

Lessons
I Tried to
Teach You
Without
Teaching You

S. I.
Grotzke

LESSONS I TRIED TO TEACH YOU WITHOUT TEACHING YOU

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To the faithful young men and women in the Liberty Youth Group.
I pray that you will seek Jesus Christ with your whole heart.

Introduction

Some statements just linger around like stray cats. No one exactly knows where they came from, but they are just part of the location. No one really owns them, but they are still part of the family...in a way. There have been plenty of funny phrases over the past years that have appeared on the doorstep of the youth group. At various times, quips like these have been tossed around:

Don't leave your stuff laying around

Throw away your trash

I'm not your mother

Play the game

Sign up for soccer camp

Who cares if it is burnt?

Say please

Say thank you

Sign up for the man-a-thon

You lose man point

Read this book

It's a tie!

I love Crystal!

I'm going to go find some other teens

Come Christmas caroling

Interview the SNAC hosts

We will leave you if you are late

When you get home tonight, don't be grumpy with your parents

I'm looking for real answers

Invite a friend

Don't come to paintball, girls

What was the date of the Exodus?

Keep the peace

This goes in Pastor Seth's Fun Box

Don't watch Veggie Tales

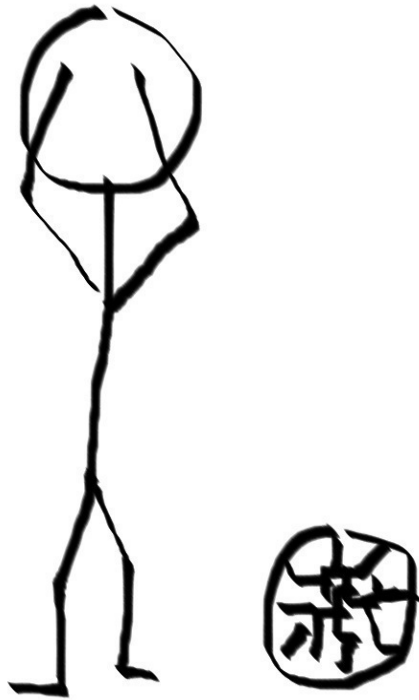
Some of these had specific places. Some of these just happened to wander along and become adopted. These short chapters are an attempt to give a home to some of those vagabond statements heard throughout the past five years around Liberty Baptist Church.

*All illustrations are original works by the author, done in the traditional whiteboard fashion. Hard to tell, I know.

CHAPTER ONE

Protect the Face

Sometimes in life we get distracted. That is not always a bad thing. You may be called a poet if you are distracted by the symmetry of a flower. You may be called a philosopher if you are distracted by a playing child. But you are called "bloody nose" if you are distracted while someone is serving the volleyball.



One of the guys in our youth group got distracted. The phrase, "protect the face," became a necessary command during various sporting events. A volleyball, soccer ball, or frisbee to the nose always seemed to break up the flow of the game.

Isn't that how life works? It seems as though we get distracted at the wrong time and then are blindsided by something. We could have seen it coming, we should have seen it coming, but we completely missed it because of a distraction.

The New Testament commands believers to be "sober-minded" in the midst of mind-numbing distractions. This word is used in opposition to sleepiness (1 Thess 5:6) and drunkenness (1 Thess 5:7-8). The admonishment is just as necessary today.

Peter uses "sober-minded" three times in his first letter. He challenges believers to be sober-minded because of **1) Your Salvation; 2) Your Prayers; and 3) Your Adversary.**

1. Your Salvation

First Peter 1:13 "Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ."

In a certain sense, we have been saved (Titus 3:5), but are not saved yet. We are awaiting the final salvation of our soul (1:9). It is of this salvation which the prophets spoke (1:10-12). Because we still await this salvation, we must be prepared for action, clear minded, and have our hope set on this future grace which will be demonstrated at the Last Judgement.

You may be tempted to slide into a complacent "Christianity." When we speak of salvation as a purely past experience we miss the fact that we await our salvation. We must remember that we not only have been saved, and we are being saved (1 Cor 15:1-2), but our final salvation awaits. Stay awake. Cling to the

Gospel. You need the God of grace who has brought you so far, and who will keep you till the end.

2. Your Prayers

First Peter 4:7 "The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers."

Peter knew what it was like to succumb to sleepiness when he was supposed to be praying (Matt 26:36-46). He knew what it was like to be taken aside by Jesus in order to be an encouragement during one of the darkest hours. He knew what it was like to awaken to the tears and anguish of his Savior. He knew what it was like to run, to lie, and to betray his best friend. Jesus warned that they should "Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation" (Matt 26:41a). Peter learned his lesson, and he wants you to as well.

Prayer is not easy. It is not natural. Don't get sleepy and neglect to pray. Here are a few ideas to encourage you in your prayer life during this busy period:

- 1) Don't neglect prayer meetings at church.
- 2) Find someone that you can pray with each week in the dorms, or from your church.
- 3) Pray with people when they mention a request. Don't just say, "I will pray for you." Say, "Can I pray for you right now?"
- 4) Make a habit to pray whenever you think about prayer.

5) Make it a habit to pray before and after you read your Bible.

6) Take it upon yourself to read one book on prayer this year (I would recommend "Praying Backwards" by Miller).

7) Pray.

3. Your Adversary

First Peter 5:8-9 "Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world."

If our own flesh and stupidity were not enough, we also have the Devil prowling around like a roaring lion. That should keep you up at night! Peter warns believers of this Adversary. He is seeking to devour you.

No one walks into the cage of a lion without staying alert, at least no one who expects to keep their life. Peter knew the feeling of being stalked and sifted by the Evil One (Luke 22:31). He had felt the desperation, the panic, the anger, and the bitter sorrow which accompany the attack of the enemy. Do you see the Devil's tracks around you? Have you seen times this last week in which your guard was down and you felt the attack?

These attacks come through temptation and trials. These early believers were experiencing persecution at the hands of other men, yet Peter attributed it to the

working of the Devil. The Devil sought to devour these followers of Jesus by tearing their faith from them, or if not, by tearing their life from them. Resist him! Stand firm in your faith! Do not forget that "after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen" (5:10-11).

You are in a world which has many distractions. There is no end to the constant flow of information and stimulation. There is no moment during your waking hours that your mind is not receiving messages. So, in the midst of these distractions, my encouragement to you is to stay alert and protect the face. Your life depends on it.

CHAPTER TWO

Eat the Hotdog

I have proven myself to be a connoisseur of any food cooked over a smoky fire. Our summer camping trips have not officially begun until I have burned the hair off my hands and eyebrows. Fortunately I can accomplish this in merely trying to start the fire, so our trip starts early each summer.

The entire trip we eat burnt sausages, burnt potatoes, burnt chili, burnt hamburgers, and burnt pancakes. The ash and smoke permeating each element of the meal is not only a flavor enhancer, but a bug deterrent. You can thank me later.



The crowning meal, not only for the camping trips, but most activities, is the Bar S Frank®. These proud tubes of mysterious goodness are the cheapest pseudo-meat one can find at the grocery store. A pack of eight will set one back \$.88, unless inflation has driven the price up recently. Most of the time we even skip the buns believing they are unnecessary and only a display of

affluence. A squirt of ketchup donated to the church fridge sometime in the 1980's will do just fine as the adornment.

So why the hotdog? Why is this odd mixture of unknown elements always lurking about the table during gatherings? Why so much pride in the mystery meat? There is one big lesson that can be taught with this little package - **"I can do all things through him who strengthens me" (Phil 4:13).**

You may be thinking that this is what you had to pray as you choked down the frank, muscling past the gag reflex. Although that may have encouraged you at the time, that was not the intended purpose. Rather Paul, in Phil 4:10-13, points us to his strength in difficult circumstances - even difficult food.

Phil 4:10-13 "I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity. Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me."

The church in Philippi had demonstrated concern for Paul. They had been anxious for Epaphroditus, Paul's comfort in jail (2:25-26). They had given to Paul during his journeys multiple times (4:14-20). They loved Paul

and wanted to do what they could to provide for him.

But Paul had a difficult life. He had been beaten with fists and whips, crushed beneath stones, shipwrecked, robbed, lost, and stalked (2 Cor 11:24-27). He had experienced the pain of starvation and the suffering of thirst. Paul knew difficulties, and no matter what the church in Philippi did to relieve that, there would always be struggles. Paul, however, had a source of strength. Whether in plenty or hunger, abundance or need, Paul knew how to be content. Neither safety, possession, nor food could supply what Paul needed.

Paul was teaching that he could be content no matter what the circumstances because Jesus Christ was his strength. It did not matter if they took his coat. It did not matter if they took his money. It did not matter if they took his health, his friends, his freedom, or his food. He could be content in whatever situation because they could never take away his Christ.

The reality is that you don't need your car to be content. You don't need your computer. You don't need your education. You don't need consistent meals. **To be content you need Christ.**

And when you have those things, you can still be content. Contentment is not only a struggle when you don't have something, but when you have more than enough. Paul writes of times of abundance and time of plenty. In those times Christ gave him the strength needed in order to be content.

Are you content right now? Are you sure?

Discontentment pokes its ugly head out of interesting places. Maybe it is the thought of "once I finish this paper life will be so much easier." Maybe it is the never ending checking of your apps to see if they are all updated. Maybe it is the longing you feel at night that if you only had a significant other your life would be more complete. It can come from anywhere from shoes to hair color.

Take a look at your life right now and ask, what am I afraid to lose? What is it, that if you lost it, it would demolish your life. What is it that if it were taken you would feel like you had lost part of your identity? Are you finding your strength there or in Christ? Is he the one to whom you turn in order to find ultimate satisfaction, ultimate contentment?

Maybe now would be a good time to head down to the grocery store and spend \$.88. Go ahead, splurge. Buy that package of pale, pressed meat and take a bite. No need to cook them, I'm sure they're "pre-cooked." Yes, yes you can be content!



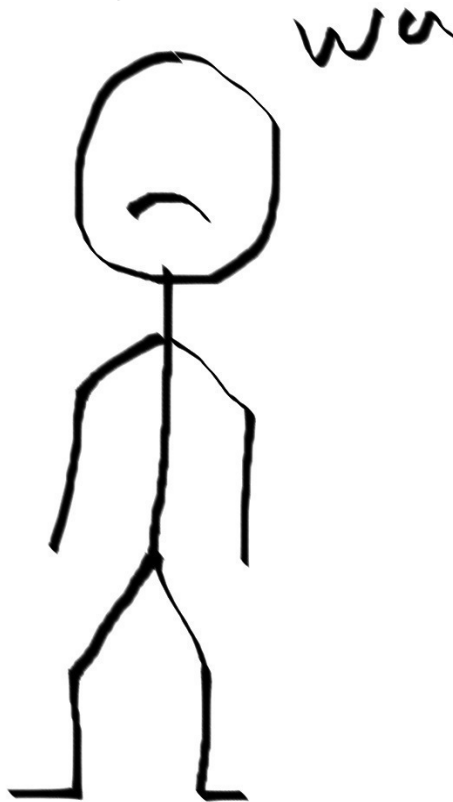
CHAPTER THREE

Don't complain

I think there is something innate in humanity, perhaps part of the sinful nature, that desires to give the person more of what they are complaining about. I say that I think it must be innate in all of humanity because I know I feel that urge and would like to include others with me. Perhaps you don't agree with me, but lying is innate in all of humanity too.

When someone complains about the food, I really want to give them another helping. When someone complains about a responsibility, I want to see them do it again. When someone complains about a privilege...well, I guess that is when I want to completely take it away.

Complaining is so easy.



Paul warns about this attitude in Phil 2:14-18. "Do all

things without grumbling or disputing, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain. Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me."

In verse 14 he gives the prohibition and in the following verses he gives the positive reasoning behind it. The prohibition is that **believers are to do all things without grumbling or disputing**. The grumbling was most likely a reference to the complaining that the Israelites did while wandering in the wilderness. I suppose if anyone had a reason to complain about something, it would have been those who wandered in the desert. Heat, thirst, sand everywhere, and a whole lot of stinky bodies all around you would make anyone a little grouchy. This complaining was directed against God, but funneled through Moses. They wanted water. They wanted meat. They wanted an easy life without fighting.

Paul also warned about disputing. Amongst the believers at Philippi there was questioning and arguing (2:1-4; 4:2-3). I know it is hard to believe, but one time in a church people actually argued with each other. Pagans from the first century, that is what we would call them. I

am glad that we don't have any of that in our advanced churches around here!

Have you ever heard or said this before – "Really? Do I have to?!" "Homework?! Why would the teacher give us homework when they know we have a big game?!" "I don't understand why whats-his-face can't do any more work, he gets paid the same amount I do, and I do twice as much!" "This class is so boring!" Or how about, "God, why are you doing this?! You are messing up my life." "I really don't think God cares at all, why else would he let me go through so much pain?" This is murmuring and disputing.

But why is it necessary that there be no grumbling and complaining, no murmuring and disputing? Everyone grumbles and argues a little. Complaining can't be that bad. Verses 15-18 explain why it is so important to live a life free from complaining. **The answer is so that we might shine.**

Instead of complaining, a believer's life should be blameless and harmless. Marks of a true believer include sincerity, purity, and innocent behavior. Believers are to live so that those outside of Christ could not rightfully point an accusing finger at them.

We are to live externally as we are internally, children of God without blemish. In this manner, we shine as lights, or like stars. We do so by holding fast to the word that brings life. It is a picture of someone holding out a light so that the path can be seen. The

person holds this light into the darkness firmly, knowing that if their grasp fails, darkness will follow.

So, is your life marked by complaining? Is the food never good enough? Is everyone annoying today? Is the work of others always subpar? Or, is your life marked by shining?



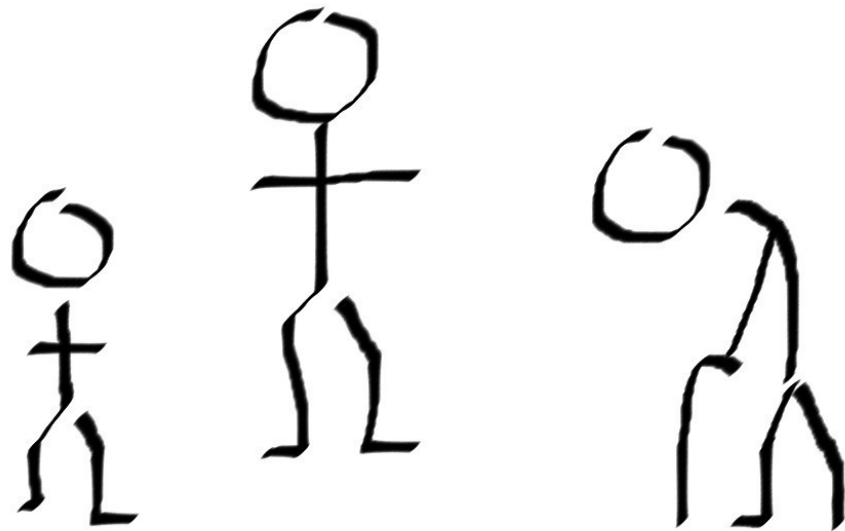
CHAPTER FOUR

Ask another generation

How many people would call you a friend who are either ten years older or ten years younger than you? Can you think of any? Are you wondering why that is even a question?

C. S. Lewis, speaking of friendship, said "few value it because few experience it" (Four Loves, kindle 686). Real friendship with others who are outside our age group are even fewer than real friendships within our age group.

Paul wrote to Titus concerning the necessity of cross generational interaction. That is a fancy way of saying, "Old people and young people need each other." This could be called a "mentoring relationship." Mentorship is the investment of one person's life in the life of another. A mentor lives as a teacher, an example, a counselor, and a friend.



In Titus 2:1-8, Paul told Titus "But as for you, teach what accords with sound doctrine. Older men are to be sober-minded, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, in

love, and in steadfastness. Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled. Likewise, urge the younger men to be self-controlled. Show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works, and in your teaching show integrity, dignity, and sound speech that cannot be condemned, so that an opponent may be put to shame, having nothing evil to say about us."

The older women were to train the younger women. Titus and the older men were to model godliness, urge the young men to live rightly, and teach sound doctrine. The younger generations needed the older because they had plenty of learning and growing to do. And the older generations needed the younger so they could carry out God's desired purposes for them. **The modeling, teaching, and encouraging not only changes the younger generation who receives them, but it changes the older generation who gives them.**

Here is an example. Who taught you English grammar? Someone, a long time ago, in a far away land, told you that you should not say, "We is..." but "We are..." Someone tried to explain to needlessly split an infinitive should be at all costs avoided, why participles should never be left dangling, and what's down, or up,

with prepositions. You needed someone to tell you the rules, model the speech, and correct you when you were wrong. That has helped you, no matter what your English professor wrote on your last paper.

Not only did you need that teacher, but in a sense they needed you. Through explaining it to you, modeling it before you, and answering questions when you were wrong, it helped them to understand, appreciate, and master the subject even more. Their effort changed you and them.

So it is with our faith. You need a mentor. You need someone to live, teach, and confront you in a spirit of brotherly love. You need the older generation to invest in your life, or you will have little to give.

That is why it is such a gift of grace to have older believers enter into your life. Jesus Christ has given you these saints so that you might consider their testimony and receive strength to run your race.

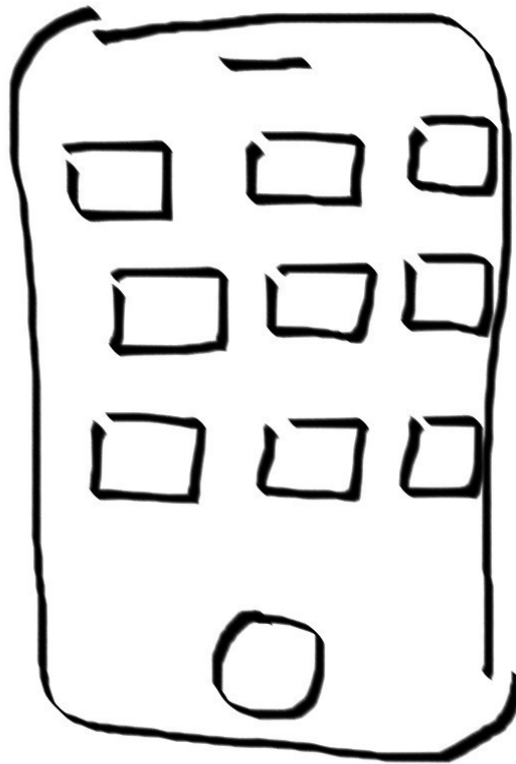
So go out and ask a question of someone who is outside your generation. Pin them down. Don't let them flee. Wrestle them into buying you lunch and telling you what they know. Then thank them for their friendship.



CHAPTER FIVE

Don't bring your cell phones

Where is your phone? (insert hyperventilation here)
Quick, check and make sure you haven't missed any calls, texts, tweets, status updates, or checkpoints! Why do we do that? Why are we so gripped by our cell phones?



It is easier to "connect" with people digitally than physically. My online persona can be so much better than my "right here, right now" persona. Why is that? Why can I chat with someone online that I couldn't carry on a conversation with in real life? Here are some possible reasons:

1. I can pad my presence - profile picture. Apart from those annoying mirror pictures (which some people still think are flattering, don't ask me why), who posts pictures of themselves which show their genuine flaws?

We would rather have people see us for who we think we are, not who we really are.

2. I can be vague - IDK, lol, rofl. Why is it that nearly any message can be responded to with one of the aforementioned abbreviations? We are vague. We don't commit with our words, come up with an answer, or bother to give an honest reply. And besides, have you ever seen someone ROFL? I have, once. And believe me, it was not flattering at all (although it was quite humorous).

3. I can be unattached - #fail. Someone actually got hurt there, or made a fool of themselves. Either way, someone suffered. But online, somehow people don't really matter.

4. I can over-exaggerate - #epic. The only thing "epic" about most uses of "epic" today is the "epic" exaggeration. It honestly pains me to see "epic" so many times in that last sentence.

5. I can be shallow - becoming friends means hitting a "+" button. Breaking a friendship is hitting the "unfriend" button.

6. I can be liked - please like that comment. Nothing makes us feel appreciated like a reassuring "like" on a funny comment. How easily we are pleased.

7. I can be creepy - do you really need to look through that album? Honestly.

8. I can be nerdy - "You are encouraged to poke people - poking is what teenage boys do who do not

know how to talk to girls. The medium is the message" (Tim Chester, Facebook).

9. I don't have to be involved - Maintaining friendships is equivalent to doing nothing. That is easy enough.

10. I don't have to confront - just saying.

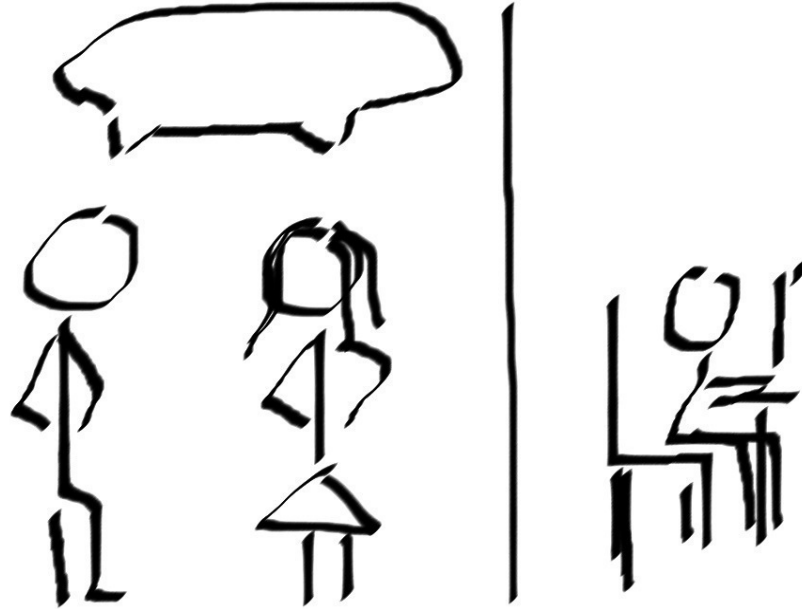
Paul wrote to the churches because he loved them. He used the medium of communication available to him to glorify God and love people. But in his heart he wanted to be with them.

Philippians 1:3-8 "I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus."

So look around at the dinner table, in the lounge, on the sidewalk, in the hallway. Is there someone that you can be with in this moment? Is there someone that could hear a word of encouragement? Could you "like" what they are saying right now? Could you "retweet" a phrase of encouragement you heard this morning to them to

point them to Christ in this moment? Could you "direct message" them by maintaining eye contact and smiling? Could you "tag" some else sitting nearby and include them in your conversation?

Never mind about the poking.



CHAPTER SIX

Pack in a small backpack

Trips have a way of revealing to us what is most important to us. All our lives we labor at arranging comforts around us. We start small in the early years by gathering immediate treasures. A child will hoard a host of toys around himself and refuse to share because they are "his!"

Gradually as we grow we begin to work slowly outwards. In our teen years we start to claim friends as our own, costly items for our pleasure, and money to be able to use. In later years of life we focus on vehicles, a home, and hobbies. In retirement we gather securities like investments, trinkets, and luxuries. We are constantly grasping and gathering.

But trips throw a wrench into all that. Now you are forced to fit all of those "essentials" into a convenient carry-on piece of luggage. Thankfully, most trips are not long enough for us to go into complete withdrawal.

Airline restrictions and limited space on church vans actually point us to a bigger reality. They help us to see something that is often shielded from our eyes by our stuff. It is what God had Abram do in Gen 12. "Now the Lord said to Abram, 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed'."

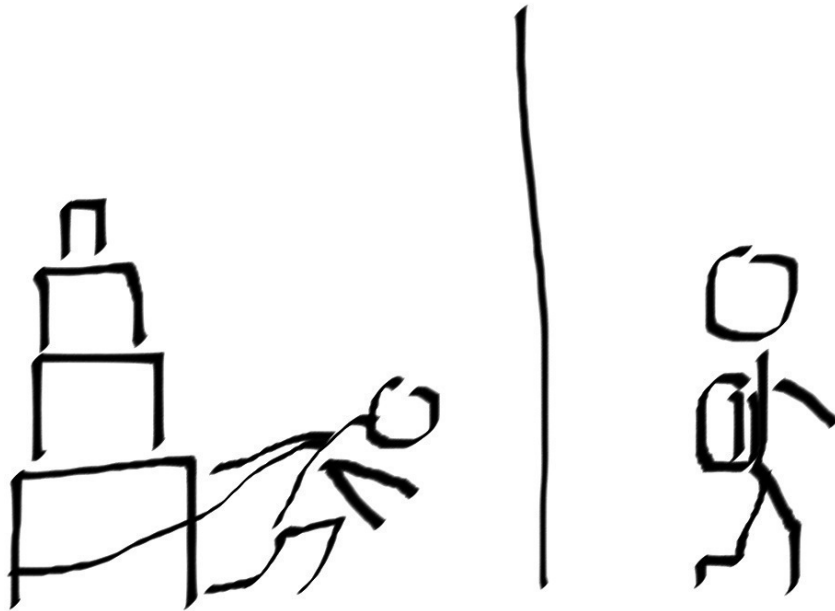
God told Abram to pack up his bags and leave. Why? **So Abram could encounter a better home, the greatest Treasure, the True God. It wasn't just a plot of ground God wanted to give him, it was a Himself.**

Hebrews 11 reminds us that God's call to move to another land was a shadow of what Abraham would do the rest of his life - search for a better city. Heb 11:8-10 states "By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God."

Abram had to learn how to pack light. His destination demanded hands free from the weights of earthly comfort, temporal security, and superficial relationships. He was pulled to search for a greater city, a true home. His transient life would not end until he reached the city that God had designed and built. It was coming and it was worth the light suitcase.

Take a look around you. What is providing you with a false sense of security and comfort? Is it that device, that relationship, that account? Those can be blessings, but they also can be weights. Be careful with what you fill your hands. Travel light. Heb 13:14 "For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to

come."



CHAPTER SEVEN

Call me Pastor Seth

Yes, I know. Sometimes it is hard to remember that I actually am a pastor. After all, I did teach you things like waterspoons, Cone Cross, and that there was a leprechaun living in our freezer. Pastors don't normally teach you those important things. It also probably doesn't help when you don't hear other adults using the title "Pastor." So why does it matter? Here are a few reasons from Hebrews 13 why I insisted that you call me "Pastor":

1. I want you to recognize that I am in a position of leadership, speaking God's word to you. Heb 13:7a "Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God." That is not a task that a pastor can take lightly. We have been placed in a position to tell you what God is telling you in His word. In effect, I am carrying the words of God to you and saying, "Here is what God is saying about you." That is a big responsibility. When someone in that position does not take it seriously, there is a serious problem.

2. I want you to recognize that a qualified leader in the church is a worthwhile example to imitate. Heb 13:7b "Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith." It is a pastor's responsibility to not only speak truthfully, but live obediently. The title, "pastor," sets someone apart. He is now going to be watched. If his life is marked by faithfully following Christ, then he is worth following.

3. I want you to recognize there there is an

authority inherent in the position of pastor. Heb 13:17a "Obey your leaders and submit to them." Don't ignore his warnings, or "spam" his emails. He has been given a place of authority in your life from God. The pastor is not the ultimate authority, but as he is faithful to God, he is to be heard and followed.

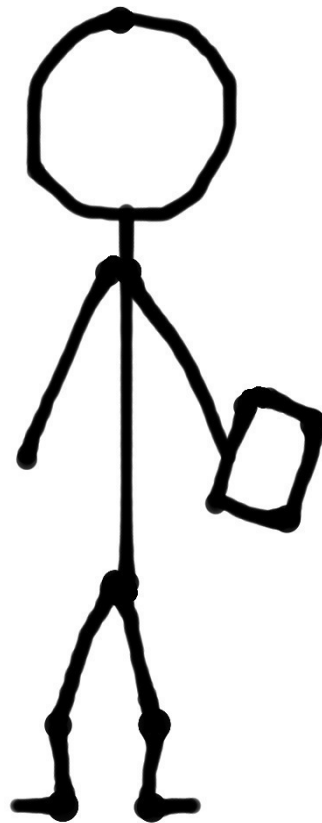
4. I don't want you or I to forget that I have to give an account for you. Heb 13:17 "Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you." When you call me "Pastor" both of us remember that there is a responsibility. God has placed you in my care, and therefore we both are accountable.

5. I want you to remember that your pastors are gifts from Jesus to you (Eph 4:11), representing the Great Shepherd of the sheep (Heb 13:20 cf 1 Pet 5:1-5). A pastor is meant to be a pointer to Jesus Christ, that is the reason why Jesus gave pastors.

6. I want you to remember that we have a deeper bond than friendship, we are one in Christ (Heb 13:24). Heb 13:24 "Greet all your leaders and all the saints. Those who come from Italy send you greetings."

These reasons are not just for our relationship. I will not be the only pastor that will give an account for you. Perhaps right now you are sitting under the teaching of another overseer. Look into their life. Follow them as

they faithfully teach God's Word to you. Mimic their lives as they follow Christ. Joyfully give thanks to God for their work in your life. Honor them as they seek to build you up in the faith. Pray for them as they experience the attack of the Enemy. Forgive them as they confess their sin. Love them as they share in the adoption of Jesus Christ. Find shepherds who follow the Good Shepherd, and call them "Pastor."



P.S.

"Elder Seth" works fine as well.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Read that verse out loud

Yes, it is true. I do derive some enjoyment from listening to people read through verses with strange names of people and places. Sometimes it is all I can do not to have an extended reading in the book of Numbers. Why do we read all these verses out loud when there are so many potential embarrassments waiting around every syllable?

Will my voice crack?

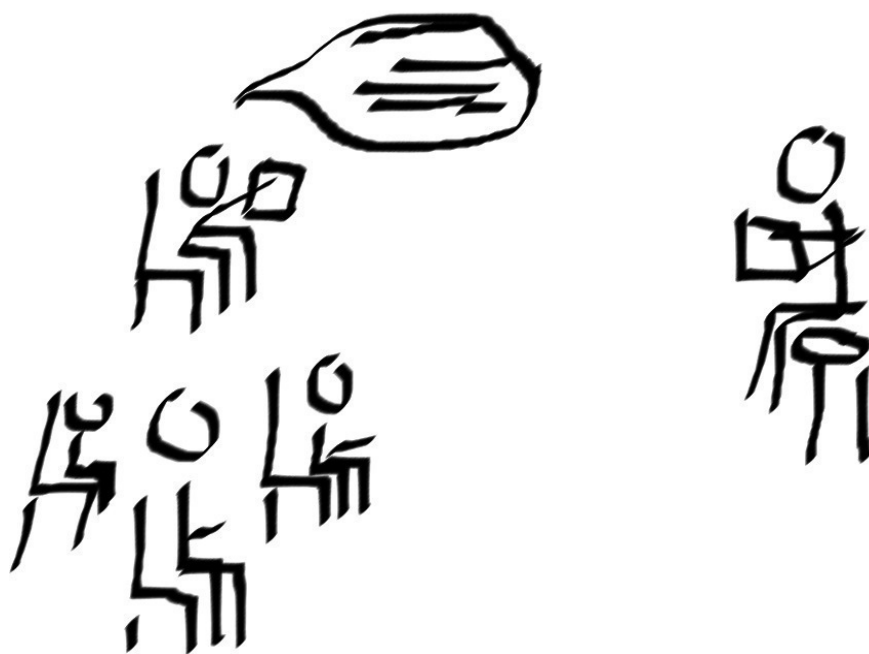
Will I miss a line?

Will I read the wrong verse?

Will I read too much?

Will my verse contain some awkward word or phrase I have been taught never to say in church?

Reading Scripture out loud is important. Paul wrote to Timothy concerning the ministry and included one phrase which has caused me to wonder. He wrote, "Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching" (1 Tim. 4:13). I understand the exhortation and the teaching. It is essential for God's people to hear what God has to say and how it applies to their life. Pastors spend large amounts of time dedicated to the study of ancient languages in order to better understand a passage. They labor over passages, phrases, even words, in order to properly convey God's truth to people. But reading in public? Are we not supposed to read Scripture every day, in our quiet place, in our minds, not out loud lest someone hear us and call us a Pharisee?



I believe there are a variety of reasons why Paul commanded Timothy to read Scripture out loud, and I believe these same reasons apply to us today.

1. Reading Scripture out loud reaffirms the fact that these words are important because they are God's words. We do not gather to read the latest magazine, blog post, or Amish romance novel. We gather to hear the Word of God, and what better way to hear it than actually have someone read it out loud for us to hear? These words have been given to reveal to humanity a God who is beyond explanation. They are important words. They are essential words. They are words which send the roots of one's life deep into the rock in order to drink deeply of the underground streams. They allow one to withstand drought without dying, to give fruit when the sky gives no rain.

2. Reading Scripture out loud forces us to

actually think about every word which we are reading. Sure, you can read through something out loud without actually thinking about it. But chances are that you are a little more attentive when you are told to read it out loud. Psalm 119 is dedicated completely to reveling in the words of God.

3. Reading Scripture out loud allows others who cannot read to hear what God has spoken. We read out loud so those who have no physical sight can hear the same God who spoke light into darkness. They may never have seen a printed word, but they can hear Him nonetheless. Not only those who cannot see, but those who cannot read. You do not know who in your hearing cannot read the words you have just read, whether they are young or old.

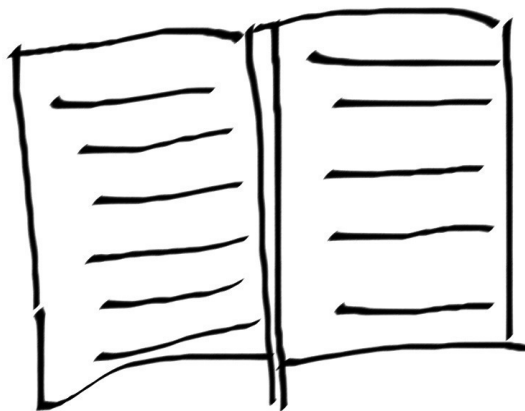
4. Reading Scripture out loud forces those who refuse to read God's Word for themselves to hear what God has spoken. Some will hear who for reasons of their hard heart, or perhaps broken heart, will not read. Those in that state are the ones who need to hear the most. God's words are like a hammer, breaking the heart of stone (Jer 23:29). They are also like honey to those who are weak (Ps 119:103).

5. Reading Scripture out loud is a form of worshipping the True God whose Word is truth. God is exalted when God is treasured. Valuing His words is valuing Him. If His Word is truth, and God delights in truth, then reading Scripture publicly delights Him. How

many times have you come across the phrase in Scripture, "You have said..." Those within the pages of Scripture and those physically writing the pages of Scripture regularly prayed God's Words back to Him. Why? Because it is truth, and God delights in hearing His truth.

Psalm 19:7-11 says, "The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb. Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward."

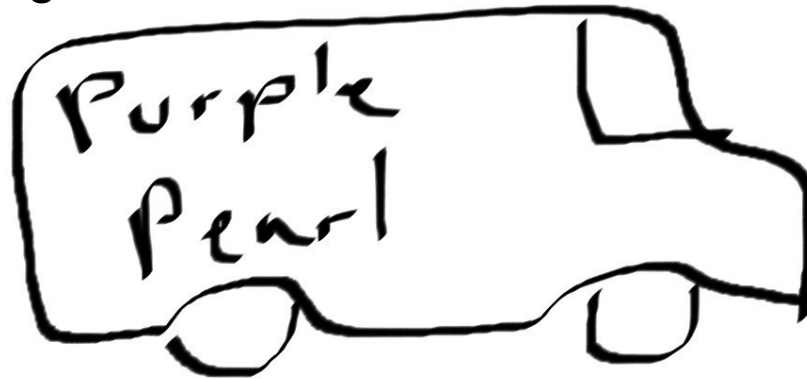
Read that again, this time out loud.



CHAPTER NINE

Put your seat belts on

Some things are not cool. Pocket protectors are not cool. An uncovered sneeze is not cool. Black dress socks and cargo shorts are not cool - together. Wearing a seat belt in the big purple van may not be cool either, although getting a ride in it sure is!



Pretty much every time we got in the van, the words "Everyone, put your seatbelt on" would proceed from my lips. There are several reasons for this, but here are just a few.

- 1. You wear your seatbelt to be safe.**
- 2. You wear your seatbelt so you don't end up getting shoved under the seat by an upperclassman.**
- 3. You wear your seatbelt to obey the law.**

The first one is pretty self explanatory if you have ever seen a rollover accident. The second one is something I learned from personal experience - the unbuckled Jr. Higher is a prime candidate to occupy the wasted space below the bench seat, on top of the spare tire. "Waste not - want not" was the motto of the larger guys who wanted to stretch out.

The final one is actually sometimes the hardest to

appreciate. Government can be annoying, it can be detrimental, it can be damaging, it can be outrightly antagonistic to God. **However, when not conflicting with God's laws, it must be obeyed.**

Paul taught this, and lived this. In Rom 13:1-7, we can hear Paul's teaching. "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed."

Those are difficult words to swallow. I am sure they were difficult words to live for Paul, understanding that he lived under the reigns of men such as Tiberius (ad

14-37), Caligula (ad 37-41), Claudius (ad 41-54), and Nero (ad 54-68). When Paul wrote these words, Nero was reigning. You most likely have heard stories about Nero. He murdered his mother in ad 59, and then his wife in ad 62. Rumor has it that he started Rome on fire and then blamed it on the Christians. There are numerous tales about the debauchery of this man. But Paul still taught that all men, even those in Rome (he was writing to those living there), should be subject to the governing authorities.

Not only did Paul teach this, but he lived it. An interesting passage to consider is Acts 27 which records the sea voyage of Paul to Rome, after appealing to Caesar (Nero). A storm came up and battered them for days, causing them to lose hope, throw everything overboard, and stop eating. In these moments, Paul received a vision from God and encouraged those on the ship. Eventually the ship was wrecked, and everyone floated to land. At various times on this journey, Paul could have attempted escape. He could have led an insurrection of the prisoners. He could have disappeared at sea. But he didn't. Why?

I think the answer is found in Paul's encouragement of the men on the ship. He tells them, "Men, you should have listened to me and not have set sail from Crete and incurred this injury and loss. Yet now I urge you to take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. For this very night there stood before me an

angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I worship, and he said, 'Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar. And behold, God has granted you all those who sail with you.' So take heart, men, for I have faith in God that it will be exactly as I have been told. But we must run aground on some island" (Acts 27:21-26).

Who gave Paul this message to give to the men? It was from "an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I worship." Paul here lays it out straight. "I may be a prisoner, but I do not belong to you. You may be able to order me around, but I worship and obey God." Paul was able to obey the governing authorities because he knew to whom he ultimately answered, and to whom each of those authorities ultimately answered, God. "For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God" (Rom 13:1). God is the reason we can obey, and ought to obey, all governing authorities. Even when they are against Him, they are accountable to him.

This is something that touches your life today. As soon as you step into your car, file taxes, or drive down the interstate, you make a choice. This passage affects not only where the federal and local government is concerned, but also any institution or organization beneath which you have placed yourself. If you are in a college, you need to obey the rules you have agreed to obey. If you are working at a corporation, you need to

wear what they say you are to wear. Why? Because your obedience to them is a demonstration of your obedience to God.

So, where do your ultimate loyalties lie? To whom do you belong? Obey him - and those to whom he has given authority.



CHAPTER TEN

Bring your Bible and Pen, the rest I don't care

Why do we meet together as a body of believers?
Upon what should we focus as we attend conferences?
What is the crucial activity on a Wednesday night gathering? If this was missing, how would a summer camp be a flop?

Let's list some possible answers for the questions above.

1. Fellowship - this is a fancy, perhaps cryptic, way of saying "spending time with people." That is not all that is involved, but it is a major part.

2. Encouragement - we live in a world that does not know our King, and therefore does not know us. It is necessary to meet with others who do know Him so we can be strengthened.

3. Music - God has given humans an incredible ability to appreciate and create music. When it is used appropriately it can uplift, convict, teach, and express.

4. Lesson - learning life truths and practical application is incredibly important, especially when they are directly taken from God's Word.

All of these are very important aspects of gatherings, conferences, and camps. But I would argue that there is something that is more specific than each of these. Something foundational, upon which all the rest are built. It is God's Word itself.

Yes, I know, we already listed "Lesson" as one of the possible answers, and now I have gone and said that it isn't the right answer. Foul! Red card! Here is why I

think God's Word itself is different than just a Lesson.

A lesson can or cannot be based on God's Word. Just because a verse is read at the beginning does not mean that the lesson itself is taken from God's Word. In the same way, you may not study out a complete passage, but that does not mean the lesson is not taken from God's Word.

If you don't put a priority of reading, studying, meditating, and memorizing God's Word, you don't think knowing God is important. God has revealed himself principally in three ways. He has revealed himself through creation (Ps 19) by which we know of His eternal power and divine nature (Rom 1:20). He has revealed himself through His Son, Jesus Christ, who is the exact representation of His image (Heb 1:1-4) and by whom we have seen God (John 14:9). And finally through His Word (2 Tim 3:14-17).

The first of these, creation, is helpful but limited. It leaves us with no excuse, but cannot lead us to Christ. The second, Jesus Christ, is the most complete, however because Jesus is not physically present on earth, we cannot appreciate this revelation until we see him (1 John 3:2). The third, God's Word, is our way of properly interpreting what we see in creation, and coming to "see" Jesus Christ. That is why God's Word is the most crucial aspect of any gathering, any conference.

So how does this look?

1. First of all, you need to have God's Word. By placing it on the top of the packing list, whether it is merely to drive into church, take a weekend trip to a conference, or meet someone for a Bible study, you are recognizing its place of importance. What does it say about your priorities if you are constantly forgetting your Bible at home, or at the church building?

2. Second, you need to read God's Word. If you don't need to read Scripture at a gathering of God's people such as a service, conference, or Bible study, you may want to ask why you are there. This does not mean that someone must read a verse before every activity, but a gathering with the intended purpose of teaching God's Word must place the Scripture before the people.

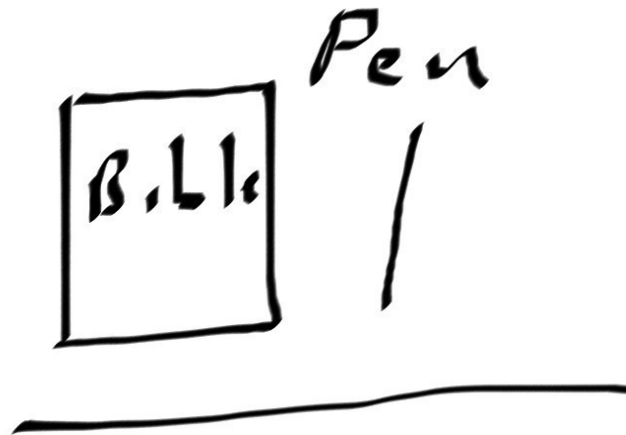
3. Third, you need to understand God's Word. Christ has given to the Church gifts for her maturation. These gifts are people. They are apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds and teachers. These individuals were given in order to reveal (apostles and prophets), preach and teach (evangelists, shepherds and teachers) God's Word. As gifts from Jesus Christ, their primary activity is to help you to hear and understand what God has said about Himself and His purposes.

4. Fourth, you need to apply God's Word. Merely hearing God's revelation is not sufficient. All Scripture has an intended purpose and profit, and that is to complete the man of God and equip him for every good

work (2 Tim 3:17). Not moving from "this is what it means" to "so this is what you should do" only makes more intelligent rebels.

5. Fifth, you need to live God's Word. Having Scripture present, read, explained, and applied all lead one to the point of decision. Will you now live it? James made it clear, "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves" (Jas 1:22). The one who consistently has God's Word laid out before him and consistently rejects its command over his everyday life is only more damned.

So why is a Bible and pen always at the top of the packing list? You tell me.



CHAPTER ELEVEN

I'm praying for you

Let's cut to the chase. **We will only pray about that which we think God has control over and we do not.** Period. We will not pray, truthfully pray, about something which we think we can handle. When was the last time you prayed about brushing your teeth? Point proven.

Perhaps that isn't the most convicting example. I doubt you have ever had a breakdown while brushing your teeth. The scene would probably be rather pitiful, you curled up on the bathroom floor, foam covering your lips, soft sobs come from your throat as you mumble, through bubbles, "I can't go on, I just can't go on." All this while your toothbrush casually rests in the corner, watching with indifference as only a toothbrush can. Yes, that is pretty pathetic.

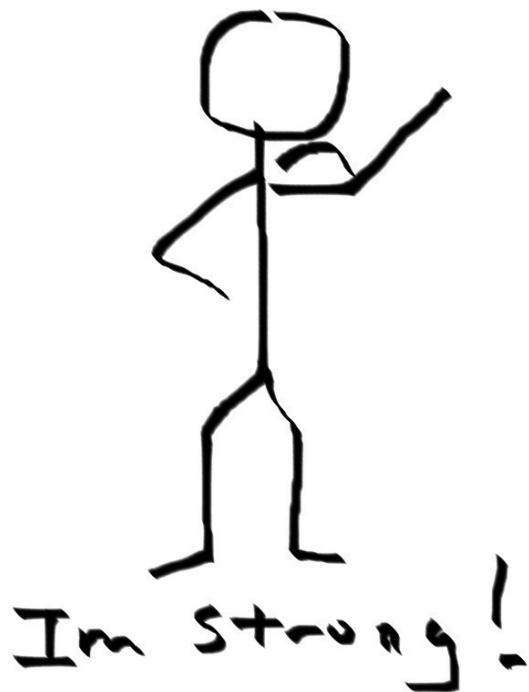


Let's move through a prayer checklist. Do we normally pray while we drive, about our driving? Do we pray for our conversations with our friends, or our family, or with a stranger we meet along the way? Do we pray for strength for the day, wisdom in choices of tasks, peace during work? Do we pray for relief from temptation? Do we pray for the provision of today's food?

Maybe that was an overload. How about we start with what we actually do pray for. Pray before meals.

Check. Pray before a big test that I didn't get to study sufficiently for. Check. Pray that someone will send me a lot of money to pay my bill. Big Check (pun intended).

The problem with us and prayer is that we just don't need to pray that often. We have most things under control. Why bother God with something that we can handle. We offer up an "I got this" instead of an "I need you." Put that way, prayerlessness sounds a lot more egotistical, and a lot less "here's a spiritual 'weakness' in my life." **No, it really isn't weakness that we are battling, it is psuedo-strength.**



I think that is why Paul challenged the early believers with this punchy command, "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thess 5:17). Perhaps he needed to tell them this because they were too weak, not nearly as developed as we are. Sure. That is also probably why he wrote at the beginning of the letter these words, "We

give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything. For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come" (1 Thess 1:2-10).

They sounded pretty infantile, didn't they? Paul's mention of their work of faith, labor of love, steadfastness of hope in Jesus. The Gospel came to them and there was the power of the Holy Spirit and they were brimming with conviction. Their hearts were so full that they took much affliction, and swallowed it with joy. Their testimony was so brilliant that the story of these

Christians flashed across cities, being retold from one region to the next. Yes, sounds like they are quite underdeveloped in their abilities. We are much farther along. Or maybe not.

Have you ever stopped to wonder whether we don't see much fruit because we are laboring with insufficient strength. Not in the sense that we aren't working hard enough, because we can work plenty hard, but that all of our strength combined is still insufficient. We need God to work.

Maybe we should understand Paul's command here a little more concretely and a little less metaphorically. What if we actually did keep a running conversation with our Heavenly Father throughout the day. What if our thoughts never strayed more than one second away from a prayer to him? What if our lives were characterized by a spirit of prayer, a conscious dependence upon Him even in the areas where we think "we've got this"? As one popular illustration put it, "I make only one call to God each day, I just never hang up until I fall asleep."

Here is the encouragement. I can't, but God can. I can't convert my unbelieving sibling, but God can. I can't see the future to determine the best option, but God can. I can't find words to encourage this hurting friend, but God can. I can't figure out how God will pull me through this, but God can. I can't have enough strength to continue on, but God can. I can't produce peace in the

midst of this stormy season of my life, but God can. I can't keep myself in the faith until the final judgment day, but God can. I can't, but God can.

Summarizing Paul's instruction to the Philippians in Phil 4:6-7, Don't worry about anything. Pray about everything. God will give you peace.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Go to Castle Ridge

Why is it so hard to love someone when you know they won't love you back? Why is it hard to smile at someone when you know they won't smile back? Why is it so hard to give a gift when you know you won't get one back?



I would suggest that it is because in these situations we aren't actually "giving" anything. We are not giving love. We are not giving a smile. We are not giving a gift. We are exchanging something. **You give when you don't expect something in return. You exchange when you do.** You give when you don't expect a birthday present when your day rolls around. You give when you don't expect them to help you with your tasks later on. You give when you don't expect good conversation, genuine concern, or financial remuneration to return to you.

Jesus said, "But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just" (Luke 14:13-14).

The reason which Jesus gives for giving, truly giving, is because God rewards that. There will be no earthly repayment, but God himself will repay. You may be

asking, "If true giving involves not expecting a reward, then how can I truly be giving if I expect an eternal reward?" That is a good question. Here is how I see it.

Jesus commanded us to give without expectation of return. When we do that we are actually giving to him. He said in Matt 25:34-40 "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.' Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me'."

So when you reach down to help up the poor, you are actually reaching up and giving to Jesus. When you sit down and spend time with a dying woman, you are really spending time with Jesus. When you give a meal, or a pair of shoes, or training for someone who needs a job, you are giving those to Jesus.

It is an incredible thought to think that Jesus Christ could ever receive anything! It is he who holds the

universe together by His power (Col 1), it is he who is the Beginning and the End (Rev 1), it is he who will judge all things (Acts 10:34-43)! Yet he has associated himself with poor, the widowed, the orphaned, the destitute. When you give to those who cannot, or will not, repay, you give to Jesus.

But notice what reward is offered to those who give. Jesus says, "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.'" Those who give will receive the kingdom. They will enter in and be intricately part of Jesus Christ's physical reign over all things. Though "kingdom" is not the same as "eternal life," it includes it. Those who enter into the Kingdom of Jesus have been born again (John 3). It is they who have life, eternal life. You see, what Jesus is offering is not a mere one for one. You give a cup of cold water, and at the last judgement he will give you back a cup of cold water. No, what he is offering is entrance and participation into His Kingdom!

Now, let's look at one more passage which I think sheds some light on giving. James 1:26-27, "If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless. Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world."

Here James gives an overview of two types of

religion - worthless and pure. Worthless religion is characterized by those who don't even watch what they say. They may have mere external actions, but their heart, from which comes forth their true person (Matt 15:18), is worthless. On the other hand, pure religion is marked by demonstrable deeds for those who can't repay, the orphans and widows.

What James is pointing out is that worthless religion is a hollow shell, whereas pure religion is marked by deeds which cannot be repaid on this earth. Pure religion is living in light of eternity. It is giving now with a view to the last day. It is being "heavenly minded." Therefore we could say that giving to others is living out the reality of your faith. Exchanging invitations, gifts, time, or help with others is not giving. Giving to others as though it were Jesus, with no expectation of return, is what Jesus will reward.

So, here is how it shakes out for you. What are you doing right now that could be called "true giving?" Are you investing in a child's life? Are you visiting the sick and elderly? Are you giving up comforts to help others who will never know what you did? How about giving up that parking space, spot in line, or last piece of dessert? Sure those last few are minor, but why can't you? If you won't do it in the simple ways, will you do it in the complex ways?

Go love someone who won't love you back. Jesus deserves it.

Go to Castle Ridge



CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Girls Can Go First

Teenage guys are not known for petiteness. Very little about the average teenage guy could be considered "petite." One area where that is definitely not the case is at meal time. The average teenage guy is nearly always at some point of a growth spurt. Either he is just beginning one, in the middle, or just finishing one. During the middle of one of those spurts, you cannot feed him enough. The only time they close their mouths is in order to swallow which some have been known to try to work around.

At this point, they are not merely consuming food, they are consumed with the thought of food. When food is present there is no question about eating or not. (Unless, that is, what is being served is purported to be "sophisticated" or for "finer tastes." This in itself is a questionable occurrence since "sophisticated" foods are never set out when a group of teenage boys is around. You leave out a package of potato chips, not anything sophisticated.)

For this reason, girls get to go first through the line...every time. Watching the guys' sad little faces as others walk through the line before them, filling up their plates with a variety of edible substances is similar to watching a dog staring out a car window at a park. They are so close, but yet so far. If it were not so humorous, it may bring a tear to your eye.



So why would anyone make the very ones who desire the food so badly wait until the end to get theirs? Several reasons come to mind.

1. Letting the girls go first reminds me that I consume food, but I am not consumed by food. This may not sound like a big deal, but think about how our culture is driven by food. Name as many fast food restaurant chains in your city as you can. These are places for people who need food, now! Think about how many advertisements you have seen recently which relate to dieting. These are all for those who thought they needed food now, but must get rid of all the evidence, now! Think about how many conversations you have overheard or partaken in recently which at some point touched on food. It is a part of our life, but it is not our life.

2. Letting the girls go first reminds me that I can give up my desires for the desires of others. I am not the center of the universe. No, I do not mean that I, as in the writer, am not the center of the universe. You would probably agree with that because if I, as the writer, were

the center of the universe, then you would not be. Case in point. You are not the center of the universe. There are others that live in the same galaxy, in the same solar system, on the same little orb, in the same country, in the same state, in the same city, and probably under the same roof, which you must think about before yourself. Waiting for others to serve themselves can push that little point home.

3. Letting the girls go first helps me provide for others by limiting myself. "Self control," those are two very non-postmodern words. We would rather hear, "Be yourself!" "Follow your dreams." "Listen to your heart." "Do what you feel is best." "Look out for yourself." "Love yourself." "Build your self esteem." I can tell you what that translates to every time a teen guy sees a table of delectable edibles - "Feed me. Now!" I need to learn to love others as myself, and I can start by waiting a few minutes, and possibly missing out on thirds later on in the evening.

4. Letting the girls go first helps me to begin to think about loving another individual as Christ loves the Church. In Eph 5, a husband is called to love his wife as Christ loved the Church. These guys are probably not married, but merely because they are not now, does not mean they won't be later. And if they never are, they are still called to love their neighbor as their own self. Putting others above yourself, even in small ways, helps us to form a mindset of humility and

service. It is this mindset which Jesus perfectly demonstrated. He gave himself up for the Church in order to sanctify her. His goal was to cleanse and wash her so one day she may be presented in splendor. The Bride for which Christ laid down His life was not presentable. She was not clean. She was not holy. The Bride for which Christ died is comprised of sinners like you and me, rebels against God. Yet he laid down His life. That is how we are to love others.

Can you think of anyone who has done this in your life? How have others put you before themselves? Is there someone who you could point to that consistently put your wellbeing before their own? How did they do it?

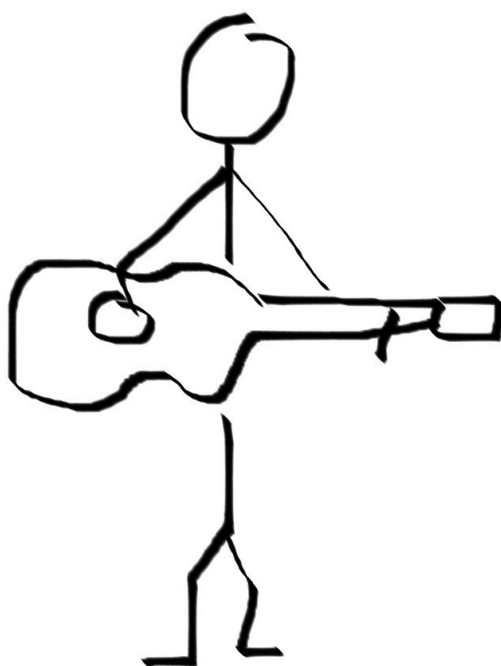
Now, how about you? How have you been putting others before yourself? Are there some small ways in which you consistently give up your place and serve others? Have you identified ways in which you can lay down your life a little at a time? Can you think of any big ways you could do this now? Is there an extravagant giving of yourself that you could do in order to love another like Christ loves His Bride?

Look to Jesus and see how it is done.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Let's sing that first verse again, this time on tune

Some people can lead music. Some can't. I proudly take my position in the second category. The danger that I face while leading music is that people mistake my efforts as a comedy routine. The amount of times I have had to stop a song because we were on the wrong tune, wrong tempo, or wrong page, is astounding. If I can make it through a song without anyone booing or throwing vegetables, I count it a success.



Music is an important aspect of humanity and therefore an important part of the gathered church. It is a gift given by God as His image bearers. He has given us the ability to appreciate and create music. That gift should not be taken lightly. It should be enough that one of the sixty-six books in the Bible is completely dedicated to songs. The Psalms demonstrate that appropriate music glorifies God, conveys truth, evokes emotion, and should be important to the people of God.

When it comes to congregational music there are two important principles to keep in mind:

1. It is not about the music.

A. We are prone to choose a church based on our music preferences.

How many people do you know who, when describing their church make this the first stop in the "Come to my church" parade? "You should visit us, we have great music!"

In our pathetic consumeristic culture, perhaps you have been "church shopping." As you were looking for a church, what was the tipping point for why you are at where you are? What elements played the biggest role? I would guess that music was one of your top considerations.

B. We are prone to evaluate a service based on the music presentation.

How many times have you walked out of church and all you could remember was how poorly the music portion of the service was executed, or maybe they did a great job of executing the music - making the death quick and painless.

Isn't it easy to judge the gathering of the body by what songs we sang? Was it a good service or bad service? Let's not consider the Gospel focus of the time, the truths revealed in the sermon, the edification that took place while speaking with others, the corporate prayer that we all participated in. No, let's judge by the

music.

C. We are prone to use music for our glory, not God's.

I am not sure which has impacted which. Did the producers of American Idol get their idea from special music, or have we tailored our special music after American Idol? Either way, there are many similarities.

D. We are prone to focus on ourselves, not others in the realm of music

We don't sing - I don't like the song, so I won't sing. I don't like to sing, so I won't sing. I would rather check email, make a joke to someone sitting next to me, or read the bulletin, so I won't sing.

We dominate the singing - I will now sing so you may all appreciate my abilities.

We force a style - Our church has to adopt this style of music! At the cost of alienating a portion of the flock we will force a music style on a congregation. We can do this without too many noticing by dividing the services between "traditional" and "contemporary." Who came up with that idea? Essentially we are dividing our church by age. "Let's encourage all the older generations to go to church early so they can sing the music they like, and be with their friends, and then have all the younger people come at a completely different time!" Great idea! Let's separate the older generations from the encouragement of younger, and let's separate the wisdom of the older generations from those who need it most, the younger.

We reject a style - Our church will never use this style of music! At the cost of alienating a portion of the flock we will reject a music style from our congregation. Yes, we need to evaluate what is appropriate and what is not. We also need to understand that this is not merely a concern between "traditional" and "contemporary." We must recognize that this is a cultural issue. If we are to be a cross-cultural church, we need to recognize that not all believers come from our certain segment of culture. This includes songs written in the 17th century and the 21st century. This includes music that was written in our country, and in countries around the world. This includes instrumentation that we are familiar with, and some that we are not.

2. It is about the music.

Colossians 3:16-17 states "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."

In this passage there are several crucial points to recognize:

A. We sing because it is commanded in the NT. This does not appear here, and in Eph 6:18-21, merely

because it was a cultural norm in the 1st century. Music is supposed to be part of our personal and corporate lives if we are followers of Jesus Christ.

B. We sing because it locks biblical truth into our minds and the minds of others.

If you notice the passage above, what immediately precedes the command to sing? It is the word of Christ dwelling in you and then coming out of you in the form of teaching and admonishing. That word of Christ is there because we have read it or heard it at some point. Music is one way that this indwelling of the word can take place. We all know that having an annoying song stuck in your head is about as desirable as having a migraine. But having a biblical song can be used by God to literally save our lives. I cannot tell you how many times these lyrics have gone through my mind:

Oh to grace how great a debtor
Daily I'm constrained to be
Let Thy goodness, like a fetter
Bind my wandering heart to Thee
Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it
Prone to leave the God I love
Here's my heart, oh take and seal it
Seal it for Thy courts above

(Robert Robinson, Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing)

C. We sing because it is an appropriate response to

God's truth.

As the verses demonstrate above, following the indwelling of the word of Christ we are to sing. If you are exposed to truth from God himself, then you should sing. How are we to sing? "With thankfulness in your hearts to God." As we hear God's truth, singing is often the best immediate response we can make to our good and gracious God. We are often so divided between what we think, what we feel, and what we do, but singing takes our minds, our emotions, and our actions and binds them together into a strong chord. Appropriately used, this is an incredible way to respond to God after being affected by His word. Our whole person is at work.

D. We sing because it focuses us on God's glory, not ours.

"And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." Appropriate music takes our focus off of ourself and puts it on God. Not only do we sing in response to having more about God's person and plan revealed to us, but music can do that to us as well. This is why we sing before the Scripture reading, before the sermon, before the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Music helps us to focus on the true God.

Is music important? **Not as much as you think, but more than you thought.**

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

I don't do a good job at this

It is hard not to act like I know everything, to admit that I sin and that I am not at the pinnacle of being the person God wants me to be, or that I want to be. It is easy for me to cover up my faults, hide behind a mask, and act like everything is ok. But what others see is not always reality.

There are times though, when in honesty I admit that "I don't do a good job at this. I fail here, too." That makes me vulnerable, but it also puts me in a position of growth. You see, I can't grow by hiding, but by recognizing where I am positionally in Christ and practically in life.

In this world, we hear many voices, and few tell the truth. We have been told that we need a healthier self-image, or better work ethic, or tougher skin. Few tell us how we can actually grow spiritually. In 1 Cor 1:18-25 Paul tells the believers at Corinth that the Cross of Christ is the most unlikely place to find wisdom in the world, but the only place to find God's. He is speaking to saints (1:1-9), who were sinning (1:10-17). I think we can sympathize with their situation.

How do we go from being positionally holy, to being holy in our everyday life? Paul wanted these believers to actually live out who they were. They did not have to be slaves to sin. But how? **The short answer is - the Gospel.** In this passage he explains that in order to live practically what they were positionally, they must live daily in the power of the cross. His message is for you

and me today.

"For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart. Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, "Let the one who

boasts, boast in the Lord."

Paul begins by dividing all of humanity into two groups: those who follow the world, and those who cling to the cross. There are only two groups. You either trust in "the Word of the Cross" (or, "the Gospel," much like in Gal 3:1; Eph 2:16; Col 1:20; 2:14), or you accept the lies of the world.

1. The world tells me I am fine, but the cross tells me I am perishing (18). They are in the process of being lost before God, coming to eternal ruin. Just as Pilgrim was on his way to the Celestial City, these are on their way to the City of Destruction. What we like to do is compare ourselves with others and think we will escape that destruction. "I am better than he is" doesn't help when we are both on the same sinking ship. Look at your present situation in light of the Scriptures, not in light of your fellow passengers. Are you perishing?

2. The world tells me I need power, but the cross tells me I am helpless (18). Paul includes himself (those of us) with the saints of Corinth (1:2,4,8). They were all "being saved." Paul himself was in the process of being saved. Don't think of salvation as purely a past event. It has a past element, for Paul also wrote "For in this hope we were saved" (Rom 8:24); "By grace you have been saved" (Eph 2:5, 8); "By his mercy he saved us" (Titus 3:5). But there is also a present tense of salvation, "Through which [gospel] you are being saved" (1 Cor 15:2); "Those who are being saved" (2

Cor 2:15). And one day, he will be saved, "How much more shall we be saved?" (Rom 5:9).

The Gospel is the power of God. Paul is not talking about the power of God to speak the universe into existence. He is not talking about the power of God to keep the galaxies, solar systems, and stars twirling and whirling through space. He is not talking about the power of God to keep the particles of creation from fragmenting into billions of pieces. He is talking about the power of God to take a dead sinner and make him alive, clothing him in the righteousness of His perfect Son, Jesus Christ. That is regeneration and justification.

We live the world's lie when we think, "I can't tell others who I really am. I need to lock reality deep inside so no one knows I struggle, that I am broken, that I need help." "I can do better. I need to try harder." After we have sinned we often force ourselves to prove to God that we will try harder next time. We attempt to prove to him that we really can do it. We shy away from communion with him in prayer and Scripture for a time until the wayward son has proved that he can obey.

When you have angered your parent, or your spouse by forgetting to complete a task or breaking something, or failing in some way, you give them space and try to win back their favor by compensating. When we try that with God, we have not understood the Gospel.

Tell yourself the Gospel every day. Jesus gave His

sinless life to pay for my sins. I am righteous in Him. Totally accepted. There is nothing that I do that surprises God, or could make him love me more, for I am in Christ.

3. The world tells me I can explain away God, but the cross tells me I am a fool (19-20a).

"In first-century Corinth, 'wisdom' was not understood to be practical skill in living under the fear of the Lord (as it frequently is in Proverbs), now was it perceived to be some combination of intuition, insight, and people smarts (as it frequently is today in the West). Rather, wisdom was a public philosophy, a well-articulated world-view that made sense of life and ordered the choices, values, and priorities of those who adopted it. The 'wise man,' then, was someone who adopted and defended one of the many competing public worldviews. Those who were 'wise' in this sense might have been Epicureans [find pleasure by living modestly and pursuing knowledge] or Stoics [virtue is sufficient for happiness] or Sophists or Platonists, but they had this in common: they claimed to be able to 'make sense' out of life and death and the universe." (Carson, Cross and Christian Ministry, 15-16)

We live the world's lie when we say, "I just need to know more to be more godly." I just need to get the proper world view. I just need to get in a certain amount of Sunday Schools, or Bible studies. I need 5 steps, or 12 steps, or a self help book in order stop this cycle of sin." That is not the Gospel. When we have taken God

out of our everyday worldview we have taken out the very ability to understand truth. When we believe we can explain life without, or better than God, we have missed it.

Tell yourself the Gospel every day. You are in Christ. You are a new creation because of the cross. You are accepted, loved, and forgiven because of Jesus, not anything you can learn, do, say, or be.

4. The world tells me I need more knowledge, but the cross tells me I've missed it (20).

The Scribe was a specialist in the Law of Moses. It was this group of men that Jesus pronounced woes upon (Matt 23). But they are not the only ones who have been blinded by their own biblical knowledge. If Jesus is not in the picture as we read and study Scripture, we have missed the story. It is not that Jesus is found in every passage, but that every passage cries out for Jesus to come and rule. We need Jesus, our Savior and King!

Failing to connect what we are reading in the Scriptures to Jesus is not like forgetting the plot in the story we are reading, or even like forgetting the protagonist. It is forgetting the book we are reading, the author who composed it, and our very existence. The scribes saw the Scriptures but missed Jesus. They could come up with rules and regulations, but could not conceive of the cross. Don't believe the lie! Read Scripture in light of the cross, not in light of you trying

harder. The Bible is not a rule book for you to follow to make God happy. It points us to the cross.

5. The world tells me I need stylish rhetoric, but the cross tells me "It is finished" (20).

The debater of this age was the one who could win an audience through skillful rhetoric. Famous Greek orators from the 4th and 5th centuries BC included: Demosthenes,, Andocides, Lysias, and Isocrates. They literally moved whole cities through their words.

Our world listens to the voices which are the most passionate, most vibrant, most eccentric, and often times the most lacking in truth. We as a people do not care what is said as long as it is said well. If you are watching or listening to Joel Osteen, Joyce Meyer, T. D. Jakes, Benny Hinn, or Paula White you are being deceived. They have shiny smiles and silver words, but their teachings are full of holes. If they preach a false gospel, let them be accursed (Gal 1:8).

6. The world tells me I need a sign, but the cross tells me it wasn't what I was expecting (22-23).

The Jews wanted a sign, "an event that is an indication or confirmation of intervention by transcendent powers, miracle, portent" (BDAG). The Jews were repeatedly asking for this (Matt 16:1-4; 12:38-39 pp Luke 11:16, 29; 12:54-56; 23:8; John 2:18; 4:48; 6:30). But the sign that they received was a stumbling block. If a hanged man is cursed by God (Deut 21:23) then Jesus had been cursed by God (Gal 1:13-14; 3:13). "He could

not be the Messiah!" What they missed is that he was cursed for you and me. He suffered God's wrath in our place.

We live the world's lie when we think, "I need an experience. I need something special. I need to see something, feel something, dream something." "If God heals me. If my marriage is fixed. If I get a job." As D. A. Carson stated, "I am not coming to him on his terms; rather, I am stipulating terms that he must accept if he wants the privilege of my company" (Carson, Cross, 21).

7. The world tells me I need sophistication, but the cross tells me I need faith (23).

The Christian message of the cross has been mocked since its very conception. The soldiers mocked the King. The priests mocked the Messiah. The people mocked the Prophet.

In 1857 a piece of grafitti was discovered in Rome. It was a drawing on a plaster wall of a man being crucified and another worshipping before him. The man on the cross had the body of a man, but the head of a donkey, and beneath the drawing the words were scrawled, "Alexamenos worships his god." From 200 AD, this was the earliest depiction of Christ on the cross. It was not as a fancy necklace, a stain glassed window, or an ornate painting. It was derogatory graffiti. The world's view of Christ and the cross has not changed much.

We live the world's lie when we think, "Jesus is too embarrassing. I can't tell others what I believe. He is

outdated." When we think "We can pick and choose which teachings we will hold on to." Tell yourself the Gospel every day. You are who you are because of the cross. He is not a token to better your status, increase your wealth, or make you popular. He has come to give you life.

8. The world tells me I am better than others, but the cross tells me I am part of fallen humanity (24).

Racism rejects the unified position of all humanity under God's wrath. It thinks we are a little better than others because of our skin, our country, or our language. We refuse to hear the prophecy of John of a unified redeemed people, "After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" (Rev 7:9-10).

When you think of yourself as better than others, or your race as more advanced than others, remember that the cross is for all nations, and you need Christ just as badly as anyone else.

9. The world tells me I need more, the cross tells me I need Christ (24).

When Paul speaks of the foolishness and weakness of God, he is not talking in degrees, as though God's

wisdom is just a higher level. He is talking about polar opposites. Two completely different entities at different ends of the spectrum. God's wisdom is the truth upon which all creation is built. This wisdom is Christ. This power is Christ. The Gospel is how we receive life, we live life, and we experience the next life.

We live the world's lie when we think, "the Cross is how I get in, but knowledge, obedience, and works are what keep me in. God's favor must be earned." You must tell yourself the Gospel every day. "It is the power of God. I am not saved in any other way. I am not acceptable in any other way. I have life in no other way."

"The gospel isn't one class among many that you'll attend during your life as a Christian - the gospel is the whole building that all the classes take place in! Rightly approached, all the topics you'll study and focus on as a believer will be offered to you 'within the walls' of the glorious gospel" (Mahaney, *The Cross Centered Life*, 75-76).

Paul, in 1 Corinthians, was repeating some of Jesus' own words while here on earth. "At that time Jesus declared, 'I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son

chooses to reveal him. Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matt 11:25-30).

So, how can I grow by admitting that I am not where I ought to be? It is because at that point I recognize that Jesus alone is my "wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption" (1 Cor 1:30). **It is only in the work of Christ on the cross that I am acceptable before God, and it is only in the work of Christ on the cross that I can live daily in that reality.**

Terror accomplishes no real obedience.

Suspense brings forth no fruit unto holiness.

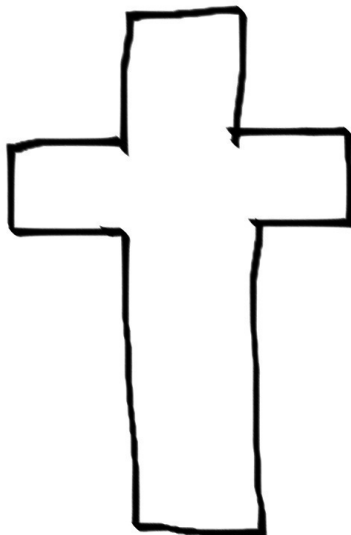
No gloomy uncertainty as to God's favor can subdue
one lust,

or correct our crookedness of will.

But the free pardon of the cross uproots sin,
and withers all its branches.

Only the certainty of love,
forgiving love, can do this

(Horatius Bonar, God's Way of Holiness).



CHAPTER SIXTEEN

How Can I Change?

"How Can I Change?"

We began by studying Titus 2:11-14.

"For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works."

In that passage, Paul reveals two perspectives of grace:

- 1) Forgiving grace ("redeem us from all lawlessness")
- 2) Transforming grace ("training us to renounce...")

All change is motivated and enabled by grace. It is a work of God (Phil 2:13).

But just because change is a work of God, we are not exempt from effort. There is no "let go and let God" in the battle for godliness. There are far too many commands to make that a legitimate option. Rather, godliness is a fight waged by the grace of God.

As we work through the study we will be addressing various tools used in our sanctification, wielded by the grace of God. These include godly sorrow, accountability, confession, prayer, etc.

Some resources that we will be using are:

Bridges, Jerry. The Pursuit of Holiness. Colorado Springs: Navpress, 1978.

-----, The Transforming Power of the Gospel. Colorado Springs: NavPress,

2012.

DeYoung, Kevin. [The Hole In Our Holiness: Filling the Gap between Gospel Passion and the Pursuit of Godliness](#). Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2012.

Lambert, Heath. [Finally Free: Fighting for Purity with the Power of Grace](#). Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013.

Mahaney, C.J., and Rovin Boisvert. How Can I Change?: Victory in the Struggle Against Sin. Edited by Greg Somerville. The Pursuit of Godliness. Gaithersburg, Maryland: Sovereign Grace Ministries, 1993.

Piper, John, and David Mathis. Acting the Miracle: God's Work and Ours in the Mystery of Sanctification, 2013.

Whitney, Donald S. Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1997.

Whitney, Donald S. Ten Questions to Diagnose Your Spiritual Health. 1st Edition. NavPress, 2001.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

How Can I Change? Sorrow

Godly Sorrow (2 Cor 7:8-11)

"**8** For even if I made you grieve with my letter, I do not regret it--though I did regret it, for I see that that letter grieved you, though only for a while. **9** As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting. For you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us. **10** For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death. **11** For see what earnestness this godly grief has produced in you, but also what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what punishment! At every point you have proved yourselves innocent in the matter."

What is the passage saying?

There are two kinds of sorrow. Worldly sorrow and Godly sorrow

Only Godly sorrow leads on to change

Godly and worldly sorrow overlap at the beginning. Both feel a loss. Both are emotional. But the further you go the further they separate. Godly sorrow feels the pain of the consequences (Heb 12:7) but it points them toward God, not their own loss.

Worldly sorrow is focused on "**I** sinned" whereas godly sorrow is focused on "**I** sinned against **God**"

How is it connected to grace?

- Who has brought the Grace of God? Jesus, through his sacrifice.
- What am I to focus on when I am sorrowful? My sin against a Holy and Loving God.
- What does that motivate me to do? Repent and Obey

What will it look like in my life? (How does that actually help me change?)

Example: While they are out, you have directly disobeyed your parents by doing something they have told you is wrong. You know they will find out because of the evidence, someone else, because the principle is going to meet with them, etc. You legitimately feel sorrow. What does godly sorrow look like in this moment and how does it help you change AFTER you have already sinned?

Steps in Godly Sorrow:

- Repentance (10) – to God and those you sinned against
- Eagerness to clear yourselves (11) – you take measures not to sin again
- Indignation (11) – you call what you did sin, and you recognize what that sin actually costs
- Fear (11) – you view your sin in light of God's holiness
- Longing (7, 11) – you desire to do right and pray for strength to change
- Zeal (7, 11) – you make a plan and consistent effort to root it out of your life
- Punishment (11) – you take the punishment as an opportunity to grow in godliness (Heb 12:7)

Homework

- What is the sinful pattern in your life that needs to change?
- Would you say that godly sorrow has been present?
- Which of the steps above need to be taken right now?
- Read Ps 51 and then write out a prayer to God.

"Sanctification, therefore, will be marked by penitence more than

perfection." (DeYoung, The Hole in Our Holiness, 139).

More Reading:

DeYoung, Kevin. "That All May See Your Progress." In The Hole In Our Holiness: Filling the Gap between Gospel Passion and the Pursuit of Godliness. Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2012.

Lambert, Heath. "Using Sorrow to Fight Pornography (ch 2)." In Finally Free: Fighting for Purity with the Power of Grace. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013.

Whitney, Donald S. "Do You Still Grieve Over Sin?" In Ten Questions to Diagnose Your Spiritual Health. 1st Edition. NavPress, 2001.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

How Can I Change? Accountability

Accountability (Gal 6:1-2)

"**1** Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. **2** Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ."

What is the passage saying?

1. The believer is to:

A. Restore the broken (1). Restore means "to cause to be in a condition to function well, put in order. Restore to a former condition, put to rights" (BDAG). When Jesus was selecting his disciples he found them "restoring" their nets (Matt 4:21). They had to mend them in order to be able to use them again.

Once, while playing racquetball with a friend, our game was interrupted by the dislocation of my opponent's knee. I still believe it was an act of saving himself the embarrassment of losing to me, but he claims it was not. After many attempts to deal with it, I was finally able to pop it into place. Upon which, I promptly dropped his leg and let it bounce off a hard surface. It was a disturbing moment. We had to set it. We had to mend the problem.

Those who have been caught in a transgression are often the ones who are immediately executed by our words, gossip, or pity. We see them as "damaged" and either deserving of a shocked and horrified reaction or a patronizing shake of the head and abandonment.

Restoring means we pick them up and point them to the healer of souls (Matt 11:28-30).

B. Carry the burden (2). I have two options when I am dealing with someone who is broken. I can heap more weights onto their back (remember the

Pharisees in Matt 23?), or I can begin to shoulder their present burden.

I carry the burden of others by entering into their life and helping them along. This is done by pointing them to Jesus (Isa 53:4).

2. The believer needs:

A. Others to restore them when they sin (Jas 3:2)

B. Others to bear their burdens (1 Thess 5:14)

How is it connected to grace?

You and I need grace to help others. We are not naturally inclined to restore those who are broken, especially not those who have sinned against us. We are also not inclined to carry the burdens of others rather than focusing on our own concerns.

We also need grace to receive that ministry. We don't want to ask others for help. We don't want others to know us deeply. That takes God's grace.

What will it look like in my life? (How does that actually help me change?)

Example: You have a friend who wants to meet with you some afternoon after school. You sit down at the coffee shop and begin to talk. This friend opens up to about a consistent struggle with sinful behavior they have been having for awhile. They unload on you, expressing their heart and desire to be rid of this yet not knowing where to go. At this point your friend breaks down and begins to question whether they really should have said all that.

What do you do? Here are some steps you can take:

- Listen
- Pray with them and for them
- Point them to the cross
- You establish a plan
- You follow up
- Seek help if necessary

But what if that is you hiding away this consistent struggle with sin? What do you do?

- Think of someone who you know.
- Who is a believer
- Who is mature
- Who you can trust
- Make an appointment to talk with them

Homework

- What is the sinful pattern in your life that needs to change?
- Who do you trust with helping you with this struggle? Have you talked to them? Do you need to confess a "self-sufficient" attitude?
- Are you helping someone else in their struggle? Are you consistent? What can you do to help them this week?
- Read Prov 27:17 and then write out a prayer to God for the friend you are seeking to sharpen, and for a friend who would sharpen you.

More Reading:

Challies, Tim. "[How to Make Accountability Work.](#)"

Knapp, Jackie. "[How to Counsel as a Friend.](#)"

Lambert, Heath. "Using Accountability to Fight Pornography." In Finally Free: Fighting for Purity with the Power of Grace, 45–58. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013.

Lutzer, Erwin W. "The Intercession of Christ and Believers." In *Getting to No: How to Break a Stubborn Habit*, 129–140. Colorado Springs: David C Cook, 2007.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

How Can I Change? The Church

The Church (Jas 5:19-20)

"**19** My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, **20** let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins."

What is the passage saying?

1. BELIEVERS ARE:

A. Prone to wander. Why do you think James ended with this admonition? Because he knows that we are all sinners and easily swayed (Jas 1:5-8). We are tempted and drawn away (1:14-15), needing to repent and humble ourselves (4:1-10).

B. In need of others. When we wander, who will be there to bring us back if we have cut everyone off from our lives, or, if we have never joined with others?

2. BELIEVERS MUST:

A. Bring others back. Judging by James message to his brothers, there were plenty of difficulties. People were in trials (1:2-4), unwise (1:5-8), and under temptation (1:12-15). There was anger, filthiness, wickedness (1:19-21), and an aversion to living the Word (1:22-25).

B. Forgive others' sin. Because of their state, they had created conflicts over partiality (Jas 2), their words (Jas 3), and their own desires (Jas 4). Which means there was a lot of sin to be forgiven. This was James intention in verse 20. Covering the sins of others is based on God's forgiveness. The wanderer will have his sins forgiven but the one who returns the wanderer may also have to forgive (cover) the sins committed against himself.

How is it connected to grace?

Titus 2:11-14 reminds us that individual believers are part of a people, not merely a lone ranger. That means that Jesus intends to use others "to purify

for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works" (14). The amount of "one another" passages in the NT and the focus on the NT Church should be ample evidence of those intentions.

The Church is a tool Jesus uses to change us. It is a blessed gift, not to be overlooked, belittled, or avoided.

What will it look like in my life? (How does that actually help me change?)

Example: Your friend Larry used to come to church regularly and talk to you about spiritual matters, but everything has changed. He rarely ever attends church (anywhere) and changes the subject whenever spiritual topic of conversation arise. What should you do?

STEPS:

- Pray for them
- Meet with them
- Listen to them
- Point them to Christ
- Walk with them
- Forgive them

What can I Do?

- Think of your three closest friends at church. Would you still come to church if they stopped coming?
- Who is in place to bring you back if you wander? Have you talked with them?
- Can you think of a once professing believer who is wandering?
_____ What can you do?
- Find an mature believer this evening that you trust to bring you back. Ask them to pray for you regularly.

"Lone Rangers are Dead Rangers" (Josh Harris, Not Even a Hint)

"We need to live in close enough community to suffer with those who suffer and rejoice with those who rejoice. And we need to know one another well enough to hold each other accountable for spiritual progress" (Ryken, City on a Hill, 88).

Resources:

Chart from Brantley, Robert, and Astra Brantley. "The Grace of God's Accountability." *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 17, no. 3 (1999): 45–47.

Bridges, Jerry. [True Community](#): The Biblical Practice of Koinonia. NavPress, 2012.

Challies, Tim. [One Another InfoGraph](#).

Lane, Timothy S., and Paul David Tripp. "Change Is a Community Project." In [How People Change](#), 73–90. Greensboro: New Growth Press, 2006.

Middletown Bible Church. "[Immature and Mature Believers Contrasted](#)."

Moore, Russell. "Miracle Together: Corporate Dynamics in Christian Sanctification." In [Acting the Miracle: God's Work and Ours in the Mystery of Sanctification](#), edited by John Piper and David Mathis, 107–126. Wheaton: Crossway, 2013. Read a [full review of the book here](#) and get the [free pdf here](#)

CHAPTER TWENTY

How Can I Change? Radical Measures

Radical Measures (Matt 5:27-30)

27 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' 28 But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. 29 If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. 30 And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell."

What is the passage saying?

1. SIN IS MORE PERVASIVE THAN WE BELIEVE
2. SIN IS MORE DANGEROUS THAN WE THINK (CF JAS 1:14-15)
3. SANCTIFICATION IS MORE PAINFUL THAN WE WANT (CF EPH 4:17-32)
4. SALVATION IS MORE VALUABLE THAN WE REALIZE (CF PHIL 3:11)

Cancer is an excellent picture of radical measures. Nearly everyone has experienced cancer, or watched someone close to them battle it. It can be pervasive without us even realizing it. It can be killing without much more than a hint of problems. To deal with it often takes drastic surgeries, dangerous chemicals, or exhaustive treatments. But physical death is nothing in comparison to eternal death.

How is it connected to grace?

"...outward measures, regardless of how radical they are, can never change your heart" (Lambert, Finally Free, 72).

HOWEVER:

- Radical measures are a response to the call of Christ in obedience
- Radical measure allow you to come to the surface to breathe.
- Radical measures allow you freedom to pursue righteousness (2 Tim 2:22)

What will it look like in my life? (How does that actually help me change?)

Example: Your friend has a problem. It is a nagging problem. It is a big problem. They can go for a week feeling as though they are growing in Christ like never before, only to turn around and dive into sin. This is followed by

guilt, embarrassment, and resolve. But they just can't shake it. Part of the problem is their access. The computer in their room, the phone in their pocket, the tv in the basement, or that place at the mall are like gateways to spiritual death. How would you help your friend pursue Christ over sin?

STEPS:

- List the times and tools involved in the temptation
- Eliminate the temptations through amputation, making space to grow
- Make a plan for pursuing righteousness
- Follow through

Jay Adams says that there are four factors in achieving this:

- We must recognize the fact that we will be tempted to repeat our sin.
- We must prepare ourselves to meet and defeat temptation in the future.
- If the problem of past patterns surfacing in the future cannot be avoided, then something definitive must be done to prevent us from falling into old sinful ways. We need to take definitive, concrete, radical action.
- Nothing must be spared in this process. Improper conduct must be curtailed even at the greatest cost!

What can I Do?

1. What is there in your life that has been a gateway to spiritual death?
2. What would radical amputation look like in your scenario?
3. Talk with your godly mentor about this.

If you keep access to sin close at hand, sooner or later you will dive in. (See Lambert).

Resources:

Lambert, Heath. "[Pornography, Radical Measures, and the Gospel.](#)" Biblical Counseling Coalition Blogs.

-----, "Using Radical Measures to Fight Pornography." In Finally Free: Fighting

for Purity with the Power of Grace, 59–74. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013.

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