

Title: The Three Gs
Date: 2/23/25
Subject: How God's people are to live in the light of the impending day of the Lord
Scripture: 2 Peter 3:17, 18

Vince Lombardi became head coach of the Green Bay Packers in 1959. The year prior was the team's worst season with only one win. Lombardi's first team won 7 and lost 5. The next year they went to the NFL Championship and lost when they were stopped a few yards from the goal line and the clock ran out.

When training camp opened in 1961, there was a mixture of disappointment and excitement because the team had been tantalizingly close to winning it all. The players expected Lombardi to pick up from where they left off, tweak areas they needed to improve, as they needed just a little push to make it to the top.

At the first team meeting, Lombardi had everyone's attention as he held up a football. What would he say? An inspirational speech about snatching victory from the jaws of defeat? He said, "Gentlemen, this is a football!" Then he had the players turn to page 1 in their playbooks, not near the end to see newly devised innovative plays. They reviewed fundamentals of blocking, tackling, throwing, catching. Some of the players initially may have thought they were above needing this reminder.

The Packers posted a 11 – 3 record and won the championship game 37-0. Lombardi didn't have another playoff loss and won the next 9 in a row. He led the Packers to five championships in seven seasons.

David Maraniss, in his book When Pride Still Mattered: A Life Of Vince Lombardi, explains Lombardi's approach in the 1961 training camp: *He took nothing for granted. He began a tradition of starting from scratch, assuming that the players were blank slates who carried over no knowledge from the year before... He began with the most elemental statement of all. "Gentlemen, this is a football."*

Peter has been giving a refresher course by reminding and saying he's going to continue to remind about the Christian fundamentals. We need this from time to time – more accurately, constantly. We never get to the place where we can say that we know all there is to know and don't need reminders.

Read 2 Peter 3:17, 18

Guard. The call is to be on guard.

Peter again addresses the readers as dear friends, loved ones. He has them and their best interest at heart. Therefore. *Therefore* is there, therefore we need to find why it's there for. It points back to everything written previously.

The apostle also writes "you already know this." The newer NIV version reads "since you have been forewarned." Most versions say you know this beforehand or in advance. The Greek combines words meaning prior and knowledge from which we get prognosis and prognostication. Synonyms are prediction, projection, forecast which have to do with what a person thinks is going to happen - the doctor after getting the test results, the meteorologist after reviewing the computer models, the stockbroker after consulting Warren Buffett.

Followers in Christ aren't engaging in guesswork. We don't have to wait until situations arise like the appearance of false teachers or Christ's coming. We have prior knowledge. The Greek carries the idea of knowledge through experience. People of Peter's time knew there were false teachers. Jesus had warned that there would be false teachers. We know there are false teachers during our time. We know this by experience.

Questions we could ask to determine if a person is a false teacher: Are they true to scripture? Do they accept Christianity's essential teachings? Does their practice and lifestyle match what God expects of his people?

We've been forewarned which is to be forearmed. We know how to live as a follower of Jesus Christ, about the presence of false teachers and their teaching, Christ's second coming, and judgment. Still, reminders.

Being on guard is a defensive posture. As we read through the Bible, we find numerous times we're called upon to be awake and alert. Peter wrote in his first book: "our enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8). The point of many of Jesus' parables about his second coming is to watch, be ready, be alert. We're to be prepared even as Nehemiah who rebuilt Jerusalem's walls with his men having their weapons in hand ready to fight at a moment's notice.

The danger from false teachers is to be carried away, led astray, transported away from the truth. The same word was used to describe Barnabas who followed the actions of Christians including Peter who hypocritically wouldn't associate with Gentile Christians when a group of Jewish Christians arrived from Jerusalem (Galatians 2:13). He was carried away, let astray. And so was Peter.

Carried away comes by adopting the approach of false teachers who question the Lord's promise about coming back (3:4). We can be lulled into a false sense of security, have a ho hum attitude. Don't think Christ is coming back. Live immoral and godless ways – lifestyle, thoughts, actions, words that don't please the Lord.

The danger is falling from our secure position. Other translations help in determining the meaning: stability (ESV), secure footing (Living), steadfastness (NAS, KJV) and firm grasp on truth (NET).

Falling pictures a person becoming wobbly and shaky. Peter may have been thinking about how he let down his guard after Jesus was arrested. Peter was in the courtyard where people approached him and asked if he was a follower of Jesus. He adamantly denied he was to the point of calling down a curse upon himself. Then the rooster crowed, and Peter realized what he'd done. He had denied Jesus.

He didn't lose his salvation. The believer won't lose his salvation. Instead of making progress they would regress. They may lack assurance or give in to doubt. The quality of the Christian life would suffer.

Commentator Michael Green explains (*The Second Epistle of Peter and the Epistle of Jude*, p. 151), "Knowledge of Christ and knowledge about Christ are, if they keep pace with one another, both the safeguard against heresy and apostasy and also the means of growth in grace."

As in most sports not only is a good defense needed but also a good offense. We come again to one of Peter's favorite words as he presents the contrast to being carried away through the word "but." Grow. The challenge is to grow. The best precaution against being infected by false teachers and carried away by them is to make spiritual progress.

We often associate the growth with plants. Some of you may have gotten your garden started by starting seeds in a properly lit and heated environment. Hope springs eternal that spring will come with warm temperatures so we can plant the garden outside, wait for the first shoot to pop out of the ground, flower and eventually bear fruit. Might not be so excited about grass growing.

Your favorite vegetable plant growing and bearing fruit is a nice visual but it doesn't quite go far enough. It doesn't have a soul or spirit. It doesn't have the ability to have a relationship with God.

We need to think in terms of people, more specifically a person who has come to know Jesus Christ as his or her Savior. This spiritual transaction is also known as being born again, conversion, regeneration, second birth. The person has repented, meaning they've turned around and changed course.

A person who's wandered too close to the edge of the Grand Canyon needs to turn around and needs to start moving away rather than just stay close to the edge. A person who has turned around and changed course of their lives by becoming a Christian is expected to do more than just stand facing the direction they should go. They're to move forward. The person who experiences the new birth is expected to grow.

A. W. Tozer observed this about the early church: "Conversion for the early Christians was not a destination; it was the beginning of a journey... In [the early church] faith was for each believer a beginning, not a bed in which to lie while waiting for the Lord's triumph. Believing was not a once-done act. It was an attitude of heart and mind which inspired and enabled the believer to follow the Lord wherever He went."

A teacher with twenty years' experience was passed over for a promotion. She went to the administrator and demanded, "Why did you choose that new young man who only had four years of experience at this job, when I have twenty years of experience?" The administrator answered, "Because you don't have twenty years of experience. You have one year of experience twenty times. You're still teaching the same things in the same way as you did when you were first hired. You haven't grown in the job."

Contrast her with Hokusai, one of Japan's most beloved painters. Toward the end of his life, he dismissed as nothing the work he'd done before age 50 and felt it wasn't until age 70 that he was turning out anything good. On his deathbed at age 88 he lamented, "If heaven had granted me five more years, I could have become a real painter." He wanted to keep growing.

Two areas of Christian growth are identified. The first is grow in the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Grace is the undeserved love and unmerited favor of God. Grace is also the character in the Christian experience. I'm not going to expand on this but simply remind us what we saw at the beginning of Peter's reminder.

READ 2 Peter 1:2, 3, 5 – 10.

The second area for growth is the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The Greek word carries the idea of knowledge through experience. It isn't gaining lots of factual information so you'd blow friends and family away when it comes to Bible Jeopardy or Christian Trivial Pursuit, as fun as that might be.

The intended result is to know and experience Jesus Christ. Know him. Know his commands. Know more about God, his character, his actions. We're to keep diving into what he has done. Explore more and more and more about Christ's coming from heaven to earth to die.

The command is given to the church, the universal church of all believers of all time. The church is to grow. How does that happen? The group is composed of individuals who are to grow. It's not just for a select few who are to do the growing for and in behalf of the rest.

At the local church level - each person is responsible for the growth of the whole. It's not just for a few - pastor, governing board, ministry leaders, old saints - to carry the load for everybody. We have different levels of understanding, different levels of ability, but we all contribute to growth.

What do we do? Immerse ourselves in God's word as we do our own study. Expose ourselves to biblical teaching. Feed on the word. Borrow from 1 Peter 2:2, 3: "Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good."

We need to desire and engage the will, the determination that we are going to grow. We need to carve out the time, reschedule our lives to engage in growth. Exertion is required as with any beneficial exercise. Sweat and pain are involved as sometimes God will point out things in our lives that he isn't pleased with.

Growth will sometimes be super fast as we make tremendous strides. Other times it will take place slowly like a sloth so we barely notice or won't until we gain the perspective of time and look back or till heaven.

The proof of growing in grace and knowledge is that we'll be more like Jesus. We'll look more like him. We'll sound more like him. We'll talk more like him. We'll act more like him. We'll continually be being transformed. We'll love him more. We'll grow in our obedience and submission to him.

I chose the scripture readings for the past weeks and this morning's because they provide tremendous guidance about how we're to live, behave, think and speak. Numerous other scriptures do the same as they teach about the ways believers used to live and the change that's taken place because we are new creations. You used to live in ways when you followed the ways of the world when you were dead in transgressions and sins (Ephesians 2:2). Don't be conformed to the ways of the world (Romans 12:1, 2). Back in 1 Peter it said you spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do (1 Peter 4:3). We aren't the old anymore because Jesus Christ washed us and purified us. Live in the light of that truth. Don't use the expressions of the world so that we sound like them when we get upset. Don't engage in their activities.

The book of James points out the common problem of the tongue: "With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be" (James 2:9, 10).

Professional athletes maintain a rigorous off-season schedule. They don't take time off from their training because they believe they'd fall behind others and would regress. The words of basketball coach "Easy" Ed Macauley drives many athletes, "When you are not practicing, remember, *someone somewhere is*, and when you meet him he is going to win." Maybe he wasn't so "easy." How about a former President, Calvin Coolidge:

"There is no development physically or intellectually without effort, and effort means work." Educator Booker T. Washington: "Nothing ever comes to one, that is worth having, except as a result of hard work."

We may not be able to relate to the regimen used by pro athletes. How about riding a bike? A primary principle is to keep moving... because if you to slow down too much, you become pretty wobbly and it's harder to keep one's balance. The same is true in the Christian life.

John Stephen Akhwari of Tanzania was one of 75 marathoners at Mexico City's 1968 Olympics. His hopes of winning were dashed when he suffered cramps, probably because of the altitude. Then, almost halfway through, he was knocked down when runners fought for position. His shoulder smashed against the pavement. His knee was cut and dislocated. It was thought he'd drop out and go to the hospital. Instead, he insisted on treatment so he could resume the race. He alternated running, walking and limping toward the finish line.

Only a few remaining spectators were in the stadium an hour after the marathon winner had finished and the medal ceremony had taken place. Things were winding down when the sound of police whistles and sirens could be heard. People turned in that direction and saw Akhwari enter the stadium. The crowd cheered as he crossed the finish line one hour and five minutes after the winner. He was the last and 57th to finish.

When interviewed about why he didn't quit because of his injury and having no chance of winning a medal, he replied, "My country did not send me 5,000 miles to start the race. They sent me 5,000 miles to finish it." He resolved to complete his race.

The Christian life is a race, that's once started, is about finishing... well.

Glory

The natural state of humanity is to be self-centered. This carries over into the Christian experience. The old sinful nature isn't eradicated. It's something we have to deal with. There's still the desire for self, for me, myself and I to get our way. There's still the draw toward seeking pleasure as the goal of life. There's still the pull to be in control, be in charge, to not surrender to our superior Jesus Christ.

However, since we've been changed and our lives have been rearranged, we're to no longer behave like the spiritually deranged. Since we've become a new person in Christ, there's a change of direction, change of who is our master that we're to serve. It's no longer about our being fulfilled, feeling good or significant. It's about what pleases him.

We were made to bring glory to God. Praise and worship and honor.

Now and forever. The forever part is easy as we'll be in the presence of the Triune God without distractions, time pressures to get in our way. The hard part is now.

To glorify is to magnify. There are two kinds of magnifying. A microscope magnifies small things like blood cells to make them look big. A telescope magnifies a big thing like Saturn or Quasar J0529-4351, the most luminous object in the known universe, with a mass of 17 billion suns, begin to look as big as it really is. Like David who said, "I will magnify God," we don't make a small Jesus look bigger than he is, but make a big Lord and Savior Jesus Christ begin to look as big as he really is.