Faithful Living in a Fallen World
Romans 8:18-31 Daniel 1:1-9

Have you ever read the warning label on a product, and it was so absurd that you thought, “What?” And the second thing you though was, “This is on here because somebody did this!” Examples include “May be hot” on a cup of coffee, “Not for highway use” on a wheelbarrow, and “Remove child before folding” on a stroller. Throughout scripture, we believers are warned of dangers and pitfalls of living in a fallen, morally corrupt world:

> 4 You adulterous people, don’t you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. --James 4:4
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> 11 Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul. 12 Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us. --1Peter 2:11-12
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> 12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. --Ephesians 6:12

These are just a few of the warnings we are given in regard to guarding ourselves against the curse and corruption of sin. We live in a world of noise, distractions, confusion, and spiritual darkness. And yet, God calls His people to live a visible faith, in diligence, embracing hope, identity, and assurance.

In our reading in Romans, we are given both a warning and a reminder of the hope that we have in Christ. Our victory is in Christ. We are members of a Holy nation, foreigners and exiles in a corrupt world—*temporary residents whose true citizenship is in Heaven.* This phrase is not just a quotable phrase but is a reality for the followers of Christ. Romans 8 is a call to spiritual vigilance and diligence of a life led by the Holy Spirit (see below Romans 8:18-25). Our living in a fallen world means grappling with the reality of suffering, sin, and evil—the groanings Paul describes.

Our diligence—our ability to endure—is not self-generated. It is a response to God's enabling power. We see in Daniel 1 that Daniel did not just determine to rely on his own resolve. It is his response to God's enabling power, in the midst of Babylon. In a crooked and perverse generation, he is aware of his identity both as an alien and foreigner and as citizen of the Kingdom of God. Embracing both identities, Daniel resolves to honor God. He makes up his mind to be set apart because his mind and heart are where they belong. Like Daniel, we live in a crooked and perverse time. Each of us can believe what the media tells us or we can believe the Word of God. Each of us can be anxious about this world or find peace in the assurance we are given in Christ. Like Daniel, we can focus on God.

The phrase in the book of Daniel that we read as "focused on God" is translated from the Latin phrase *coram deo,* literally *before God*. It conveys living every moment with an awareness of God's presence. This all-encompassing understanding is expressed by David:

> 7 Where can I go from your Spirit?
> Where can I flee from your presence?
> 8 If I go up to the heavens, you are there;
> if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.
> 9 If I rise on the wings of the dawn,
> if I settle on the far side of the sea,
> 10 even there your hand will guide me,
> your right hand will hold me fast. Psalm 139:7-10

Always, David, the man after God's own heart, is aware of the glory of God. This awareness reflects David's sanctification: *hagiozo*, to be set apart. It indicates the sovereign action of God to set apart to accomplish His purpose.

Regarding this sanctification, Jesus gave us both a warning and an assurance: 33 "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome

the world" (John 16:33). I bet Peter recalls these words when he writes his letters to the Christians enduring persecutions under Nero: 1

> 11 Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul. 12 Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.
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> 13 Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human authority: whether to the emperor, as the supreme authority, 14 or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. 15 For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people. --Peter 2:11-15

Recognizing that these Christians suffer false accusation, arrest, and physical persecution for their faith, Peter reminds them that Christ is our Shepherd and the overseer of this world (1 Peter 2:25).

So, what do *we* do? In practical terms, how do we live faithfully in a fallen world? Let me suggest a commitment to six actions:

1. Remember that it is God's own faithfulness that is the anchor for the believer's perseverance: "9 Know therefore that the Lord your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commandments" (Deuteronomy 7:9); "22 Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed/for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness" (Lamentations 3:22-23).

2. Practice an active faith by being salt and light. In a decaying and dark

   world, salt is a preservative that slows decay, and light reveals truth. Jesus doesn't say, "Do your best to try to be light." No, He says in Matthew 5:14, "You are light." Our lives should be distinct in love, truth, and integrity, so others can see the goodness of God at work through us.

Our prayers should reflect a holy dissatisfaction with sin and injustice. Scripture and the Spirit of God should shape our thoughts, desires, and decisions.

3. Pay close attention to the truth so that you do not drift: "We must pay the most careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away" (Hebrews 2:1). Pursue holiness and Christ-like behavior. Actively put off—literally act to—put off the old self. Practice self-control and remember faithfulness is a fruit of the Spirit.
4. Do what sanctified people do! Conduct yourself with spiritual discipline. Separate yourself from sin and worldly contamination. Turn away from moral impurity, unrighteous behavior, and reject the corrupt patterns of this fallen world.
5. Broaden the scope of your prayer life. Pray for your country and its leaders, for the darkness to be purified by the light. And this is the most political thing you'll probably ever hear me say: *Go Vote!* I will never tell you for whom to vote, but I will say this: Vote according to biblical principle!
6. Embrace your identity as both foreigner-stranger in this world and a citizen of a holy nation.

Remember, Family, God's own faithfulness is the anchor for the believers' perseverance. Do what sanctified people do. Minister to the broken and hurting. Serve God. Show up. Lead your family in the fear and admonition of the Lord. Be set apart.

And finally, Family, we do not have to fear this dark and fallen world. We just have to live actively sanctified in it. We may suffer and groan, but our King has already overcome this world.

Passages in support of this sermon"

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Romans 8:18-31

18 I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. 19 For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. 20 For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope 21 that[a] the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.

22 We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. 23 Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. 24 For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? 25 But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

26 In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. 27 And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God.

28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who[b] have been called according to his purpose. 29 For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. 30 And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

Daniel 1:1-9

Daniel's Training in Babylon

1 In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. 2 And the Lord delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the articles from the temple of God. These he carried off to the temple of his god in Babylonia[a] and put in the treasure house of his god.

3 Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, chief of his court officials, to bring into the king's service some of the Israelites from the royal family and the nobility— 4 young men without any physical defect, handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand, and qualified to serve in the king's palace. He was to teach them the language and literature of the Babylonians.[b] 5 The king assigned them

a daily amount of food and wine from the king's table. They were to be trained for three years, and after that they were to enter the king's service.

6 Among those who were chosen were some from Judah: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. 7 The chief official gave them new names: to Daniel, the name Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abednego.

8 But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way. 9 Now God had caused the official to show favor and compassion to Daniel,