

Week of November 25-December 1

GOTCHA

Scripture Reading: Read 1 Peter 4

There are times in our life where we encounter God in such a powerful way that it shapes the way we do ministry for years to come. I've known folks who came to faith through the efforts of a campus ministry at their college who were later called to college ministry themselves. I've met people who have experienced God's supernatural deliverance from demonic powers who sense God's call to help others obtain freedom and deliverance in their lives. In my own pilgrimage, I've watched the Lord's healing in my life physically, emotionally and spiritually and now serve as pastor of a church whose vision is all about hope, healing and wholeness. In each case, an encounter with God shaped the course of a life and ministry. This is true even when the experience may not have been positive at the time, as was the case with Peter at Gethsemane.

Mark's gospel indicates that Jesus was deeply distressed and troubled and "overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death." He requested that Peter, James, and John stay and keep watch. Unfortunately, they fell asleep shortly after he left to pray. When he returned, he challenged them again to watch and pray so that they would not "fall into temptation." Sadly, they could not stay watchful and pray for even an hour but fell asleep again. When he returned the third time, they were still sleeping. He woke them because Judas was on his way to betray him.

Fast forward some thirty years later and this apostle who penned 1 Peter is now in a different place in his life and ministry. He had learned much from his failures and, out of that experience, was in a position to provide godly counsel to believers. He reminded his readers: "*The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray.*" Having failed Jesus in Gethsemane and having denied him three times shortly afterwards, Peter knew firsthand how dangerous life could be if one is dull-headed, lacking in self-control and not praying.

So, what are some of those things that can dull our minds? A number come quickly to mind: exhaustion, overwork, addictions, worry, stress, anxiety, unresolved anger, unforgiveness or guilt. Each in its own way saps us, distracts us or numbs us so that we are not clear-headed and able to pray. In such a state, we become easy pickings for the devil, who, Peter says, "prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8).

Years ago, my wife planned a surprise birthday party for me at church in honor of my 30th birthday. She planned it for weeks and when the time came to announce it during the service she looked at me and said "gotcha." Such surprises are enjoyable. Not enjoyable at all, however, are those times in our lives when we fall prey to the lion's "gotchas" and he catches us with temptation because our guard was down, our self-control was weak, our minds were not clear, and our prayer life was limited.

Action Step & Prayer Focus: Go back through the list above and ask the Lord to show you if any of these areas are keeping you from being clear minded and self-controlled. Address them immediately so you can pray and avoid the devil's "gotchas."

Take-a-way: *The devil's "gotchas" will always harm you so stay alert and pray.*