that, and a foundational reality behind that, knowing Jesus, knowing Jesus as our Lord and Savior is absolutely key to what we go on to say about prayer and about planning in our lives.

It can never be about planning and praying as a ritual, as a mere programmable thing that we do in our lives.

[6 : 48] It needs to be based on the reality of our relationship with Jesus. So it's not a ritualistic thing that we want to plug into our life, but it's based on this great foundation of having a relationship with Jesus Christ.

We will pray when we get who Jesus Christ is, and the magnitude of what He has done in our lives. That's when we will get prayer, when we see who Jesus is, and when we see our need of Him in our lives.

In many ways, until we see Him, and until we recognize that relationship of grace and love that is offered to us in the gospel, He will always be a sideshow.

He will always be a fringe event. He will never be significantly important. We will plow forward with our own plans and with our own lives, and He will be just in the very corner and will not be significant.

And so this passage we've read in 1 Peter, half of chapter 1 and half of chapter 2, where Peter is laying foundations for believers that are scattered throughout different places, in ancient Near East.

[8 : 04] The whole of it actually, or it's interspersed and it's soaked with the presumption of a knowledge of Jesus Christ and who Jesus Christ is and why He matters.

It's all very personal in the advice and everything He says, and there's a couple of things that I just want to say about Jesus Christ here from this passage that recognizes Him as key in our ongoing thinking.

The first is that He is precious, and that's what Peter says in founding what he's got to say in this letter. In verse 19 he says, you know, it's not with worthless things that you've been redeemed, but with the precious blood of Jesus.

And in chapter 2 and verse 4 he says, you've come to the living stone to God who is chosen and precious. And then in verse 6 he says, he's a cornerstone, he's chosen and precious.

And he repeats that because that's the truth for him, that Jesus Christ is precious, that the word is important, he's valuable, he's held in honour.

[9 : 14] And that makes all the difference to what he has to teach and what he is to encourage the people to do. See, everything that Peter's saying here is based on the worth of Jesus Christ, that He is a precious stone, He's not worthless, He's not insignificant.

His love, His grace, His character, His worthiness. And in that verse 4 of chapter 2 we see that really it's not only precious to those who believe but it's precious within the Godhead, in the sight of God chosen and precious.

So there's this sense of value of who Jesus is. Not insignificant, not a bit player, not a fringe performer but precious in His character.

This maybe in many, many different facets that we can't go into but a couple of things here. First in his pure goodness, he is different, he is holy.

In verse 16 of chapter 1 he says, you know, be holy because I am holy. And then he goes on to speak about the goodness of Jesus that we have tasted as believers.

[10 : 27] So there's a pure goodness that makes him precious. This has become a difficult word for us I think because we regard it as kind of sometimes as we associate it with being holier than thou, kind of a bit kind of prissy.

But it's not like that at all. Holiness just means different and different as he is revealed. God is holy and that He's set apart. He's incomparably good and pure.

We can't begin to imagine how good and different and holy He is. He speaks of Him here in terms of what He's done for us and that He's a lamb without blemish.

And that's an Old Testament picture where the Old Testament people of God were to take not a diseased or a broken, boned animal to sacrifice to the living God, you know, that was cheap and nasty.

They were to bring a whole, an unblemished, the very best of their flock as a reflection of the debt they owe and of the worth of Jesus.

[11 : 39] And here we have this picture of God in His pure goodness. Jesus Christ in His sacrificial capacity as a lamb without blemish and His sacrifice for us in His innocence and in His perfection nailed to a tree in death on our part.

And He is always good, perfectly good, hugely challenging theological truth in a world where we are soaked and surrounded in confusing darkness and badness and evil, that God Himself is good like the newborn baby's milk from its mother craving the pure spiritual milk that is spoken of there at the beginning of chapter 2, longing for that goodness, that life-giving, nourishing, satisfying, communicable, shared goodness that He gives to us, precious.

And as believers, we've tasted that, incomparable with anything in our own hearts or in the world which we belong. So He's precious in His goodness, but He's also precious in His power in chapter 2 and verse 6.

He speaks about being a cornerstone, and He quotes from Isaiah chapter 28. And that cornerstone is really just a picture of great power carrying all the weight of a building, or the cornerstone or the foundation stone.

The cornerstone keeps it together, or the foundation stone is the one that carries all the weight of the building. And it's this picture of God in Christ as the powerful one, the Redeemer who takes the weight of our sin and of our burdens and of our troubles and of our prayers as we come to Him.

[13 : 37] So that's always been His plan. From the beginning of the world, He says here, that's been His plan, His incomparable love. He wants to share with us His preciousness and His goodness, His difference, His holiness, His life, His victory over life and death.

He wants us to give Him the weight of our struggles, of our hopes, our fears and of our plans. So the relationship with Jesus Christ and the value of Jesus Christ is going to determine how significant we place prayer in our planning and in our life.

So can we look at His place in our life plans? I'm going to look at that personally and then within the church briefly. We'll look at these things.

So personally, I want to keep it simple. I'm going to ask, do you have a life plan? Are you planning through your life or are you drifting or very passive?

No real thought about a plan for your life. And if you do have a plan, what's it based? What is your life plan based? Because as a Christian, you already have a life plan.

[14 : 52] You have a life plan because verse 14 tells us that we're children of God. We're children of God. He says, as obedient children, do not be conformed by the passions of your former ignorance.

We have new hearts, new love, new motivation, new power. We've been recipients of God's mercy and therefore He wants us to plan our lives with the gospel at the very core of it.

He wants us to plan what it means to have the gospel outworked in our day-to-day lives. And He says, I want you, what does He say? I want you to be holy.

And so I want you to plan to be holy in your life. It doesn't just happen by osmosis or by magic. We're called like Him to be different. As Christians, we're called to be different, to be Christ-like, to be full of grace, to be good, to be pure, to love our neighbor and to love God.

That's His plan for every one of us, for every believer. And all of the teaching in His Word is to reveal who He is and what He's like.

[16 : 02] And therefore this passage, for the examples, gives us as much of the New Testament does, just unpacks a lot of what that means. All of the New Testament teaching is just unpacking what it means to love God and to love your neighbor.

And we are asked to recognize that as His purpose and His plan for us in our lives. So we're not to conform to our own selfish ideals.

We are to love others. We are to get rid of the damaging stuff, all malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, slander, anger, all the things that sometimes make up our lives.

We are to plan for these things, think them into our lives and think them into our futures. We're to want to know what God wants for us because it's good.

And we're to seek the resources and the learning to do that. And that needs to be for us intentional, conscious, reflective, cooperative.

[16 : 59] We need the help of other people. Holiness, it never just happens in our lives. You know, it's like a journey, isn't it? We plan a journey, but we don't just arrive.

We never just arrive. We've got to follow a plan. We've got to follow a particular route. And eventually we get there.

And as Christians, we're on a journey. We are growing and we have a destination to be more and more like Jesus Christ. But it doesn't just happen because there is natural antagonism in our hearts remaining towards growing holy because we have selfishness that we have to deal with and we have various other things in our hearts and lives.

So personally, it's knowing what He reveals and planning that into our lives, knowing what He wants us to be like, knowing the character traits and the ethics and the morality and the love worked out for Him and for others.

So we're to plan to be like Him and what He reveals, but also to trust God in what He doesn't reveal. Because there's lots of things He doesn't tell us our everyday choices, our decisions, even the big ones, our circumstances, our relationships, the illness that we may face, different events that come into our lives that maybe challenge our hopes and plans.

[18 : 31] We are to commit them to Him also and recognize His purposes for us. So in what He reveals and even in what He doesn't reveal, we are to plan and pray through these plans in verse 4 of chapter 2.

He says, as you come to Him, and that's what He's wanting for us in our lives. He's wanting us to come to Him, to take our plans and to commit our plans to Him, to trust in Him daily, giving ourselves to Him, being alert, recognizing that we can't live the Christian life on our own and pray through all of these things because of the battle.

Praying for your heart to be holy, that He would expose the idols that might be there, the wrong desires that need to be addressed, the priorities and the focuses that are not Christ-centered.

And pray as we sung in that Psalm as you go into the day, praying intentionally for what lies ahead, praying as a child of God, praying for the challenges and the encounters that you will face that day, and maybe praying at the end of each day, maybe for forgiveness for some of the things that we've done wrong, or thanksgiving for what has happened during the day.

Praying your life and the gospel into all that you do, just soaking the gospel into your day-to-day living. That's why prayer is so significant for us, and I'm just going to say a couple of things about that at the end.

[20 : 05] So praying His place personally into our lives, but also praying as part of the church family, part of the community of God here.

Now as leaders, we're always planning lots of different things in the church. We have visions and plans which we share with you. We want to be a gospel-centered community.

We want to be on mission. We want to worship well. We want to highlight discipleship. We want to build relationships. Want to share the gospel relationally. We're planning churches.

We're bringing in, we're training interns and ministers in training from September, and we've worked with our young people, and there's lots of things we plan and think through and consider.

But can I encourage you about your own place within the church? The church isn't someone else's responsibility, and it's not simply the responsibility of the leaders.

[21 : 04] Look at the last few verses where you're a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people that declare the Excellencies are praises of God. Once you were not a people, now you are God's people because we share in the receiving of God's mercy.

And you belong. The church is your family. You matter. God's community is part of your identity as a believer.

With all its fragility, frustration, flaws, unreasonableness, failure, it is a place to serve.

It's a place to forgive, a place to be forgiven, a place that we want to be a community that is different, that is holy, that is declaring God's praises.

And we seek to encourage you to plan what that looks like and to pray what that looks like, to be deliberate and intentional about your involvement in this family.

[22 : 07] Where can I serve? How can I sacrifice? What are the needs? What priority does the church community have in my life? Who can I support and help?

What plans do I put in place to stop me gossiping or judging or looking simply out for myself? How can I welcome new people? How can I move beyond just my friendship group to serve those who need in this?

Because I'm not a passenger in the kingdom. And this is the local outworking of the kingdom in our lives.

So as a church family, we have plans and you are part of that. And so I would encourage you to pray through your church-related plans.

Pray for others in the church. If you look at the prayers of the New Testament, and I know that very often we think, well, I never know what to pray and I run out of things to pray about.

[23 : 07] And I don't know what to say. If you look at the prayers in the New Testament, many of them, a high percentage of them, are praying for other people.

They're praying, words of encouragement, they're praying for those who need Paul or Peter or Thomas or James or anyone telling one another that they're praying for each other. So many of the New Testament-recorded prayers are for other believers.

Praying for them, and so pray for others in the church, for the next church plant, pray for the resources we need for that, pray for the interns that are starting, pray for the leadership, pray for your city group friends, pray for those who maybe haven't been around for a while, those who are struggling, those who are going through difficult times, know them, tell them, text them, say, I'm praying for you.

I remembered you this morning, it's amazingly powerful to know that somebody else has thought of you in this big, isolated world in which we live. So plan to pray for others and plan to tell them that you're praying for them and all the energy and effort that is needed maybe to do that.

It's a great motivation for us, and also pray not only for others, but pray with others. Can I really encourage you to do that?

[24 : 33] It's also a very significant element of the New Testament church life that they prayed, not just for one another, but they prayed with one another.

And I do fear that it's dangerously diminished more and more in the world in which we live. But in our church life, just as much as our individual life where we saw last week from John 15 about the vine, the branches, without me you can do nothing, that's not just true of us as individuals, it's true of us as a church.

And a reflection of that will be that we see in our community together the need to pray together with God as our Father. And it's one area I'm just going to plead with you as your pastor to stand against the trend of spiritual individualism at that level.

He is precious, He is powerful, He is worthy, we need Him. And I'm calling on you as a people.

Yes in twos and threes, yes in city groups when we meet together, yes whenever we can choose to pray in any way and it's been great to know in these days when we're not being able to gather on a Wednesday that people are meeting together to pray.

[25 : 53] But can I just make that special plea for over the term, over this year, once a fortnight when we corporately gather together in the engine room, man it's not called that to be flash, it's just called that because I hope it reflects something of its significance.

And I know that will be painful and I know it will be sacrificial and I know it's a challenge and I know everyone can't make that on a Wednesday evening here. But can I just encourage you to see this sign that it's not just going through the motions because well that's what churches always do when they meet on a Wednesday night to pray.

But it's significant and it's recognizing both His preciousness and His power for us as a church not just as individuals because we are a people and we are those who have God as our Father.

Now I know and I would like you to plan that in your diary, put it this way, I know as minister I can't and I have no desire to inspire you by guilt or with fear but I do just plead with you for the sake of the Kingdom to prioritize and plan your life in the gospel and your prayers individually and together as a family, as a people together.

Now I just want to conclude with two very brief words about prayer. First is attitude and the second is time. First is attitude. I think prayer generally.

[27 : 24] I think our attitude to prayer will be reflected in how we think about it. So if we say I need to pray or I want to pray.

Now this might be wrong but at some levels it might be right. So I think sometimes if we say, well I need to pray then it will be hurried, ritualistic, grudging and unproductive.

I really need to, I just need to pray before I go into the days. Just like it's a superstition or just to get it done out of the way. Might be hurried, ritualistic, grudging, unproductive.

Now I know we do need to pray. I know, I know. But if we say I want to pray then I think that comes from a heart of desire and refreshing, life changing and important value.

I've just finished a counselling, biblical counselling course which was hugely challenging. Had to write things all over the place and do exams and everything. It was terrible.

[28 : 33] But I got marked down several times when I was giving advice in counselling and saying that the person needed to do, they needed to change this, they needed to do that.

And the examiner questioned that and said, should it not be that we get them to the place where they want to do that? Because there's, can you see the difference?

The difference in attitude sometimes, sometimes we're driven by guilt and by a desire to perform or a superstition or a fear.

I need to do this. Because if he is precious and powerful and if Christ is the core of who we are and what we do then we will say, I want to do this.

I desire this and that's important. So attitude I think can make a great difference to us in prayer. But so also can time, space, you know, making space in our lives.

[29 : 38] We don't have any space, you know. You think of your day, your week this last week. How much space did you have? How much down time did you, oh no, okay, it's holiday time just now.

But just take it in the routine of life. How much time did you actually take where you hadn't, you had nothing to do? A planned space, planned emptiness. Then time is hugely important and I think it's a great longing we should have because we need to plan it.

See there I go again. We need to plan. You should want to plan time in your life for God. You should want to make it part of your daily routine, I should as well, to read and to meditate without the pressure of the bus coming in two minutes or a multitude of other things.

If we can somehow get into our life that recognition that time is something we can plan and set aside that will allow us to meditate on God and on His Word without undue rush.

I know 99% of my devotional time is rushed and I always think there's other important things that I need to get on with. But if we can plan our time, now we've all got, nobody's got more than 24 hours, nobody's got less, we've all got that and it's no different from any other time in history at that level in terms of hours.

[31 : 08] Take out your phone at some point today, press on settings, press on screen time. See how many hours you have spent on screen time today, this week.

Now I'm not saying that it hasn't been valuable and good and important time, much of it will be, but all of it. Is it that we're just filling every conceivable downtime with something to look at or with something to take up our boredom?

Do we have, can we set aside time for Jesus Christ? Jesus was pure and perfectly good and God.

We have the same amount of times every day that Jesus had when he walked on this earth. He was Savior of the world, He was the Son of God, yet He made time every day to be with His Father in prayer.

He wanted that, He needed that and wanted it and longed for it in His life, went into the presence of God. And that would be my heart's desire for me and what I would like to plan for more, planning my time and my use of time so that I am learning and knowing and loving and understanding God better in Jesus Christ so that I know His plan for my life.

[32 : 45] I'm aware of what He wants for me and then knowing that my plans in life are established as we saw last week.

So planning these things, I hope that you will consider that in your life. I also hope you'll pray for the preaching and the planning that we're doing.

Next Sunday morning, next Sunday, I think it's actually next Sunday evening, I'm going to look at planning to pray as a people for the whole question of abortion and how to address that and how to pray through it and how to be consistent, gracious, loving, gentle and strong in relation to it in our society.

And then the following Sunday morning, looking at praying into the gospel into the LGBT community and how to reach into that community with the love of Jesus Christ in a meaningful and gracious and loving way.

So let's pray. Lord God, we ask and pray that you would help us as we plan to pray as a people and as we plan to pray through issues in our society and also issues in the church and issues in our own lives.

[34 : 08] We pray that we would each take time to think about what you want for us, the purposes and the plans you have for us and we take time to recognize our responsibility and our privilege of being children of God and being holy because He is holy and help us to know that priority and that usefulness in His kingdom therefore.

And we pray that we would support one another and love each other and pray for one another and be different together because of Jesus Christ and because of His grace.

Deal with our selfishness or our pride or our anger or our frustrations and of our battles. Help us, we pray, through them together and may our fellowship with you in prayer as a people and as individuals be hugely encouraging and uplifting.

Amen.