

Be Careful How You Live

Lent 2022

Day 1 of 2022 Lent season.
Wednesday, March 2, 2022

Ephesians 5:15-17 NIV

¹⁵ Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, ¹⁶ making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. ¹⁷ Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is.

When walking down a dangerous road, filled with predators, hidden dangers and awaiting accidents, your safety requires being very cautious and aware of everything in and out of sight. The catch is, the more comfortable you become, the less careful you can get.

Today's culture is filled with most of the things that God hates...

Proverbs 6:16-19 NIV

¹⁶ There are six things the LORD hates, seven that are detestable to him: ¹⁷ haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, ¹⁸ a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil, ¹⁹ a false witness who pours out lies and a person who stirs up conflict in the community.

These things are viewed today as marks of success and are common in the movies we watch, the songs we dance to and the social media that entertains us.

Today is a perfect opportunity for us to live more carefully (and cautiously) when it comes to these things. A key part of the Lent experience is self-exploration. This first week, that will be our focus. Consider what areas of your life connect you most with these seven things and what you can do to “fast” from them during the 2022 Lent season.

1. Haughty eyes – greed
2. Lying Tongue – dishonestly
3. Hurting innocence – predatory
4. Devises wicked schemes – Plotting against others
5. Rushing to Evil - A love for bad things
6. False witness – gossip
7. Stirs up conflict – divisive

Questions to consider

1. What do I entertain myself with that connects me to these things?
2. Where do I go and associate with these things freely?
3. What habits do I have that are rooted in any of these 7 things?

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Lent 2022

Day 2, 2022

Thursday, March 3, 2022

James 1:13-15 NIV

¹³ When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; ¹⁴ but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. ¹⁵ Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

Searching for Sin...

Our common response when things go wrong is to look for whose fault it is. Who can be blamed? Psychologists suggest that this act of investigative research is intended to provide us an "out." We look for an opportunity to say, "it wasn't me." The truth is, much of what we do that God despises is part of our self-discovery about where we need to grow. God is not in the business of condemnation, "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him." [John 3:17]. If He who has the right of condemnation chooses not to, then how can we become so comfortable doing so? Because it frees us from looking at ourselves.

James points out that temptation is an indication that growth is necessary in a particular area of our lives (where the temptation is). Here is the catch, wherever there is temptation there WILL be growth. The question is what kind of growth? If we do nothing about the temptation and just let it continue as is, it will eventually grow into full blown sin. On the other hand, if we grow intentionally toward God because of our temptation as it lets us know there is needed growth, we can overcome the sin and be free.

As you consider yesterday's list and what you are going to fast from, how much temptation surfaces as you think about what you will have to sacrifice? Perhaps there is an area of needed growth that has been overlooked. It's not easy to give up the habits we have come to know, love, and feel comfortable with. It is only when we back away from them and feel the drive, the temptation, that we know how deeply committed we are to them. These areas perhaps need a little growth.

Questions to consider...

1. As you consider making your lent sacrifice, what do you think will be the most difficult things to fast?
2. As you looked deeply at your answers to question one, how does it relate, connect with and lead to any of the seven things God hates?
3. What need does your greatest temptation satisfy?

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Day 3, 2022
Friday, March 4, 2022

Preparing for Worship...

Colossians 3:16-17 NIV

¹⁶ Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. ¹⁷ And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

A popular song from past times offered a common sentiment of people who worked all week and could not wait until 5:00PM on Friday. The song "Living for the Weekend" highlighted the efforts people put into a night and two days of freedom and the joy that came with the party life. For Christians, "living for the weekend" should have a very different meaning. It should not draw us to a crowded gathering with drinking, dancing, and sometimes smoking, but rather to a moment at the throne before a mighty king.

Many of us forget that gathering together to worship should be so much more about God than it is about us. In the Old Testament it was a place of sacrifice and praise. In our day it has become a place of entertainment and self-centered judgement. So much so that its impact on us is not as it should be. God's message should "dwell deeply" in us, driving us to connectivity and reflection of Him.

These three days have given us an opportunity to look at ourselves briefly and be reminded of where my desires might conflict with God's and where my temptation can stand in the way of growth. But Sunday is a day for me to reflect on God's deliverance from who I am and the pathway to who I should be in Christ, "¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! (2 Corinthians 5:17)." So, how do I refocus in this fasting time so I can experience this new me and my increased connectivity to God?

Questions to Consider

1. Be honest about yourself regarding day one and two (your relationship to what God hates, and the temptation that hinders your growth).
2. Don't condemn yourself. You were born in sin and shaped in iniquity, there is no way that you would not need growth. The problem is not being in sin, it is staying in sin. During your fasting, as you consider doing without something not good for you, think about how you can perhaps satisfy the desire with something spiritually healthy for you.

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3. Note that worship is an order given to God's people from heaven. Use this weekend to allow your heart to be filled with Christ by removing other things (like envy, grudges, hate, jealousy, regret, shame, etc.) so that there is room for Him.
4. As you worship this Sunday, listen to the words to the songs in worship. What do they mean and how can they be experienced in your relationship with Christ?

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Day 4, 2022

Saturday, March 5, 2022

Instrument in God's Band

Romans 6:13 NIV

¹³ Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness.

I have always found it interesting to see the conductor of a band in motion. The level of excitement that is present when they are guiding the band through perfect harmony and succinct rhythm. But it becomes painfully obvious when one of the instruments is off key, out of step and with broken rhythm. It is almost like someone stabbed the conductor right in the heart and left them hemorrhaging blood on the stage floor.

God sees us as His instruments of righteousness. He is our conductor who guides us toward living out His harmonious plan. We however, as the band members in any band, have freewill to play our own tunes, at our own rhythm and pace. We can ignore our conductor and go off of what we feel or desire instead of following His lead.

Temptation usually targets one part of us at a time and seeks to gratify that part at the expense of the rest of us. For example, if I take a drink of liquor, it will give me a feeling of carefree delight, while destroying my liver. Cursing someone out will perhaps boost my pride but ruin my testimony. We usually sin by allowing our "instruments" (parts of our body) to be used as instruments of wickedness. These are the uncontrolled parts of us that do not observe or obey the conductor.

Today, take a look at what instrument in your body has a tendency to play unbiblical tunes. It could be your attitude, your physical desires, your pride, your appetite, selfishness, etc. Write down what that body part is (you can use a code if needed) and ask yourself, what would it be like if this part of myself was used as an instrument of righteousness? Make a plan to play this instrument considering Christ as the conductor. Is it a scary thought?

Questions to consider

1. How long have I been playing out of key with this instrument of mine?
2. What does God expect from this instrument?
3. How does my fasting choice impact/contribute to my doing better in this area of my life?

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Day 5 of 2022 Lent season.
Monday March 7, 2022

Why is Jonah in my Mirror?

Jonah 1:1-3 NIV **Fleeing From the Lord**

1 The word of the Lord came to Jonah son of Amittai: ² “Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me.” ³ But Jonah ran away from the Lord and headed for Tarshish. He went down to Joppa, where he found a ship bound for that port. After paying the fare, he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the Lord.

As a kid, I remember times when my mother came to the door of our house and yelled from the porch calling my name. She looked up and down the street and yelled my name to summon me to come home. Usually, it was to clean my room, or respond to a call she might have gotten from one of my schoolteachers or something of the sort. While she was under the assumption that I could not hear her, she didn't know that I was actually hiding on the side of the house. I knew by the sound of her voice that I was being called to do something that I didn't want to do.

Perhaps we are not hiding on the side of the house when God is calling us, but many times when we know what He is going to ask of us, we hide and even run from what we KNOW God expects of us. Some have said, and I believe it to be true, that if you are not growing in some areas of your life, you are sliding backwards or about to miss your window of avoiding negative consequences.

In this passage, Jonah has just completed “theology training” and was fully equipped as an evangelist. However, when he heard the call of God's voice he elected to go in the other direction. He not only wanted to hide from God, but to run.

Today we are asking that you consider your “Jonah moment.” What is God telling you to do to be more biblical? It could be that sermon or message you keep hearing but running from, pretending you didn't hear it, or applying it to everyone but yourself. If you find yourself saying things like, “I know I need to do better,” “I'm just waiting for the right time,” “this is just how I am,” or “there are people doing much worse than me,” then you might be having a “Jonah moment.”

Assignment:

- List three areas in your life where you have had a “Jonah Moment.” These are areas where God is calling you to change and you continue the same, run the other way, or just procrastinate and not move forward.
- Consider what it would look like if you changed in each of those areas.
- How would it impact your fellowship with God?

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Questions to consider:

1. Why is it difficult from me to accept God's plan for me in the Jonah moments of my life?
2. What makes me trust myself more than I trust God in the areas where I have not moved toward God's request?
3. Which do I experience more when God asks something of me that I don't want to do: 1) fear 2) selfishness, or 3) habit?

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Day 6 of 2022 Lent season.
Tuesday March 8, 2022

Jonah 1:4-5 NIV **Who Takes the Fall?**

⁴ Then the Lord sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up. ⁵ All the sailors were afraid and each cried out to his own god. And they threw the cargo into the sea to lighten the ship. But Jonah had gone below deck, where he lay down and fell into a deep sleep. ⁶ The captain went to him and said, "How can you sleep? Get up and call on your god! Maybe he will take notice of us so that we will not perish."

Disobedience or sin is never a victimless occurrence. The bible goes as far as to say, "For the wages of sin is death" [Romans 6:23a]. Missing the mark [sin] always has consequences. Disobedience of God's word is the intentional act of sin. It is sinning when you know better. Jonah was willing to allow everyone in the ship he was in to experience the consequences of his act of disobedience. In fact, while everyone else was trying to figure out why the ship could not move forward, Jonah seemed relieved as he thought he had escaped God's command.

Many times, we are not aware of who or how many people are impacted by the consequences of our disobedience to God. It could be our unwillingness to grow beyond our unbiblical attitude, our reflection of the seven things listed from week one, or the bad habits that we are unwilling to change that have an impact on others. There are no unbiblical parents whose children are not impacted, there are no unbiblical spouses that do not impact their mates, and there are no unbiblical individuals that do not impact their church families, natural families, communities, etc. [Joshua 7-8] Disobedience has consequences.

The other question is, who benefits from your obedience? When God responds to our obedience there is always an expanded consequence, a positive one. Jonah was relieved when he thought he had escaped God's calling and gave no thought to the fact that his decision to disobey God had an impact on others.

Assignment:

Consider who is impacted by your response to God.

- Do they benefit or suffer as a result?
- Are you running to God in obedience and thus breeding good consequences or are you standing in disobedience with no focus on how others are impacted?

We [God's people] are called to be light. Light is not only designed to provide for itself, but for others; however, when light is not functioning by design it is leaving many to suffer.

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Questions to Consider:

1. Who has God put in your pathway to experience your light?
2. When you are stuck in “Jonah moments” who is left in darkness or with less light?
3. Write down in three sentences or less, one thing that God is asking of you and pray for strength to respond in obedience to the call.

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Day 7 of 2022 Lent season.
Wednesday March 9, 2022

Jonah 1:7-16 NIV

Face to Face with God

⁷ Then the sailors said to each other, "Come, let us cast lots to find out who is responsible for this calamity." They cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah. ⁸ So they asked him, "Tell us, who is responsible for making all this trouble for us? What kind of work do you do? Where do you come from? What is your country? From what people are you?"

⁹ He answered, "I am a Hebrew and I worship the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land." ¹⁰ This terrified them and they asked, "What have you done?" (They knew he was running away from the Lord, because he had already told them so.)

¹¹ The sea was getting rougher and rougher. So they asked him, "What should we do to you to make the sea calm down for us?" ¹² "Pick me up and throw me into the sea," he replied, "and it will become calm. I know that it is my fault that this great storm has come upon you."

¹³ Instead, the men did their best to row back to land. But they could not, for the sea grew even wilder than before. ¹⁴ Then they cried out to the Lord, "Please, Lord, do not let us die for taking this man's life. Do not hold us accountable for killing an innocent man, for you, Lord, have done as you pleased." ¹⁵ Then they took Jonah and threw him overboard, and the raging sea grew calm. ¹⁶ At this the men greatly feared the Lord, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows to him.

There always comes a time when we come face to face with God. How do you know when this is happening? Good question, I'm glad you asked. The first sign that you are face to face with God is that HE will get the glory! God gets the glory whenever we come to the realization that He is right - not just in concept, but in the reality of our lives. At this very moment, Jonah recognized that there is no running from God. He is right there with you, on the boat you took to get away from Him.

Do you have a "hiding place" where you "feel like" God is not present? Here is a secret: there is no place where God is not. Yes, He saw you dancing at the party, looking at your videos in your private restroom, even when the lights were off and you were whispering on that phone call; He is always present.

Jonah figured, 'since God sent me over there (Nineveh), surely, he is not at Tarshish.' Or you could say, 'since God sent me to church, surely He is not at the party house.' You fill in the blanks, 'since God sent me to _____, surely, he is not at _____.'

The fact of the matter is, we are always face to face with God. He sees all that we do or say, even when we forget that He is looking.

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If the first way to know you are face to face with God is Him receiving glory, (often from us learning that He is right), what is the second? The second way to know we are face to face with God is us running into his sovereignty, a word we hear a lot. Sovereignty means absolute control or axiomatic authority. When we are running from God, we often run right into his sovereign boundary. We experience this in one of two ways. One because we hit that “brick wall” or “raging storm” and cannot go further without surrendering to God. The other way is that God’s sovereignty serves as a boost to push or support you toward the change that God intends for you.

Jonah chose the storm, and in these verses, he hit the brick wall. Could it be that you are standing at the brick wall right now in your life?

Questions to Consider:

1. Where do I go or what do I do when I am avoiding the change or changes that God is calling me to make? Perhaps He is calling me to work on my temper, my procrastination, my avoidance toward discipleship and fellowship, or maybe it's the choice of Facebook over scripture, the grudge that you are holding, etc. Eventually you will hit the storm. The storm will lift up your boat or throw you overboard according to what side of God’s sovereignty you are on.
2. What can you use as an indicator that you are on target with God’s expectations of biblical obedience?
3. Who can you connect with for true accountability? Someone who will even throw you over the boat to get you closer to God.

Be Careful How You Live

Lent 2022

Day 8 of 2022 Lent season.
Thursday March 10, 2022

Jonah 1:17 – 1-10

God's Unusual Saving Grace

¹⁷ Now the Lord provided a huge fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights. **2** ¹ From inside the fish Jonah prayed to the Lord his God. ² He said: "In my distress I called to the Lord, and he answered me. From deep in the realm of the dead I called for help, and you listened to my cry. ³ You hurled me into the depths, into the very heart of the seas, and the currents swirled about me; all your waves and breakers swept over me. ⁴ I said, 'I have been banished from your sight; yet I will look again toward your holy temple.' ⁵ The engulfing waters threatened me, the deep surrounded me; seaweed was wrapped around my head. ⁶ To the roots of the mountains I sank down; the earth beneath barred me in forever. But you, Lord my God, brought my life up from the pit. ⁷ "When my life was ebbing away, I remembered you, Lord, and my prayer rose to you, to your holy temple. ⁸ "Those who cling to worthless idols turn away from God's love for them. ⁹ But I, with shouts of grateful praise, will sacrifice to you. What I have vowed I will make good. I will say, 'Salvation comes from the Lord.'" ¹⁰ And the Lord commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.

The fact that God's grace is sufficient always comes up when God's deliverance does not match our expectations. This week we have seen almost first hand a major attack on an innocent state of people as Russia continues its effort to invade and overtake Ukraine. Where is God's grace? What does sufficiency mean? While God's grace is everywhere, our satisfaction with God's actions seems to fall short. I know, we love the Lord and appreciate all that He does. We are grateful for Him and His mercy on us. But when we compare our experiences with our expectations, often we expected something that God didn't allow or make happen for us. The fact is, God's grace is not designed for our satisfaction but rather our progress.

Jonah's prayer of praise focuses on how God's grace and mercy delivered him from the deadly storm and raging sea, into the peace and sound safety of the belly of a fish. Imagine that, safety was inside the fish. Here is something to consider- God often delivers us from our consequences into His wilderness. Getting into the consequences is evidence that growth is needed, but it is hard for true growth to take place in a place of paradise. So, if you asked Moses, who was delivered from Pharaoh's army into the wilderness, or Noah who we delivered by the Ark into a vacated land of the dead, or even Paul who was delivered into prison, we find that often our deliverance leads to a wilderness.

Jesus, who was delivered to a wilderness [Matthew 4:1-11] demonstrates the purpose of the wilderness. The wilderness in each case is provided as a place of growth. Jesus deepened his focus on ministry in the wilderness. After being face to face with God, we often find ourselves in the wilderness. What does the wilderness look like for you? When has God delivered you from the consequences of your behavior into a wilderness to grow? Yes, to grow.

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It is in the belly of the fish that we can be without distraction, biblically focused, beyond our excuses, past procrastination, to a place where it's just you and God. God wants to grow you in those areas. David, in his distress said, "Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me" [Psalm 51:10 NIV].

It's now time for you, during this time of fasting, to ask God to grow you... "create in you a pure heart, "a heart He can use for His purpose.

Assignment:

Jonah's prayer landed him at the place where he started. He started as a trained evangelist given an evangelistic task, but with an unclean heart. He is now delivered to the same mission but with a different heart.

Write a prayer expressing to God your experience of deliverance. Include your commitment to change, to move beyond your point of resistance. Then allow God to remind you that He equipped you for His purpose and called you to a mission. That mission is still waiting for you.

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Lent 2022

Day 9 of 2022 Lent season.
Friday March 11, 2022

Jonah 3:1-5 NIV

Bittersweet Success

3 Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time: ² “Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you.” ³ Jonah obeyed the word of the Lord and went to Nineveh. Now Nineveh was a very large city; it took three days to go through it. ⁴ Jonah began by going a day’s journey into the city, proclaiming, “Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown.” ⁵ The Ninevites believed God. A fast was proclaimed, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth.

Jonah’s success was bittersweet. The issue is that while Jonah acted in obedience, he had not fully surrendered his mission in exchange for God’s. He agreed to the call of evangelism but was still more committed to his version of God’s plan than he was God’s version of the plan. He took to the streets as he was called and put God’s plan into action, speaking the message of God’s voice to a lost people. In spite of Jonah, God’s message reached the hearts of the people bringing them to repentance and surrender to God. This was an evangelistic dream but with a slight issue of unfinished growth for Jonah.

Have you fully surrendered to God, or do you want to do God’s will your way? This can happen without intention when we assume that we understand what God wants enough that we don’t check with Him. We just simply assume we think like God. Paul states in his case, “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” [Galatians 2:20 NIV].

Paul found a way to fully surrender what he wanted and the way he wanted it in order to allow himself to be a vessel for God. This can be difficult if you are more committed to your agenda than you are to God’s agenda. How do you measure success? Is it your agenda or God’s objective? Do you serve him or expect for him to serve your purpose?

Assignment:

In the next 4 weeks, as best you can, name five of what you think are the most important things to God concerning you. Don’t be general, be as specific as you can. Then, name five things that are most important to you. Compare the two lists and think about what might need to be changed.

Be Careful How You Live

Lent 2022

Day 10 of 2022 Lent season.
Saturday March 12, 2022

Jonah 3:6-10 NIV

Voluntary Growth

⁶ When Jonah's warning reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust. ⁷ This is the proclamation he issued in Nineveh: "By the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let people or animals, herds or flocks, taste anything; do not let them eat or drink. ⁸ But let people and animals be covered with sackcloth. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. ⁹ Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish." ¹⁰ When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened.

The sinner, the king of Nineveh sets a decree [law] that creates a wilderness for the growth of the people of Nineveh. As said before, growth requires surrender, humility, and a willingness to "die to self" to "live for Christ." What are your thoughts about how quickly the people of Nineveh were willing to humble themselves and turn from their wicked ways to submit to God? How does their response to God compare to yours? Does the word of God spark such a reaction from you? Note that their wilderness of sack cloth and fasting was not "depression" or "self-condemnation." It was focused on how we need to change... without violence. This declaration of surrender was said by one of that time period's most violent people. The people put away what they viewed as "this is who we are" to become who God wanted them to be.

Can you do the same? Are you willing to change your habits, attitudes, actions, emotions, etc. to be who God wants you to be?

Assignment:

Today's task is for you to look at the five things you listed yesterday and jot down what it would look like if you became more aligned with God's desire for you in the areas you choose.

- What "wilderness" do you need to put in place to provide space for true growth?

Perhaps your wilderness includes limiting your social media time to reduce a temptation, or getting an accountability person to help you evaluate an area of your life where you need to be more biblical. It's time we have an action plan for change. Hearing the word is great, but JUST hearing is not enough to satisfy God.

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Lent 2022

Day 11 of 2022 Lent Season
Monday, March 14, 2022

Ecclesiastes 1:12-18 NIV

If You Were the Wisest Person Alive

¹² I, the Teacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem. ¹³ I applied my mind to study and to explore by wisdom all that is done under the heavens. What a heavy burden God has laid on mankind! ¹⁴ I have seen all the things that are done under the sun; all of them are meaningless, a chasing after the wind. ¹⁵ What is crooked cannot be straightened; what is lacking cannot be counted. ¹⁶ I said to myself, "Look, I have increased in wisdom more than anyone who has ruled over Jerusalem before me; I have experienced much of wisdom and knowledge." ¹⁷ Then I applied myself to the understanding of wisdom, and also of madness and folly, but I learned that this, too, is a chasing after the wind. ¹⁸ For with much wisdom comes much sorrow; the more knowledge, the more grief.

Solomon was gifted with more wisdom [the ability to understand and apply truth to life] than anyone who ever lived [or lives]. He took on the task of using that wisdom to explore the value of life "under the sun" and the idea of "happiness" or pleasure. Why? Because this seemed to be the most sought-after experience of mankind. People seek relationships in order to be happy; they seek riches believing that will make them happy; fame, because they believe it will make them happy and pleasure with the goal of finding happiness. In fact, the most often-stated complaint from people who are not satisfied with life is that they are not happy. When Solomon applied wisdom to the search for happiness as a personal research project, he concluded that searching for happiness is like "chasing after the wind." Have you every chased the wind? Well, you will never catch it, but it will hit you while you are running after it. If you had it, you would not know it until its gone, as it cannot be handled or controlled; it just happens to you and then does not. It's hard to chase after the wind because its path is unpredictable, and it is always subject to a set of uncontrollable circumstances.

Are you chasing happiness or pleasure? Have you ever prayed for it? Is it how you measure the value of your relationships, job, church, etc.? Is it how you measure the value of your relationship with God?

Solomon suggests that trying to find happiness "under the sun" has a unique set of challenges even if you were the wisest, richest, person who ever lived.

Questions to consider:

1. What critical choices have you made in order to experience what you define as "happiness" or to be "happy"?

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2. Do you believe that your relationships are responsible for making you happy?
3. Do you get frustrated with God when you can't find happiness? Do you see it as part of God's job?

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Lent 2022

Day 12 of 2022 Lent Season
Tuesday, March 15, 2022

Ecclesiastes 2 NIV

The Danger of Pleasures

2 I said to myself, “Come now, I will test you with pleasure to find out what is good.” But that also proved to be meaningless. **2** “Laughter,” I said, “is madness. And what does pleasure accomplish?” **3** I tried cheering myself with wine, and embracing folly—my mind still guiding me with wisdom. I wanted to see what was good for people to do under the heavens during the few days of their lives. **4** I undertook great projects: I built houses for myself and planted vineyards. **5** I made gardens and parks and planted all kinds of fruit trees in them. **6** I made reservoirs to water groves of flourishing trees. **7** I bought male and female slaves and had other slaves who were born in my house. I also owned more herds and flocks than anyone in Jerusalem before me. **8** I amassed silver and gold for myself, and the treasure of kings and provinces. I acquired male and female singers, and a harem ^[a] as well—the delights of a man’s heart. **9** I became greater by far than anyone in Jerusalem before me. In all this my wisdom stayed with me. **10** I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure. My heart took delight in all my labor, and this was the reward for all my toil. **11** Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun.

Does pleasure bring happiness? Being entertained and experiencing pleasure is without a doubt one of the most common ways that we seek happiness. The pursuit of pleasure is responsible for our addiction to drinking and drug use, our epidemic and then normalization of unwed parents, the celebrated sexual revolution and eventually redefining of sexuality, our souring divorce rate that has led to the normalization of people shacking up. Our pursuit of pleasure has contributed to a trillion-dollar pornographic industry, trafficking of children worldwide, the most brutal sports (we cheer on people beating each other up for our entertainment). The pursuit of pleasure has led to unfaithfulness in relationships, dishonesty among friends, and compromise in our relationship with God (just to name a few things). Most of us seek pleasure without the benefit of extreme wisdom and endless wealth, so we blame our dire consequences on the fact that we “did it wrong.” But what if it was not the fact that we did it wrong but rather that it was the wrong thing to do? What if the pursuit of pleasure is not for us? Wow, I said it! Perhaps it is not the goal of humanity and does not lead to happiness at all. Ephesians chapter 1 hits us with some interesting insight into the idea of pleasure. Verse 5 says, “he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will.” Verse 9 says, “he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ.” It seems that our “happiness” is found as we seek the pleasure of HIS will with our lives instead of expecting him to grant us the pleasure of our will. Fasting during lent should involve giving up a pleasure in exchange for spiritual growth opportunities. Perhaps our pursuit of pleasure has served as an obstacle to spiritual growth all along.

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Questions to consider:

1. What pleasure would you say you have been unwilling to give up, even for Christ?
2. What have you pursued believing that if you had it (or them) you would have pleasure?
3. What pleasurable pursuit has resulted in unfavorable outcomes?
4. How can you shift your pursuit of pleasure to be focused on His will rather than yours?

Be Careful How You Live

Lent 2022

Day 13 of 2022 Lent Season
Wednesday, March 16, 2022

Ecclesiastes 2:17-26 NIV

Trying to Find Happiness

¹⁷ So I hated life, because the work that is done under the sun was grievous to me. All of it is meaningless, a chasing after the wind. ¹⁸ I hated all the things I had toiled for under the sun, because I must leave them to the one who comes after me. ¹⁹ And who knows whether that person will be wise or foolish? Yet they will have control over all the fruit of my toil into which I have poured my effort and skill under the sun. This too is meaningless. ²⁰ So my heart began to despair over all my toilsome labor under the sun. ²¹ For a person may labor with wisdom, knowledge and skill, and then they must leave all they own to another who has not toiled for it. This too is meaningless and a great misfortune. ²² What do people get for all the toil and anxious striving with which they labor under the sun? ²³ All their days their work is grief and pain; even at night their minds do not rest. This too is meaningless. ²⁴ A person can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in their own toil. This too, I see, is from the hand of God, ²⁵ for without him, who can eat or find enjoyment? ²⁶ To the person who pleases him, God gives wisdom, knowledge and happiness, but to the sinner he gives the task of gathering and storing up wealth to hand it over to the one who pleases God. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.

Many of us connect what we have with a life of happiness. Some believe that people who live in larger homes, drive more expensive cars, and have more stuff are happier. This belief has even gone as far as people assigning value and choosing relationships based on the quality or amount of stuff one has. Expensive shoes, clothes, cars, etc. are considered signs of success, as people post publicly on social media their stack of money or the bill showing the cost of their meal, as if these things are a sign of personal value or indications of success with the subtle assumption that they contribute or lead to happiness. As part of his research project, Solomon applied wisdom to the idea that having stuff leads to contentment, happiness, or life satisfaction. His conclusion suggests that if having stuff is your main aim in life or the basis of your pursuit of happiness, then you are again working yourself into utter disappointment.

Paul the Apostle shares something very important that he learned on his journey that leads to life's contentment. He explains in his letter to the Philippians in chapter 4, starting a verse eleven, "I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength." Note his key - he gets the needed strength from Christ. How does one do that? He does not rely on his circumstances to determine if he is doing good or bad in life, but rather gets strength from Christ in every circumstance. So, he depends on God to give him strength to effectively manage plenty and depend on him in the same way when he has to manage through

Be Careful How You Live Lent 2022

less. So, the value that he sees is more in his various experiences with Christ and what he has or does not have is a tool designed to deepen his experience with Christ. Did you get that? What he has is not as important as how he experiences that with Christ. Our stuff is a tool that is designed to deepen our walk with Christ. When you have a lot of stuff that is what is needed to deepen your fellowship with Christ, and when you have less, its purpose is the same. Many people look at God/Christ as a tool that impacts our relationship with stuff. This is why Solomon says stuff becomes meaningless. Our time of Lent sacrifice is designed to put things back in order.

Questions to Consider:

1. If you review the words of your prayers, would you say that you see what you have or don't have as a means of enhancing your relationship with Christ, or do you see Christ as a means to having more and better stuff?
2. Do you invest more time, talent, and treasure in gaining more stuff or deepening your relationship with Christ?
3. How can you use this time of Lent sacrifice to clarify and, if needed, adjust your priorities when it comes of stuff?

Be Careful How You Live

Lent 2022

Day 14 of 2022 Lent Season
Thursday, March 17, 2022

Ecclesiastes 3NIV

A Time for Everything

3 There is a time for everything,
and a season for every activity under the heavens:

² a time to be born and a time to die,
a time to plant and a time to uproot,

³ a time to kill and a time to heal,
a time to tear down and a time to build,

⁴ a time to weep and a time to laugh,
a time to mourn and a time to dance,

⁵ a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them,
a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing,

⁶ a time to search and a time to give up,
a time to keep and a time to throw away,

⁷ a time to tear and a time to mend,
a time to be silent and a time to speak,

⁸ a time to love and a time to hate,
a time for war and a time for peace.

⁹ What do workers gain from their toil? ¹⁰ I have seen the burden God has laid on the human race. ¹¹ He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end. ¹² I know that there is nothing better for people than to be happy and to do good while they live. ¹³ That each of them may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all their toil—this is the gift of God. ¹⁴ I know that everything God does will endure forever; nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it. God does it so that people will fear him.

Most of my life I have heard people make the statement, “timing is everything.” Well, I know it is not everything, but it is critical to success. As we experience life, we learn the value of timing. As a baby, we don’t know when it’s the best time to cry, soil our diaper, be hungry, or let out a loud sound. Over time we learn that there is a time for everything, even those things listed above. The question is, what do we use to determine the right timing to do, say, learn, hear, observe, etc. things that contribute to our understanding of life? As children we learn when to say or ask for various things, mostly by asking or saying something at the wrong time and getting a negative response. If our parent, spouse, or friend is in a not so good mood, we might not ask them questions or say things that contribute to frustration. We understand the value of timing, but do we seek the correct source for guidance? For example, our country just faced two years of the most unpredictable wave of death we have ever experienced in recent history as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Those at risk for the most part, did not depend on our differences (white, black, rich, poor, old or young, etc.). It depended on us being human and

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having a soul. As it relates to timing, the most critical and pressing thing that would have contributed to God's agenda was evangelism. This was a time when the opportunities for eternal life for many people were closing fast and it was a "time for witnessing" for every believer. When marriage was being redefined in our country, it was a time for Christian marriages to reflect biblical love. When there is racial tension in our country it is a time for biblical unity under the blood of Christ. When Solomon says, "there is a time for everything under the sun," that means we can align our priorities and actions with God's timing and become active doing great things toward his agenda.

In his wisdom, Solomon sees the burden that God has laid on the human race. This means he could clearly see our responsibility when it comes to time. God has made everything beautiful in its own time. This suggests that there is a right time for everything. It also means that even the right thing can lead to disaster if applied at the wrong time. Since God is the author of time, it is our responsibility to align our actions with his timing (rather than expect him to act in our time). In order to manage time biblically, we must know God's plan and fit our actions within it.

Questions to Consider:

1. In your decisions in life, how much do you consider God's plan and how timing according to his plan is more important than timing according to yours?
2. What is the last thing you have done based on God's timing (not your timing, but God's)?
3. Lent is a season where time is given sacrificially to make sure God matters in your life. Is the time you are giving during Lent a sacrifice that He deserves all year around?

Be Careful How You Live

Lent 2022

Day 15 of 2022 Lent Season
Friday, March 18, 2022

Ecclesiastes 3 (NIV)

The Light Shining Through Your Life

¹⁵ Whatever has already been,
and what will be has been before;
and God will call the past to account.

¹⁶ And I saw something else under the sun:
In the place of judgment—wickedness was there,
in the place of justice—wickedness was there.

¹⁷ I said to myself,
“God will bring into judgment
both the righteous and the wicked,
for there will be a time for every activity,
a time to judge every deed.”

¹⁸ I also said to myself, “As for humans, God tests them so that they may see that they are like the animals. ¹⁹ Surely the fate of human beings is like that of the animals; the same fate awaits them both: As one dies, so dies the other. All have the same breath ¹; humans have no advantage over animals. Everything is meaningless. ²⁰ All go to the same place; all come from dust, and to dust all return. ²¹ Who knows if the human spirit rises upward and if the spirit of the animal goes down into the earth?”

²² So I saw that there is nothing better for a person than to enjoy their work, because that is their lot. For who can bring them to see what will happen after them?

As Solomon continues his research, he addresses the issue of accountability. Who do we all answer too? Many of us search for justice “under the sun,” believing that somehow things should be right on earth. While we [God’s people], are to be a reflection of heaven on earth (as God’s light shines through us) we cannot be bright enough to remove the darkness. In fact, God has never charged us with removing the darkness, he only tells us to be the light. Then he helps us understand the degree of darkness that we are in (through His word) so that we will know how much light is needed so that God can be seen. Now, why is this important? Because there is a place of judgement for both the wicked and the “just.” Yes, while we are justified through Christ, we are still subject to judgement by God. He will not judge us for being a part of the darkness as the wicked will be judged; He will judge us for not being the light that we are charged with being. The world is not dark because of the darkness, it is dark because the light is not bright enough. Consider this, when you walk in a room without light you don’t blame the darkness for being as it is, you are concerned about the lack of light. When the light is not working the darkness prevails.

The only way we can be light is to be a channel through which God can shine. Without God, we are more than dust waiting to return to the ground, we are contributing to the darkness that

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prevents the world from experiencing God. Look around you. Are you biblically brightening up the world around you? Not by being perfect, but by being in such fellowship with God that other people can see his reflection in you. As you fast from a physical desire this week, how can you use that time of sacrifice to look at yourself and see what dark spots (bad attitudes, antisocial, envy, self-centeredness, etc.) need to be removed so that God has more places to shine through you?

Questions to Consider:

1. If there is a shade in your life that God's light can't shine through, what is it?
2. Who is most impacted by the darkness in your life (in other words, who would see more godliness if you had less darkness)?
3. What makes you hold onto your dark spots?

Be Careful How You Live

Lent 2022

Day 16 of 2022 Lent Season
Saturday, March 19, 2022

Ecclesiastes 5 NIV

Fulfill Your Vow to God

5 Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. Go near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools, who do not know that they do wrong.

2 Do not be quick with your mouth,
do not be hasty in your heart
to utter anything before God.

God is in heaven

and you are on earth,
so let your words be few.

3 A dream comes when there are many cares,
and many words mark the speech of a fool.

4 When you make a vow to God, do not delay to fulfill it. He has no pleasure in fools; fulfill your vow. **5** It is better not to make a vow than to make one and not fulfill it. **6** Do not let your mouth lead you into sin. And do not protest to the temple messenger, "My vow was a mistake." Why should God be angry at what you say and destroy the work of your hands? **7** Much dreaming and many words are meaningless. Therefore fear God.

How much does God matter to you? Not in your mind or thoughts, or even in your worship but in your living. Solomon shares a note of caution along with his advice. He says, guard your steps as you go into the house of God. Going into the house of God refers to the experience of sacrificial worship. It was the process of going to the house of God to present your sacrifice in exchange for your sin and trusting that God's blessings, mercy, and guidance will lead you to a more biblical walk as you recognize the impact of your sin on God's holiness. Worship is the moment of our vow to be his servant and honor him as our God. What shapes your vow to God? The songs you sing in worship? The question is, do your steps prove your words to be true or a lie? Your 'amens' are signatures of agreement that you sign as you listen to the word of God in agreement. Have you falsified your signature by the way you live after your voice of amen?

In any relationship there is an exchange of value. Solomon's point is that God, who is holy and without blemish has created a space where we, who are sinful and far from holy, can experience a true relationship with him. This connection with God is not based on life "under the sun" but rather a reflection of God's position in heaven. Yes, his throne of worship. But how do we deal with heaven worship while we live "under the sun?" We must worship God in spirit and in truth [John 4:24]. Solomon raises a concern about how easily we can mess up our worship by living a life that does not reflect our worship. He suggests that there are some who offer the "sacrifice of a fool". What is that??? Well, "the fool hath said in his heart, there is no

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God.” (Psalm 14:1) Meaning, the act of worship has no deeper meaning, no consequences, and no real value. Because there is a God, if our worship is hypocritical (does not match our lifestyle) there is a consequence. For example, in 1 Corinthians 11:30 Paul highlights that many among God’s people are weak, sick and some have died because of compromised worship. Tomorrow is your day of worship, how will you let it impact your life?

Questions to Consider:

1. What do you do to make sure your time in formal worship impacts your daily life?
2. When you consider your favorite worship song [a song that describes God], how much does it remain true in your lifestyle?
3. When you consider who you are in worship, is there an area in your life that is hypocritical?

Be Careful How You Live

Lent 2022

Day 17 of Lent 2022
Monday, March 21, 2022

Luke 15:11-32 NIV

The Parable of the Lost Son

¹¹ Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons. ¹² The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them.

¹³ "Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living.

Have you ever thought, without saying it out loud, that you could make it without God? Of course, you perhaps have never "said" it, but do your actions sometimes show that you think that way? Scripture tells us that we are not to lean (or rely) on our own understanding but in ALL our ways acknowledge (consider God's ways, commands, and options) and He will direct our path (guide you in the right direction) [Proverbs 3:5-6]. When we do not do this, we are deciding that we want to follow our own path. Just prior to the passage above Jesus shared a parable about a lost sheep and a lost coin (Luke 15:3-10) and He then expands the discussion by sharing about a lost son. A son because he was a child of God, lost because he decided to follow his own path. What's interesting is that he has the audacity to take the blessings from his father and use those blessings in ways that contradict God's path for him. This is where I want to focus today.

Each of us is given a measure of grace according to our calling in Christ (Ephesians 4:7). God has carefully blessed [equipped] us according to the path that He is guiding us through. As we lean to our own understanding, we actually walk down a path that we are not equipped to handle. Consider this: as a parent you are equipped to parent your children according to God's guidance, manage your treasures according to His priorities, to engage in relationships according to His standards, etc. This also means that when you are not walking according to His path you are walking a path that you are not equipped to be on.

For example, suppose God gave you a ticket to Florida and gave you all that you needed to be successful there for a year. However, you decide you want to spend that year in Alaska. You get to Alaska but are equipped for Florida and you get frustrated as you demand of God that He give you blessings based on your path. God will continue to give you what is needed in Florida while you are trying to make it fit in Alaska.

We are often asking God to exchange the grace that He has given us for the path He is leading us through for the grace needed for a path He did not equip us for. We are in fact saying, "God, give me all of my share of the estate" so I can go do my thing with your grace. The result is often like the one in today's passage: we "squander" our blessings in unbiblical living. It's not that our living is always "bad" but it is not according to God's path so what we are experiencing is a journey down a path that we are not equipped to handle.

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How can we allow God to direct our path?

1. We must assume that God has blessed us for the path He has called us to. When we make unbiblical choices, we are choosing a path that is more difficult because we are ill equipped to [or not blessed] to walk on our chosen path.
2. We must remember that God will not put more on you than you can handle (I Corinthians 10:13) but you can choose a more difficult path but opting to go your own way rather than God's way [think of Jonah for example].
3. God is always waiting for you to return to the path that He has equipped you for. His chosen path for you will not change because you decide on something different.

Be Careful How You Live

Lent 2022

Day 18 of Lent 2022
Tuesday, March 22, 2022

Luke 15:14-16 NIV

¹⁴ After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵ So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. ¹⁶ He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

Growing up I often heard the statement, “desperate times call of desperate measures.” This meant that under normal circumstances I would not do something, but under the current or rather extreme circumstances this is an appropriate response. If you are normal, you have perhaps experienced times in your life where you would find this statement fitting or appropriate. During desperate times we usually are so focused on the circumstances that we forget that even these moments have a biblical purpose. Whenever we discover that our current grace is not fitting for the current demands, it is usually because of one or two things:

1. It is the result of us taking a path that God did not equip us for and the blessings that we have don't fit the circumstances that we face. It's like taking a Volkswagen to move a house full of furniture when you need a truck. The load that you have to carry seems like so much more than your blessings can handle.
2. It is the result of our lack of faith in the fact that God's grace IS sufficient for the circumstances, and we need to grow to the point where we can effectively apply his grace to the situation in a way that better equips us for the next path that God has for us.

In the gospel of John this process is explained in this way, “he cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit [stops trying], while every branch that does bear fruit [does its best to be fruitful but lacks that needed fruit to meet his desire], he prunes [or purges] so that it will be more fruitful [John 15:2]. To purge means to remove the parts that are undesirable, unproductive, or any defilement, usually in an abrupt and violent way in order to salvage or preserve what is valuable.

In today's passage the son who took a path unprescribed by God ended up in circumstances that he did not seem able to handle with his current blessings. His first decision was to continue in that path even deeper believing that if he goes further, it might eventually work out. He took a job that drove him even further from the path that God equipped him for and found himself wanting [or without] even more.

How far do you run from God before deciding that He is your solution, even when you are off the biblical path? Can you trust God even when you know you are the one who did wrong? Our

Be Careful How You Live Lent 2022

relationship with God is dynamic in that it is fully comprehensive. Meaning that its value does not stop even when our obedience does. His redeeming characteristic keeps him from retaliatory responses toward our disobedience, while his mercy keeps him from holding a grudge. His grace demands that we grow from our own deficiency, and his love is such that we are never alone.

Have you made some bad decisions, taken the wrong path, or committed to the wrong thing? Perhaps you found yourself in bad circumstance through passive decisions [a decision that resulted from something you didn't do]. Perhaps it is that you stopped reading God's word, underprioritized biblical fellowship, or put your faith in something other than Him. Often, when we mess up, we try to fix our mess to get us back into good standing. The lesson we learn from today's passage is that more wrongs won't get you to the right place.

Questions to consider

1. In what areas of your life are you distant from God?
2. What inside you needs to be purged?
3. What circumstances do you face that demand biblically centered personal growth?
4. What steps do you need to take now, to move you closer to God?

Be Careful How You Live Lent 2022

Day 19 of Lent 2022
Wednesday March 23, 2022

Luke 15:17–20 NIV

¹⁷ “When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! ¹⁸ I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. ¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.’ ²⁰ So he got up and went to his father. “But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

Coming home to visit after moving out was always filled with a stew pot of emotions for me as I was on my journey toward adulthood. The greatest experience was always coming home to see mom and how excited she was to have me home and the peaceful experience of being in a safe and familiar place. The challenge was that I knew that what I was doing while away was not really acceptable living according to mom’s standard. Most of what I had learned in my exploratory independence, was that she was right about most everything she had warned me about and coached me toward while I was living under her roof.

Our relationship with God is not based on performance, but our performance does impact our fellowship. Fellowship is the interaction that takes place in a relationship, a relationship is the “legal” or “biblical” connection that we have with a person. For example, you can take two very different husbands, one who loves and spends time with his wife, and another who disrespects and neglects his wife. Both of them are “husbands” (both biblically and legally) but their fellowship within the husband-and-wife relationship is very different in that one brings an experience of love to his wife and the other just the opposite.

God is passionate about both the relationship (which is possible by accepting Christ as Savior) and the fellowship (the interaction that takes place within that relationship). God’s commitment to us is described in 2 Corinthians 5:19a as Him reconciling us to Himself [thus creating the relationship] while not counting our sins against us [allowing fellowship within that relationship]. When we sin, we forget how eager God is to experience fellowship with us. Even more so, sometimes we even forget that we are in an everlasting relationship with God.

Just as the father is waiting and longing for fellowship with the son in our passage, our heavenly Father is longing for fellowship with us. He created the pathway through Christ so that no matter how far off the path we wander, He is always waiting for us where we left off.

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Questions to Consider:

1. In what areas of your life is God most excluded?
2. In what area of your life do you have the greatest fellowship [interaction] with God?
3. In what area of your life do you leave God standing, waiting for you to return?

Be Careful How You Live

Lent 2022

Day 20 of Lent 2022
Thursday March 24, 2022

Luke 15:21-24 NIV

²¹ “The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’²² “But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³ Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. ²⁴ For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate.

Do you know that you can move from death to life without dying? Yes, living in darkness is in the eyes of God the same as living in death. Since life is in the Spirit, that means when we are living in the flesh, we are being driven by what is dead. Romans 7:24 refers to our flesh as a body of death which wars against the spirit.

In our passage today the father states that his son was dead and is alive. It seems that the son’s lack of fellowship with the father is being referred to as “dead,” while his return to fellowship is referred to as being alive again. All of this while not ever losing his position as “son.”

Sometimes we, like the son, feel far too lost to be found. In fact, the son felt so lost that he assumed that he was no longer a son. He assumed that he had lost the relationship because he was dead in his fellowship with the father. He came to the father with an unacceptable offer. He proposed that he could be less than a son. But what he did not realize is that his sonship was not in his control. His sonship was not changeable to the father. But his fellowship was totally in his control; he chose to be dead in his fellowship. BUT because the relationship is in the hands of God, even when he was dead in his fellowship his relationship was in good hands. SOOOO... how do we move from death to life in our fellowship with God?

We as the son must come to a place of humility in our relationship with God. Scripture says, “humble yourself before the Lord and he will lift you up,” (James 4:10). Humility is a reduction of one’s importance with the understanding that there is a greater or more significant value. The meaning of what the son said was this: “My desire to do what was important to me should have never become more important than your desire and expectations for me.” He said, “I have sinned against heaven [God’s plan for me] and against his father [his lord]. This recognition is significant in how we approach God for closer fellowship. It is not a compromise or a request from God to not do our thing, it is a surrender. It is us laying down our desire for His will.

The next thing we must do is repent. Meaning we must demonstrate that we have grown beyond repeating the same behavior. Repentance is not simply an apology. It consists of growth beyond the error being acknowledged. An apology without growth is not repentance, nor does the simple apology enhance or return the fellowship that is lost in our relationship with God.

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These two acts led to full restoration. The son was given a robe [public recognition of his association with the father], a ring [a sign of authority to make decisions on behalf of the family], sandals [freedom and access to the property of his father] and a party [a promotion or rite of passage that acknowledge his growth].

Questions to Consider

1. In what areas of your fellowship with God have you been or are you now “dead?”
[Example: Bible study, prayers, application of His word to some areas of my life, etc.]
2. In what areas have you attempted to jump back into fellowship with surrender and/or growth? We cannot change by simply acknowledging that we are willing to change. We like the son must understand the nature of our sin [missing the mark]. It is more than a simple “difference of opinion.”
3. Is there an area where you are stuck in darkness and not ready to surrender and/or grow beyond? Commit that area to prayer now.

Be Careful How You Live Lent 2022

Day 21 of Lent 2022
Friday, March 25, 2022

Luke 15:25-27 NIV

²⁵ “Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶ So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. ²⁷ ‘Your brother has come,’ he replied, ‘and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.’

Being in fellowship with God keeps us on the path of righteousness. It’s not just the relationship that offers us a set of unique benefits, it includes how “interactive” we are with God. Some of us see him as “that guy on the throne,” and while He is that, He is also one that we can call “abba father” [Romans 8:15].

While this moment is not given much attention in this parable, I believe it is a crucial moment in the story. As the lost son came back into fellowship with his father, he desired to be one of the servants. In this part of the story, we hear the voice of one of the servants share with the older brother his perspective of what was going on. What I found interesting is that the servant’s perspective is fully in line with the father. It seems like his earthly position did not stand in the way of him experiencing a biblical perspective. He did not speak as if he was frustrated that the lost son could be lost and still comeback and have more authority than him; he seemed to be in celebration with full understanding that the lost son has grown in repentance and surrounded in humility. In fact, if we look at the complete verse offered earlier, it says, “The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, “*Abba*, Father.” [Romans 8:15]. An evangelist moment, an experience of spiritual growth, a reunification with the father, a rededication to the right path, are all experiences that bring great joy to our Father’s heart.

In the last couple of years, the world has seen more deaths at one time than perhaps in any other period in our lifetime. In 2020 we had an estimated 15% percent increase in the number of people dying. At the same time, we had less evangelism in the United States and worldwide than we have had in years past. In other words, while many of us claimed to be in fellowship with the Father, what is most significant to Him seemed to be off the radar with us. Not only did this servant see and hear the party, he understood what was being celebrated and seemed to join the father in his feeling of gratefulness in the lost son’s safe and sound return.

Do your priorities align with God’s? When he celebrates do you celebrate at his joy? As a child I longed to get things for Christmas. Yes, I was self-centered and only focusing on what was important to me. I didn’t think about the cost of the gifts, the work behind getting it for me or the sacrifice made for me to get it. As I matured while still a child, what I received became less important. I honestly watched my mom as she struggled to make sure everyone was pleased with what she could give. She would ask all of the kids, “Do you like what you got?” Sometimes

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when my younger siblings would complain my heart would sink. My joy was wrapped up in what made mom happy. This servant seems to be fully in sync with God. Are you?

Questions to Consider:

1. Where in your Christian walk are you selfish or self-centered [see things primarily from you point of view rather than God's]?
2. Do you have a genuine emotional response to God's disappointments? Or is it mainly a passing thought?
3. What have you given up that was important to you for what is important to God?

Be Careful How You Live

Lent 2022

Day 22 of Lent 2022
Saturday, March 26, 2022

Luke 15:28–32 NIV

²⁸ “The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. ²⁹ But he answered his father, ‘Look! All these years I’ve been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. ³⁰ But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!’ ³¹ “‘My son,’ the father said, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. ³² But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’”

It can be easy to dress up like a Christian and act like we have a relationship with God. In today’s reading, I would like for us to compare the relationship that the servant had with the father and that of the older brother. While the story includes the younger son as the one who committed the action to be observed, the comparative fellowship with the servant and the brother gives us much to observe also.

The servant perhaps spent many years under the leadership of the father serving him with gladness and joy. He appears to have no problem with the return of the younger brother and even seems to speak with gladness regarding his return. He served gladly which resulted in him enjoying the celebration with the father and even sharing in his joy.

On the other hand, there was the older son. His issue seems to be that he had been “slaving” for many years. It seems that there was not much joy in serving the Lord. In fact, he seems to serve grudgingly, even with resentment. Sure, he had a relationship with God as he was the son, the older son. But the fellowship he had with God [serving him] was something he hated. Our service to God should be with gladness (Psalm 100:2). We are told to serve Him with all of our heart [Deuteronomy 10:12]. So, it’s mirror time. What does your service for God look like? Do you serve the Lord strictly out of duty? Is your fellowship [interaction with God] a robotic task rather than a joyful experience? Which one are you?

Joyful service requires the appreciation of the relationship and joy in the fellowship. Many people work a job that they literally hate. They dread going to work each day and see it only as a necessary evil. Others see their jobs as contributing to a greater cause, making a difference or contributing to their personal growth. Serving the Lord is a kingdom work and should be experienced as such. It is not only about completing a task but about contributing to a heavenly agenda. What greater joy can be experienced than to see someone move from death to life. It is even more joyful for us to experience moving from death to life. Being in the relationship with God without a genuine fellowship means you must feel like the older brother. Yes he was a son [had a relationship with the father] but without the fellowship with God he was left bitter and envious.

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Assignment:

This week as we approach our time of worship, write down the name of 2 songs that speak to you about the joy of serving God. Then write a brief letter to God sharing what would give you more joy in serving him and pray with expectation that through this lent season, God will bring you to a point where you can genuinely experience the joy of fellowship with God.

Be Careful How You Live

Lent 2022

Day 23 of Lent 2022
Monday, March 28, 2022

Acts 2:1–4

2 When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. **2** Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. **3** They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. **4** All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

The concept of an “indwelling spirit” is not an experience that God’s people have always enjoyed. While the Spirit of God did dwell among humanity the timing of when and why are things that cannot be overlooked as it clarifies God’s intended purpose. Let’s look at a few examples of God talking about the relationship of His Spirit and humanity.

The first is a comment that God makes early on in this fellowship with mankind. In Genesis chapter 6 God is discussing how far mankind had drifted from God’s word as they knew it. He describes them as being driven by their every imagination. He states in verse three, “My Spirit will not contend with humans forever, for they are mortal; their days will be a hundred and twenty years.” The word, “contend” or some versions use the word, “strive,” can be interpreted as, “tolerate” or “endure.” God is saying that His Spirit has a limit on how much He will tolerate as a cohabitor with us. While it is God’s desire to dwell with His people as a saving element in our mortality, He is not willing to allow our mortal ways to totally dominate the relationship. In the example in Genesis, He states His limitation on the lifespan of mortal man to 120 years.

In an interesting conversation with God David, in Psalm 143:10 says to God, “teach me to do your will, for you are my God; may your good Spirit lead me on level ground.” This indicates that the Spirit of God is willing to lead and guide us away from the unacceptable journey but in conjunction with freewill. So, we are seeing here that God says, allow my spirit to lead you according to my will, and He is also saying that following the leadership of the Spirit must be your will. He is also saying, and this is important, my spirit will not always/continue to tolerate those who choose to go in the way of their mortality rather than follow my eternal guidance.

How is your spiritual walk? I don’t mean church or the times when you are doing “Christian stuff,” but how much do you truly seek after the guidance of the Spirit of God in everyday life? God makes a clear and distinct difference between being motivated by our mortal desires and being led by His Spirit.

Questions to consider:

1. What is your process for ensuring that your decisions are spiritually led?

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2. How do you keep your fellowship with God in the place where you are confident that you are hearing His guidance?
3. Did you know that Lent is designed to strengthen the connections that you have with God spiritually? How has giving up something physical helped deepen your spiritual journey? Is your 40-day sacrifice really a way to connect with the Spirit at a deeper level?

Be Careful How You Live Lent 2022

Day 24 of Lent 2022
Tuesday, March 29 2022

Acts 2:1-13

2 When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. **2** Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. **3** They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. **4** All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. **5** Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. **6** When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. **7** Utterly amazed, they asked: "Aren't all these who are speaking Galileans?" **8** Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? **9** Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, **10** Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome **11** (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!" **12** Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, "What does this mean?" **13** Some, however, made fun of them and said, "They have had too much wine."

As we reread yesterday's passage adding a little more context, I want to dive a little deeper in our observation of the work of the Spirit. The Spirit of God is in the process of changing locations as He adjusts how He will dwell among his people. We see a number of examples of how He shows Himself throughout the Old Testament experiences, but the most common one is reflected in how He dwelt with his people during their wilderness journey. You might ask why that is so important. God went as far as to free the people of Israel because of His desire to be worshiped (Exodus 8:1). Yes, worship is a big deal with God. In fact, any time in history where God allows or brings destruction upon humanity, it involves a lack of worship toward Him. It's not an earthly thing, it's a God thing. Worship is a requirement of all of creation, in heaven and on earth. It was before we were and will be after our time on earth. God is very serious about worship. He says to Moses, "go to Pharaoh and say to him, this is what the LORD says: Let my people go, so that they may worship me."

When the children of Israel were finally free, they ended up in a wilderness because of their disobedience, but God still wanted to be worshiped. So, God gives them instructions on how to create an acceptable worship center for Him. This center, called the tabernacle was designed to God's liking and according to His instructions and commanded activities. When the center was complete and all guidelines were followed, the Spirit of the Lord came to "dwell" among them and experience the worship. You ask, "What did He look like?" The scripture describes his presence in Exodus 12:21 in this way, "By day the Lord went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night." Wind and fire were the tools that God used to make his presence known to mankind.

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As I stated earlier, in Acts 2, the Spirit of God is moving from a temple/tabernacle dwelling to the dwelling of the hearts and souls of individuals. WHAT!!! Yes, we are the new dwelling place.

This was clear to those who came on the day of Pentecost, they were mostly Jews and knew the manifestations that God used in the wilderness. He does that same thing here. His first presentation was the wind (cloud); described as a mighty wind. His other known manifestation was fire. But this time He did not appear as a major flame of fire, instead He shows up as a small flame (that looked like a tongue or a flicker) that was above everyone's head. As with the temple, the flame above the dwelling place gives an indication of the location of the mercy seat of God. The Spirit of God moved from the dwelling of the tabernacle or temple to the indwelling of each believer in the son. You are now the dwelling place of God.

Things to notice:

1. God, even though He is holy, and we are not, has a passionate desire to dwell with us. What does that mean to you?
2. God's Spirit works in the collective gathering of His people.
3. As the Spirit of God dwells in you, what does He have to deal with while dwelling with you?

Be Careful How You Live Lent 2022

Day 25 of Lent 2022
Wednesday, March 30 2022

Acts 2:1-13

2 When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. **2** Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. **3** They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. **4** All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. **5** Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. **6** When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. **7** Utterly amazed, they asked: “Aren’t all these who are speaking Galileans?” **8** Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? **9** Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, **10** Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome **11** (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!” **12** Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, “What does this mean?” **13** Some, however, made fun of them and said, “They have had too much wine.”

Steaming from the same passage, we will continue dissecting these first thirteen verses to learn more about the move of the Spirit from the dwelling among His people to the dwelling in God’s people. God’s desire to be among his people is highlighted in Exodus 29:45–46 when He says, “**45** Then I will dwell among the Israelites and be their God. **46** They will know that I am the Lord their God, who brought them out of Egypt so that I might dwell among them. I am the Lord their God.” But in the New Testament He deepens the connection by His commitment to the indwelling work of the Spirit. In John 14:17 he says, “**17** the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.” This is Christ foretelling of the coming of Pentecost event. Christ is explaining to the disciples that what they had experienced regarding the Spirit of God was about to make a huge adjustment.

In order to create the perfect element for this dynamic transition, God selected a day that was a traditional day of unity and worship for those who were familiar with the “dwelling among” experience with the Spirit of God, the day of Pentecost. The term Pentecost comes from the Greek word that means “fiftieth.” It refers to the Jewish festival celebration of the fiftieth day after the first fruits, also known as the “Feast of Weeks.” This was a perfect day because it commanded all Jews to come to the holy land for the celebration. Our passage explains that Jews from all over and various cultures and languages showed up for the celebration. God’s passion for unity among the body for this unique experience is critical. Upon the transition of the dwelling of the Spirit of God, not only did God plan for there to be unity in worship, but He bridged the language gap by allowing what was being said (the message of God) to be heard in every language represented in the place. This means that the Spirit of God prioritizes unity

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among His people; diversity in the work of the Spirit and a common focus around His word. His introduction to the new relationship that the Spirit of God would have with the people of God laid out significant factors for us to observe as priorities for him whenever we want to see the spirit of God at work.

Questions for think about...

1. Considering God's criteria for the moving of the Spirit of God, would you have qualified to be a participant on that day?
2. Seeing that fellowship among believers is critical for the Spirit, how much does your lack of fellowship limit the Spirit's work in your life?
3. What does the work of the Spirit of God look like in your life?

Be Careful How You Live

Lent 2022

Day 26 of Lent 2022
Thursday, March 31, 2022

Acts 2:14-18

¹⁴ Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: “Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. ¹⁵ These people are not drunk, as you suppose. It’s only nine in the morning! ¹⁶ No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: ¹⁷ “In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. ¹⁸ Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.

Acts chapter two continues to provide the historical understanding of the Spirit of God’s transition into the hearts of His people. Peter, who at this time we could refer to as the lead apostle, stood up to explain or give clarity to the moment. He explains that this transition was not without forewarning, as he points to the prophetic message of Joel 2: 28–32. This passage highlights God’s promise to pour out His Spirit on all flesh. While Joel’s overall focus included God’s judgement on Israel for her rebellion, it clearly includes the event at Pentecost and the promises of future blessings as part of the work of the Spirit of God. While Joel’s prophecy is only partly fulfilled, the work of the Spirit of God at Pentecost helps us understand that the transition of the Spirit’s work was not a “spur of the moment” event but rather a long-term plan with a future ending in mind.

This helps us understand the relationship between the work of the Holy Spirit and the significance of God’s word. Understanding the work of the Holy Spirit is only possible by understanding the word of God. Many people claim work of the Holy Spirit that actually contradicts the written word of God. This is harmful to the message and mission of the Spirit’s work. The challenge is that many commit this atrocity without knowing and sometimes without intentionality. Please note that it is the Spirit that makes scripture clear and without clarity of the word it is impossible to understand the Spirit’s work in your personal life. John 16:13 says, “But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.” This is a critical verse to implement into your life. It highlights the Holy Spirit’s work in making sure you and I are guided into truth by this indwelling work combined with the willful efforts on our part to invest time, commitment, effort, and fellowship in the written word.

In most generations there are a large remnant of God’s people who would be classified as hypocrites. Meaning that they are biblically classified as Christians while at the same time their lives fail to reflect biblical living. This is often because they fail to make the connection necessary to be guided by this dual work of the Holy Spirit and the Word of God. Most will lean more heavenly toward one or the other. It’s like trying to operate a car by depending on either the transmission OR the engine. Both are equally critical for progress and without

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understanding and applying their work together, you really cannot experience or fully understand their purpose. In order for you to understand your purpose in God, you must have the work of the Spirit of God in your life guiding you into the truth of the Word of God.

Look at how you currently manage your Christian walk. So far, we understand that success requires (1) a view of the word of God that is seen through the lens of the Holy Spirit, (2) a commitment to a relationship/fellowship life with both, (3) a demand of unity among the body that allows the Spirit to work as intended, (4) a life of corporate and individual worship, and (5) the use of your freewill to satisfy all of the above. How effectively are you managing all of this?

Deep thoughts to consider:

1. It is critical to know that God's plan is not "piece meal," but rather a clear strategic plan that is designed to guide us toward biblical living.
2. We must have a balanced life that includes fellowship with God's word, the Holy Spirit, the unity of the body of Christ and His Lordship, and a freewill commitment, in order to avoid hypocrisy.
3. What do you need to change today to become better balanced in your efforts toward biblical living?

Be Careful How You Live Lent 2022

Day 27 of Lent 2022
Friday, April 1, 2022

Acts 2:19–24

¹⁹ I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. ²⁰ The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord. ²¹ And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’ ²² “Fellow Israelites, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. ²³ This man was handed over to you by God’s deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. ²⁴ But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.

Wherever there is grace, mercy and freewill, there is always going to be judgment and consequences in order to reflect and maintain holiness. In his address to the crowd on that day of Pentecost, Peter highlights the power of freewill choice in today’s passage. He points out in the words of the prophet Joel, that the world will be exposed to “wonders” [things at a level beyond our experiences] that include blood and fire, darkness and billows of smoke. It is hard to determine what they might look like. It could be the result of a nuclear war (which could happen any day) or a nature driven episode that is beyond what the world could handle. But it is clear that such devastation is written into God’s plan as a result of sin among God’s people. Peter calls it the glorious day of the Lord.

He shares the freewill choice of the Israelites and how they used their freewill to reject the relationship offered by Christ. He states that they had the plan of God in their hands and still were blind to its application, and in fact rejected Him by supporting his crucifixion. While Peter ends this discussion by highlighting that death could not hold Christ, I want to back up a little and address the clear and inexcusable rejection of Christ and His offer of a connection with God and a deep and significant fellowship through the Spirit of God. We have to ask ourselves especially during this Lent season, are you doing the same today?

Rejecting God’s plan is very easy. It is rejected by not accepting it. Note what John 3:18 –21, says: ¹⁸ “Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son. ¹⁹ This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. ²⁰ Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. ²¹ But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God.”

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Note that the issue is more about passively accepting darkness. It is the unwillingness to put critical things in place in our lives that drive spiritual growth and move away from things that lead to condemnation from God. When working a job, you don't have to do anything WRONG to get fired, all you have to do is NOT do right. This seem to be the case when it comes to biblical living as well. Most of us are living hypocrites, not because of what we are doing but rather because what we are NOT doing to advance our biblical living.

Questions to consider:

1. Where in your life can you see hypocrisy in our responsibility for biblical living?
2. Name two places in your life where passive procrastination is leading to spiritual hypocrisy?
3. How can you become more intentional about using your freewill to engage with the Holy Spirit, the Word of God, the fellowship of the body, and the Lordship of Christ?

Be Careful How You Live

Lent 2022

Day 28 of Lent 2022
Saturday, April 2, 2022

Acts 2:25-28

²⁵ David said about him: “I saw the Lord always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. ²⁶ Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest in hope, ²⁷ because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead, you will not let your holy one see decay. ²⁸ You have made known to me the paths of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence.’

As we wrap up this week of Lent devotionals, and prepare our hearts for our current sermon series entitled “Stay on Track,” I want to grab this short and significant portion of Peter’s discourse where he quotes the words of David and his picture of Christ in his glory. He highlights the most critical element of living biblically, and that is the focus on our heavenly destination. Christ made a way for us to live heavenly on earth and demands that we do. Note a very familiar passage in the Lord’s prayer found in Matthew 6:9–10, “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, ¹⁰ your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” It is our role to make heaven happen on earth through our submission to God’s plan for biblical living.

The arrangement that God has made in the work of the Holy Spirit gives us a connection with heaven that allows us to see, understand, and live in a way that is beyond earthly principles. Note Paul’s comments in I Corinthians 2:10–12, “¹⁰ these are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. ¹¹ For who knows a person’s thoughts except their own spirit within them? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. ¹² What we have received is not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may understand what God has freely given us.”

This makes it clear that we CAN live biblically and reflect heaven on earth as we live according to God’s strategy. It also means that without His strategy we cannot live a biblical life. In the CFBC series “Stay on Track” many things are addressed that can distract us from this picture of glory that Peter highlights. As we keep our eyes on the prize, we must implement God’s strategy and become a reflection of heaven on earth according to the grace that God has given each of us.

Final thoughts for the week

Living biblically requires a significant understanding of the Holy Spirit. As you reflect on what we have learned, please answer the following questions:

1. What major adjustments in the Holy Spirit’s work is displayed in Acts two?

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2. What things must be in place to live a biblical life?
3. What is the primary goal of biblical living?
4. What are you doing to “Stay on Track?”

Be Careful How You Live

Lent 2022

Day 29 of Lent 2022
Monday, April 4, 2022

Jude 1–4

¹ Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and a brother of James,

To those who have been called, who are loved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ:

² Mercy, peace and love be yours in abundance.

³ Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt compelled to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to God's holy people. ⁴ For certain individuals whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord.

We begin this week's devotional time with a scarcely discussed self-professed servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James, the Church leader that we know well and recognize by his straightforward approach to discipleship. Jude, like James, was the "half-brother" of Jesus. Jude, whose full name is Judas was known in the community as "the brother of Jesus" as acknowledged by the community in Matthew 13:55 where it says, "Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't his mother's name Mary, and aren't his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas?" [also mentioned in Mark 6:3]. Jude, along with his other brothers were early doubters of Christ and his mission. In fact, as the Jewish leaders were out to murder Jesus, his brothers even suggested that he come out of secure locations and present himself publicly, suggesting that he wanted to be a "public figure." Note John 7:2–5, "² But when the Jewish Festival of Tabernacles was near, ³ Jesus' brothers said to him, 'Leave Galilee and go to Judea, so that your disciples there may see the works you do. ⁴ No one who wants to become a public figure acts in secret. Since you are doing these things, show yourself to the world.' ⁵ For even his own brothers did not believe in him." But later, primarily after the resurrection, they are clearly strong disciples along with the apostles as reflected in Act 1:14 as it states, "they all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers."

Jude's primary focus is for believers to "stay on track." There had been some who were unbelievers and non-followers of Christ who had become an active part of the church activities and were persuading many in the body to drift from the faith. Jude's concern is that we (as he and some of his brothers once were) can be with Christ every day and still not be a part of His sovereign agenda. Yes, it's possible to be in a "relationship" with God and not be a part of His sovereign agenda. The Spirit of God only used Jude to write one book in scripture, but the message is deep and significant, urging each of us to have a "careful Christian walk" as he highlights God's approach to such things.

Be Careful How You Live Lent 2022

Questions to consider:

1. Are you led by Christ's agenda for His kingdom or more by your own desires, perceptions, and/or benefits?
2. Are you looking for God to fulfill "your purpose" or are you a part of the fulfillment of God's purpose? In your own words, define the difference.

Be Careful How You Live

Lent 2022

Day 30 of Lent 2022
Tuesday, April 5, 2022

Jude 4–7

⁴ For certain individuals whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord. ⁵ Though you already know all this, I want to remind you that the Lord at one time delivered his people out of Egypt, but later destroyed those who did not believe. ⁶ And the angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their proper dwelling—these he has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day. ⁷ In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire.

Jude, as with James his brother, was really concerned about people not taking seriously the impact that holiness has on sinful living. While grace is truly amazing in that it gives us the opportunity to experience life with God, it does not erase the reality of judgment and its requirement when sin and holiness occupy the same space. Grace has led us to believe that as long as we are among that crowd of believers, we are good with God. This is not reflective of God's character; He does not ignore sin. Jesus makes the statement in Galatians 5:9 that a little leaven makes the whole lump of yeast leavened. In other words, sin cannot exist in the space of holiness and not impact all of holiness. God must address sin because of its impact on all of holiness. God is holy and only deals with what is holy. In fact, in 1 Peter 1:14–16 He says, "As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."

Jude wants to make sure we get that point. He gives us some examples to help us understand God's approach. He starts with his community of people who were slaves in Egypt. He notes how God delivered them all but when they failed to meet the standards of obedience expended by God, He also destroyed them all. He shares an example that is beyond human experience, that of the angels who were once in heaven in positions of authority but after compromising holiness were eternally banded and sentenced to a eternity in bondage. He then gives a human example using Sodom and Gomorrah as an example of humans (who are all created for God's purpose) who face a similar fate after sins of misusing sexual freedoms in a way that compromised the holiness of sex and procreation. Jude wants us to know that if holiness is not a priority in your life, you might be at a distance from God and not even paying attention. Perhaps it's time to check yourself.

While grace is one of our greatest blessings as New Testament believers, it has also been a major distraction from living biblically. If sin were addressed immediately, as it is sometimes done in the Old Testament, I wonder if many of us would live more holy lives? Paul raises a similar question in Roman 6:1–2 when he asked, "What shall we say, then? Shall we go on

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sinning so that grace may increase?” but quickly answers by saying, “By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?”

Questions to consider:

1. How can you spend more time focused on “holy” living (different from simply avoiding sin)? This requires living for God rather than simply avoiding what He does not like.
2. What’s the unholy thing that you most struggle with? What would help you become spiritually stronger in that area?
3. How can you walk holy in the common areas of your life? (Work life, single/married life, church life, financial management life, personal/friendship life, entertainment life, etc.)?

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Day 31 of Lent 2022
Wednesday, April 6, 2022

Jude 8–11

⁸ In the very same way, on the strength of their dreams these ungodly people pollute their own bodies, reject authority and heap abuse on celestial beings. ⁹ But even the archangel Michael, when he was disputing with the devil about the body of Moses, did not himself dare to condemn him for slander but said, “The Lord rebuke you!” ¹⁰ Yet these people slander whatever they do not understand, and the very things they do understand by instinct—as irrational animals do—will destroy them. ¹¹ Woe to them! They have taken the way of Cain; they have rushed for profit into Balaam’s error; they have been destroyed in Korah’s rebellion.

Jude continues with a voice of frustration as he describes the attitude of those who sort of “mock” holiness and ignore God’s rules. He says they are driven by their own dreams and thus pollute their bodies. This could mean bad eating but dives much deeper than what we eat. He is reflecting on what we pour into our minds (songs, videos, movies, conversations, both scripted and reality TV, what we choose to read, etc.) He is making it clear that unholy things are not just problems for the moment, but they pollute us. We often think that we can pray or church away the impact of such things. According to Jude, it’s like pouring garbage in your bowl and then eating something good out of it and claiming that your meal was pure.

He goes further by highlighting the pattern of rejecting biblically assigned authority. Today’s culture, especially in America, promotes, encourages and celebrates rebellion toward authority. As one commentator put’s it, “we only recognize self as the only real authority in our lives.” Many of us do this because we don’t focus on being holy, we spend more time trying not to be sinners.

There are many ways that we reject biblical authority. For example, by choosing only certain passages to follow in the bible and deeming others as less important, by treating our worship commitment as if we are shopping for our favorite show or pastime rather than trying to adapt to God’s pleasure, by making up our own rules about what God likes or does not like, as if He has no opinions. We even choose who will provide life guidance and spiritual insight based on earthly criteria; sometimes making those decisions based on our feelings (desires) and what satisfies our fleshly interests. During the darkest days of humanity, the common reference is the same, “every man did what was right in his own eyes” [Jeremiah 3:17; Judges 17:6; Judges 21:25].

In Genesis 6:5–6 we see a sad moment in God’s experience with mankind. God, who created humanity in His image as a reflection of Him, looks at His creation and observes that they have used their freewill to become filled with wickedness and every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil, all of the time. God experiences broken-heartedness. The idea that this mercy, grace and redemption would have a place to shine in a freewill experience using active obedience, faith, and trust in God, was rejected by God’s chief creation. Verse 6 talks

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about the pain in God's heart, describing Him as deeply troubled and experiencing regret. Yes, God can experience such emotions when we dishonor, misuse, and abuse our God given freewill.

We proudly sing the song, "I love the Lord, he heard my cry," (one of my favorites). I wonder if we love him enough to hear His cry.

Jude is frustrated that his brother, but more so his Lord and savior is being abused and taken advantage of by those for whom he died on the cross.

Questions to consider:

1. Do you every hear God's cry as he observes how you treat his word, His worship, and/or His will? Think of a time when you can imagine God's joyful heart as he observes you... or are there times of regret?
2. If you were living holy on purpose (with a plan and intent) what is the first thing you need to change?
3. As you consider that change, is God worth the effort that needs to go into that change? If yes, prove it...

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Day 32 of Lent 2022
Thursday, April 7, 2022

Jude 9-13

⁹ But even the archangel Michael, when he was disputing with the devil about the body of Moses, did not himself dare to condemn him for slander but said, “The Lord rebuke you!” ¹⁰ Yet these people slander whatever they do not understand, and the very things they do understand by instinct—as irrational animals do—will destroy them. ¹¹ Woe to them! They have taken the way of Cain; they have rushed for profit into Balaam’s error; they have been destroyed in Korah’s rebellion. ¹² These people are blemishes at your love feasts, eating with you without the slightest qualm—shepherds who feed only themselves. They are clouds without rain, blown along by the wind; autumn trees, without fruit and uprooted—twice dead. ¹³ They are wild waves of the sea, foaming up their shame; wandering stars, for whom blackest darkness has been reserved forever.

Jude hits us with a very deep example. He points out that what God expect from us is not a new thing nor a human thing, it is a deeply heavenly concept. God commands us to be the examples of heaven on earth, the salt and the light, the most visible illustration of heavenly principles lived out on earth. Jude highlights two kinds of angelic beings in his discussion. Michael the archangel, meaning a high ranking angelic being who stands in obedience to God with full allegiance. The second is the devil, who is a fallen angelic being who is against God and in rebellion against his agenda. One is a servant of God who serves to support man’s efforts to live heavenly on earth, the other is an enemy of God and thus an enemy of God’s people. His goal is to disrupt God’s plan.

One commentator notes that the devil can’t unsave a saved person, but through his deceptions he can corrupt and defile a Christian who is called to walk in purity and holiness. It appears that at some point, as with Job, the devil had an opportunity to distract or disrupt Moses’ pathway to God’s intended purpose. He could not dispute his heavenly destination, but he could attempt to distract him while in bodily form (as he does us).

Michael the archangel seems to lead that invisible heavenly force that battles for God’s agenda and on behalf of God’s people [including Moses]. The scripture says, “If you say, “The Lord is my refuge,” and you make the Most High your dwelling, no harm will overtake you, no disaster will come near your tent. For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways” [Psalm 91:9–11]. The point Jude makes is that even in such a dispute at the level and with the opportunity to slander and condemn the devil, Michael did not dare but made it clear that he was fully committed to God’s agenda stating, “the Lord rebuke you.” Jude uses that standard of behavior as an example of heavenly conduct in contrast to those who are ungodly and who slander whatever they don’t understand. He likens them to wild animals who function by instant and attack what they don’t understand.

Jude continues by pointing out some earthly examples of men in God’s camp who fell to the devil’s ways. He highlights Cain who wanted to worship God his way instead of God’s way (Genesis 4:1–8), and Balaam, who was used by the devil to try to block God’s people from

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following his plan (Numbers 22–24) as examples of unholy conduct. Then he highlights that these people attempting to block God’s plans probably are unnoticed by us because we have made them a part of our everyday living. They eat at our tables (fellowship) they hang with us in life and over time there is no difference between us and them. Heaven becomes invisible and the light because overcome by darkness. We help normalize sin.

If we live a life that is truly committed to the concept of biblical holiness, living heavenly on earth, being committed to being “careful how you walk,” then you will stand out in the face of gossip (even social media), as parents, as spouses, as singles, as worshipers, and overall, as biblical managers of our freewill. Do you?

Questions to Consider:

1. Based on how you live, would others assume that your efforts toward holy living are not as important as other goals in your life?
2. Will you compromise holiness with God in order to satisfy and maintain a relationship/fellowship that is ungodly?
3. How hard does the devil have to work to keep you from following God’s agenda?

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Day 33 of Lent 2022
Friday, April 8, 2022

Jude 1:14 –16

¹⁴ Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about them: “See, the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones ¹⁵ to judge everyone, and to convict all of them of all the ungodly acts they have committed in their ungodliness, and of all the defiant words ungodly sinners have spoken against him.” ¹⁶ These people are grumblers and faultfinders; they follow their own evil desires; they boast about themselves and flatter others for their own advantage.

Jude now makes the point that we should know better. If in fact we spend any time in scripture we should in no way be blindsided by ungodly behavior. We definitely should not be caught up in it. Jude does an odd thing here by quoting Enoch who proclaims the future regarding mankind’s drift toward unbiblical living. He makes the point that God will not always tolerate sin without judgement.

To get where Jude is, we will have to capture some context. Enoch would have been familiar with the early discoveries of the impact of sin. While we are so inundated with sin to the degree that it is normalized, Enoch was close enough to the time of Adam to see the contrast between living biblically and living sinfully pretty clearly. The rate of unholy living was growing rapidly. Enoch’s father was Jarad, just six generations from Adam and Eve’s children. He was 65 years old when he had his son Methuselah, who lived until right at the time of the flood involving Noah. So, the talk around the table for Enoch must have been, “look how bad people are getting, look at the rise of sin around us.” Jude highlights his assertion that God’s is not going to just let this go, He will create a contrast of godly people who will bring judgement upon the ungodly. Not judgement as in prosecutorial convictions but rather a conviction in light and dark contrast so that it will be obvious who is for God and who is not (remember, human government had not been formed at the time).

Jude now uses the characteristics of the ungodly that would have been clear in Enoch’s day to suggest that they should be easily identified and that we should not be identified by the same characteristics. This list includes defiant words [rebellion] often including statements like, “I don’t have to answer to nobody,” “it’s my body and I will do what I want with it,” “you ain’t my momma/daddy,” “I don’t care who said it, I am going to do my own thing,” “if it does not make sense to me, I ain’t doing it,” etc. He is not suggesting that we just do what anyone says but a sign of rebellion is being self-centered (only seeing things from your perspective or based on their impact on you) and self-submissive (only submissive to yourself).

These characteristics include grumblers and faultfinders. People who complain more than they support, gripe instead of helping, and blame more than they take feedback. Their goal is to defend themselves always at the expense of others and they find it very difficult to accept their opportunities for growth. They carry an underlying belief that they should not make mistakes

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(which are the pathway to growth) and as a result stay stuck in their deficiencies while looking for any mistakes made by others.

The next ungodly characteristic that he brings up is a sense of arrogance (lack of humility). He says that they boast about themselves meaning that they are “self-worshippers” and promote and market themselves in the way God should be highlighted. They have become their own “I AM’s.” I noticed there was a string of rap music that was self-promoting in nature [from someone claiming to be the “number one MC” to being the best things alive as a man or woman. If you looked at the lyrics of such music, there were very few lines that didn’t start off with “I AM.” People who see themselves as the “Solomon” [voice of wisdom] of all things fall into this category. They can’t fathom any truth they can’t figure out or understand, or that they didn’t discover themselves.

He adds on the end that they “flatter others for their own advantage.” In other words, they are manipulative and filled with “shadow missions.” If they ask you a question, it’s usually to address something that they are thinking rather than asking. The goal here is to benefit self, far from the sacrificial giving perspective that should be prevalent in the life of a follower of Christ. So, as we review the issues surfaced by Jude, we have to take some “mirror” time. Which of these characteristics are a part of who you are and what do you need to do to “walk more carefully” and “stay on track” in that area?

Questions to Consider:

1. In what area of your life have sinful behavior and unbiblical characteristics become “normalized” [almost acceptable as the way things are]?
2. Among the list of ungodly characteristics identified, what stands out the most to you and why?
3. What among the list of characteristics, have you heard people suggest is true about you? Do you believe it? Are you working on it?

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Day 34 of Lent 2022
Saturday, April 9, 2022

Jude 17–25

¹⁷ But, dear friends, remember what the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ foretold. ¹⁸ They said to you, “In the last times there will be scoffers who will follow their own ungodly desires.” ¹⁹ These are the people who divide you, who follow mere natural instincts and do not have the Spirit. ²⁰ But you, dear friends, by building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, ²¹ keep yourselves in God’s love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life. ²² Be merciful to those who doubt; ²³ save others by snatching them from the fire; to others show mercy, mixed with fear—hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh. ²⁴ To him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy— ²⁵ to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.

Jude, as James often does, hits us with a concluding thought. He says this should not be a surprise to us and that we should be fully prepared for the growth of ungodliness in our times because our Lord told us that this day would come. Living in Kansas City make the weather people very important. The rapid pace by which the weather can change will take you totally off guard and leave you unprepared for inclement weather. Once upon a time you could judge things by the season. At that time the weather people (people with the answers) were not as important, but in the later years, changes happen so frequently and unexpectedly that we have come to rely on the people who are supposed to have the answers.

Guess what? We are the answer people! The world is seeking its own solutions because the weather people are getting caught up in the same inclement weather as everyone else. God calls us the salt of the earth, and states that if we [the salt] have lost its saltiness [impact] what can make it salty again [Matthew 5]? We are the funnel for God’s voice. If we have allowed ourselves to be contaminated by the world, then there is no means by which the people of the world can experience any of heaven’s benefits.

Jude tells us to “build ourselves up” through faith in this lifestyle of holiness by connecting in solid fellowship [interaction] with the Holy Spirit. The secret to living a holy life is by being bathed in communication with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the person of the Godhead who gives us the word of God. Being truly engaged in the word of God as a guiding vessel that shapes your life, thought, views and focus will drive you toward becoming more holy. He highlights the importance of mercy, the ability to recognize and accept that God has provided a way for you to grow through stumbling without punishment when you are trying to become more holy. But he points out that you must be merciful (rather than judgmental) in order to biblically management the mercy he has given you. In other words, the degree to which you forgive others in light of God’s mercy toward you, is the same degree that you will be able to

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fully forgive yourself for your own experiences and imperfections. It is the practice of forgiveness that makes forgiveness work in your personal life.

Jude reminds us that people will go to hell because of our unwillingness to be God's model and voice in the midst of an ungodliness that the flesh can't recognize. He says, we are the only ones who can "snatch" them from the fire [rather than watching them burn in a hell that many won't discover until they are already there]. He tells us to balance our approach... loving yet firm, show mercy and fear. This has to be real.

Then he closes his discussion by leading us to a posture of worship and alliance, acknowledging that God can keep us from stumbling and make us holy before Him. Our task is not hopeless as is that of the world, but don't be afraid to be the light and the salt. Yes, you will think at times that you have stumbled, but that will actually be an illusion. He can keep you from falling. Even when you feel like you have fallen, you feel like ungodly living has influenced you, your character has been influenced or impacted by a sinful world and it's hard for you to look beyond yourself to move forward, trust in Him to hold you up. Be that parent, child, single, employee, friend, servant, that gives evidence of God in your life. God is the only savior, He desires majesty, has all power and authority and has given us access to Himself through Jesus Christ who is our Lord.

As you prepare for a day of worship tomorrow, look over the **Questions to Consider** given for this week and see if there is anything you would change.